Article

The *Selbständigkeit* of the Essence: Michel Henry and the Meaning of Philosophical Knowledge

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Abstract: This paper deals with a research hypothesis tying the legacy of German idealism to the first foundation of Michel Henry's "phenomenology of life". Based on a series of archive documents, the paper reconstitutes the hermeneutical horizon in contrast with which the young Henry (1946–1963) defined his conception of phenomenology, philosophy, and religion, i.e., the French existential–Hegelian debate (Wahl, Kojève). The reconstitution of this dialogue between the young Henry and the French Hegelianism of the 20th century will provide the theoretical framework for the analysis of the "religious attitude" in Henry's philosophy and in his attempt to rethink the transcendental connection between phenomenality and (philosophical) discourse.

Keywords: Michel Henry (1922–2002); French phenomenology; 20th century Hegelianism; Alexandre Kojève; Jean Wahl; phenomenology; French existentialism; theological turn

Si l'hégélianisme était véritablement une phénoménologie, ce serait un existentialisme. Problème pourtant: une phénoménologie est-elle forcément un existentialisme?; ou bien la *méthode* phénoménologique suppose-t-elle une objectivation des essences qu'elle étudie [. . .]. Mais ceci suppose quand même une *répétition* de ces essences [. . .]. Cette répétition est cependant différente de la vie originelle; auquel cas on peut reprocher à Husserl sa méthode. Mais si on fait ce reproche, on s'enferme dans une attitude; et les autres? Il faut élucider ce problème (Henry Archive n.d., Ms. A 5960).[1]

1. Introduction

After discussing Levinas' use of phenomenology "as a springboard in a quest for divine transcendence" (Janicaud 1991, p. 107 [p. 70])[2] in his famous study, *The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology* (Janicaud 1991), Dominique Janicaud focuses his attention on Michel Henry, the author of *L'Essence de la manifestation* (Henry 1963). He does not fail to recognize the importance of this latter work, as it is the first in which Henry establishes, once and for all, the fundamental principles of his philosophy. However, observing Henry's entire project and its results, Janicaud declares:

> The important thing here is not to fail recognize the incontestable philosophical élan animating this project and to follow it as closely as possible, so as not to lose the thread of our methodological question. It would be easy to fly directly to the end and to exhibit this project's essentially religious character: the revelation of absolute Being [*être*] "is not separated from [this being] (Henry 1963, p. 683 [p. 859])". [. . .] But what matters here is to understand and to make understandable how a phenomenological problematic that presents itself as rigorous, coherent, and radical terminates in such metaphysical conclusions. (Janicaud 1991, p. 110 [p. 72]).

In Janicaud, however, the whole analysis takes place as if this "religious orientation" of phenomenology depends solely on the personal choices of Henry, as well as of Levinas and the other philosophers examined. Such personal choices (i.e., their linkage to Judaism

or Christianity) would, according to Janicaud, alter the phenomenological method and, consequently, the meaning of phenomenological research in general. About Michel Henry, for example, Janicaud still states:

> What alone matters to us, but which is already a lot, is to show that the conceptual analysis just performed permits us to situate what passed itself off, at the beginning, as 'pure phenomenology' within a spiritual movement. This movement is perfectly identifiable, if rather secretive, as the mystical thinking of Meister Eckhart, itself in consonance with many of the words of Jesus, and such as Hegel rethought them in *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate*. These references are altogether explicit in *The Essence of Manifestation*; Henry has no reason to have to hide them, as they are noble and magnificent. However, we must return persistently to our methodological question: To what extent are they compatible with a phenomenology? (Janicaud 1991, pp. 114–15 [p. 76]).

Curiously, in this passage, Janicaud seems to ignore—or pretend to ignore[3]—the historical-hermeneutical context in which these references by Henry to Meister Eckhart and Hegel take place. Indeed, interpreters have frequently tended to pay but scant attention to this context, rooted as it was in a moment decisive to the history of French philosophy. In fact, since 1930–1940, the rediscovery of German idealistic philosophy—notably Hegel (cf. Descombes 1979; Roth 1988, pp. 19–146; Jarczyk and Labarrière 1996) and his so-called "early theological writings" (Hegel 1907)—fed into and accompanied the initial French reception of Husserl and Heidegger's phenomenology (cf. for example, Wahl 1946; Valentini 1957). Given its primary exigency—namely, to shake off the abstractions of 19th century academic and metaphysical tradition—of merging, as it were, the horizons of debate (the *Hegel-Renaissance*[4], contemporary phenomenology, philosophies of existence, the discovery of Marx' early writings, neo-Kantianism, etc.), French philosophy found a path to the conceptual means that would underpin its program of "reverting to the concreteness"[5] of experience[6] and human reality (*Dasein*) (cf. Dastur 2011); the discovery of Husserl and Heidegger's phenomenology in contemporary French philosophy occurred in the wake of Hegelianism, phenomenology, and the existentialism of that day, depending upon the way these had framed and formulated the major questions pertaining to the phenomenon of Being and its relation to "the Experience of Consciousness" ("*die Erfahrung des Bewußtseins*", as Hegel describes it in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes*).

In this context, phenomenology turned out to be the privileged instrument by which French philosophy operated an original reappropriation of Hegel's philosophy of the Spirit. Christianity, conceived as a spiritual phenomenon, became the subject of conflicting interpretations. If, for instance, according to Wahl, Christianity represents much more than a mere passing historical moment in the evolution (and revelation) of the human spirit, on the contrary, Kojève argued that atheism, as a dialectical suppression of every religious understanding of Being, might constitute the authentic fulfilment of contemporary phenomenology. However, beyond their contrast, all these interpretations shared a common assumption, i.e., the idea that the phenomenological sphere of human existence reveals itself as the "privileged place" for the manifestation of Being. Human existence—i.e., his world, his historicity, his spirituality—constitutes the horizon for this essential, ontological, disclosure.

My own interpretation purports to show that in reacting to the Hegelianism/ existentialism/contemporary phenomenology hybridization, the young Michel Henry both took on and, in his own way, inherited, the categories and overall framework of his religious phenomenology. By "religious", here, I mean something very specific. The term intends to recall some characteristic features of the figure of the "unhappy consciousness" which, in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Hegel describes as follows: "The *unhappy consciousness* is the consciousness of itself as doubled, only contradictory creature. [. . .] While at first it is only the *immediate unity* of both [consciousnesses], but while, for it, the two are opposed consciousnesses and not the same consciousness, one of them, namely, the simply unchangeable, is, to itself, as the *essence*, the other, however, the manifoldly changeable,

the *inessential*" (Hegel 1807, p. 122 [p. 123]. Emphasis in original). The term "religious" refers to *the attitude of consciousness*; to how it relates to its essence and understands it. Religious is then that way of representing the essence that consists of projecting onto it all the characteristics and perfections that consciousness denies to itself: the essence is eternal ("unchangeable"), while human consciousness is finite; the essence is self-sufficient, i.e., absolute, whereas consciousness depends entirely on the revelation of this latter. In short, it is a question of that link between human reality and its understanding of its essence, which will then form the basis for the critique of religion that Feuerbach and the young Marx would have developed, criticizing Hegel.

The religious character of phenomenology is revealed in its central thesis: that of the autonomy (*Selbständigkeit*) of original phenomenality, the heterogeneity of the original self-appearing of the absolute with regard to his manifestation in History and in the phenomenological horizon of the World. This thesis—its meaning and its implications—is the central subject of this study. It is not my intention here to provide a systematic presentation of Henry's conception of religion—i.e., his explicit theorization about religion and Christianity—but to reflect on the theoretical presuppositions in his way to rethink philosophy. The analysis of Henry's critical appropriation (and overturning) of French Hegelianism will lay a basis for pointing to the knots or, rather, tensions, that crop up as Henry conceptualizes phenomenology and the sense of its religious attitude. That analysis will, at the very least, serve to open up a question critical to *my* research, one that has to do with determining the meaning and status proper to phenomenological knowledge.

2. Phenomenology and French Hegelianism

As evidence of the connection between the genesis of Henry's phenomenology and the debates characteristic of the French philosophical culture of the 1930s and 1940s, I would like first to bring to attention a document of particular interest: this is a research file that Michel Henry began to write up by hand in 1946. At Paris on a CNRS grant, he was preparing his *Doctorat-ès-Lettres*. As the 1946–1947 academic term opened, young Michel Henry filed the initial version of his main research project. Though a mere sketch at the time[7], its final version—seventeen years later, and further to much review and redrafting along with changes both to titles and structure—would form the kernel of his *thèse d'État*. First published in two volumes in 1963, and defended in 1964, that work is the cornerstone of Henry's radicalisation and (re)conceptualisation of phenomenology: *L'Essence de la manifestation* (Henry 1963).

His main dissertation, intitled *Éléments pour une esthétique religieuse* (Elements for a religious aesthetic), was directed by Jean Wahl (cf. Dossier CNRS, p. 303), amongst the most eminent of Kierkegaard's French interpreters. For Henry to select Jean Wahl as Research Director suggests a significant connection between the problem of religious aesthetics—i.e., experience peculiar to religious consciousness (which in essence is made up of transcendence, rupture, and paradox)—and the manner in which Kierkegaard's philosophy was received in the general framework of his *reaction* against Hegel's system. Additionally, indeed, a significant body of manuscript notes from that period (cf. Henry Archive n.d., Ms. A 2033-6434) confirms that Henry's *critique of Hegelianism* was central to the way he would define and construct his project and seek his own identity.

For Jean Wahl, that connection constituted a major pole of his labor in reinterpreting Hegel's phenomenology. Wahl's volume on the "unhappy consciousness" in Hegel's philosophy (Wahl 1929) points to tensions and perplexities in the young Hegel, which can be said to anticipate Kierkegaard's critique of the philosopher of *Wissenschaft der Logik* or the *Enzyklopädie*—i.e., the mature Hegel (cf. also Wahl 1938). Jean Wahl sees Hegel[8] not as the atheist who broke a path to Feuerbach and Marx, but rather as one who had "translated" Christianity's main subjects into the language of modern philosophy. The young Hegel's "Death of God" does not lead to identifying Spirit with the sphere of human *praxis*, but rather expresses, through the Resurrection, the "Christianisation of the world" (i.e., appropriation of the latter in the light of the tension which, in the Judeo-Christian

tradition, religious consciousness incarnates vis à vis of a transcendent being). That conscience being "unhappy" through experiencing "appropriation" of its mortal condition, is, from Wahl's standpoint, key to not only reinterpreting phenomenology and "vivifying" Hegel's thought by bringing it forward into our own time, but also to deploying it as a basis for understanding other philosophical programs that call for a "return to concreteness". From the 1930s onwards, the decisive reference would be the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger.

All these issues would seem to be raised in Michel Henry's bibliography attached to his grant application for 1947: it sums up the constellation of theoretical references surrounding this initial research stage[9]. Besides Wahl, one finds amongst Michel Henry's supervisors, importantly, Martial Guéroult and (from 1949/50) Jean Hyppolite along with their "opposite numbers" as it were, namely Alexandre Kojève and Jean-Paul Sartre, for whom Hegelianism was *atheistic*.

In contradicting Wahl's interpretation, Kojève deems religion in Hegel's thought to be but a "moment", if a necessary one, in the process of achieving Hegel's philosophy of Spirit—the definitive form of which very specifically entails *radically negating all religious forms*. Like Wahl, Kojève is bold enough to view Hegel as an "existentialist" *ante-litteram*, despite Kojève having first taken that from his perusal of Heidegger, rather than that of Kierkegaard. The "unhappiness" of consciousness, the anxiety permeating existence, is but a "moment" whose original meaning will be found in the work of *Negativität*.

Now, one must acknowledge that Kojève's reading of Hegel—a creative rather than a philological one—would markedly influence later French philosophy (cf. Canguilhem 1948, pp. 282–97), to the degree that "at least in France, one could no longer get at Hegel without first making the detour round Kojève" (Vuillerod 2017, p. 91). One finds the imprint of that very mediation in the initial reception of Heidegger's phenomenology. A significant illustration thereof is *L'Être et le Néant* (Sartre 1943), which Michel Henry acknowledges having studied in 1947. Sartre's thought returns to the Hegelian theme of the "In-and-For-Itself (*en-soi-et-pour-soi*)", to be elaborated afresh in Kojève's concept of "Nothingness which nihilates (*Néant qui néantit*)" (Kojève 1947, p. 574).

That being said, for Kojève, and insofar as the "human reality" is concerned—i.e., *Dasein*, to follow the first French translation of a notion critical to Heidegger's phenomenological ontology—negativity in essence is (and is achieved in and by) *work*: Man is but a negating Act; his acting, exercised at the outset on the immediate data of consciousness, will transform and thus preserve it while lending it fresh form. In that sense, negation is a creative act. Its true meaning is that of dialectics, which Kojève declines to apply to nature, restricting it solely to the *free* life of the *Geist*.

That connection between negativity and freedom[10] is discovered through the "unhappy consciousness", which thinks Man onwards from the day of creation. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, as expressed in the figure of "unhappy consciousness", Man was created in a state of perfection. After the Fall and in a state of sin, that lost perfection may be recovered, *though in another form*: Man must become *other*. Accordingly, he is free so that he *may* transform himself, improve his very essence, and live for striving towards an ideal. However, for Man, to be free means to be *mortal*. Unlike the beasts, whose life simply ends, the death of a Man is a dialectical sublation. *Knowing* he must die, Man can thus transcend his own death, thinking on it and rising above it by means of thought: through *knowledge*, wherein the rising above one's own death will be completed. The truth that follows—negating the finitude that makes of man what he is; negating his mortality—is the mirror in and through which the Absolute *acquires a vision* of itself, a self-awareness: it represents itself, makes of itself the subject of a representation, and thereby *acquires knowledge of itself*, albeit in a form that cannot be otherwise but objectified. In reflecting upon itself and thus becoming *other*, in human knowledge, the Absolute denies itself whilst remaining identical to itself. Phenomenology—as a description of the modes of human existence (cf. Kojève 1947, p. 39 ff)—is thus a Discourse on Being, on its *concrete* modes of manifestation that refer to how Man understands the Real.

In his *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, Kojève writes:

Taken singly, Subject and Object are abstractions lacking both "objective-reality" (*Wirklichkeit*), and "empirical-existence" (*Dasein*). What exists in reality—once the issue is the Reality-of-which-we-speak; and since we do in fact speak of reality, for us the only question is that Reality-of-which-we-speak; what, I must insist, does exist in reality, is the Subject-knowing-the-Object, or, which is the same thing, the-Object-known-by-the-Subject (Kojève 1947, p. 451).

As Kojève saw it, there is nothing in phenomenological discourse foreign to the truth of the "real"—nothing separate from its formation and unfolding through history. Discourse *belongs* to the reality of the truly real (i.e., the phenomenon): *only to the extent that it can be described*, is there reality. *It is through and* via *the mediation of description* that Reality, as a phenomenon, *actually attains* its truth—the horizon being Time and History. Discourse negates the substance's immediate identity: its negating action drives the phenomenon's becoming, where Being's entire unity finds its way back to itself (i.e., Being as a totality taken *in Discourse* as its discursive subject); reconstituting that unity is *that in which Being proves to be revealed to itself, mediated by Discourse*. From this, it follows that Discourse *belongs* to the appearing of Being, as it is *by the mediation of Discourse* that Being must be enabled us to achieve its manifestation: by making itself *other than itself* on a world horizon limited in time via anthropogenesis that acts upon History and *by appropriating its* "historical forms" within a dialectical process in respect of which philosophy—unveiled as the self-awareness of the Being's self-consciousness—represents the ultimate moment.

3. Phenomenality and Philosophical Discourse

As his first year of research drew to a close, Henry altered the title of his main project to *Négativité et Transcendance* (Negativity and Transcendence). Accordingly, religion, which he had at first intended to place at the heart of his thesis, would be subsumed within a vaster issue pertaining to "the experience of consciousness", i.e., its movement of "dialectical sublation" (*Aufhebung*). In a preparatory memorandum to *L'Essence de la manifestation*, which deals with Kojève's interpretation of Hegel's dialectics (Kojève 1947, pp. 527–28), Michel Henry writes:

Ko[jève 1947, p.] 527. *Truth = "revelation"* (= *description*) (→ probl[em:] ph[ilosophy] and revelation) of Being and the Real through Discourse.

[Kojève 1947, p.] 528 [illegible word] *True* = Being-revealed-by-the-discourse-of-its-Reality → Philosophy claims to describe not Being alone, but the revealed Being, and to explain the fact that revelation of Being is realized by Discourse.

Philosophy—the totality of that which is:

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{lll} \text{Being} & = \text{Substance} & \text{Philosophy of Nature} \\ + & & \\ \text{Discourse} & = \quad \text{Subject} & \quad \text{Anthropology} \end{array} \right.$$

The philosopher asserts that he speaks not of the given-Being alone, but of himself speaking of Being, as well → discover of the category of negativity and the dialectic. *Discourse is integrated into the totality of Being, i.e., a monism* [11].

These few lines draw our attention to the fact that Michel Henry has not made use of Kojevè's "atheist" Hegelianism because he approves of it. It is rather *on account of his radical, conscious opposition* to the notion of a constitutive unity between the phenomenality of Being and Discourse (accompanied by a concern for the "atheistic" development of philosophy) that Michel Henry reads Kojève's texts: the reason behind his gaining acquaintance with this theory and these discursive categories is that he seeks to master their foundations; "*the better to destroy them*"[12]. Michel Henry's research path thus entails forming a concept of the founding principle upon which the ultimate condition of possibility of Hegelianism, existentialism, and, more generally, contemporary phenomenology rest.

In Kojève's writings, Michel Henry comes across that same principle in the *integration* that an existentialist interpretation of the dialectic assumes to exist, between the phenomenality of Being and its revelation by phenomenological discourse. Such integration, which involves inserting the transcendental link acknowledged by phenomenology between the appearing of Being and the structuring of the existence of "human reality" (*Dasein*), characterizes the fundamental, preliminary assumption underpinning the "conversion" of the *Nichtigkeit* of finite consciousness and its experience—as essential determination of human existence—into a mode that constitutes the phenomenalization of Being as such. Integrating the modes of ontological understandings peculiar to existence within the truth of Being is what Michel Henry refers to in his notes as "monism:" the reduction of the two different modes of givenness to a single and identical mode of phenomenalisation understood in the light of the work of negativity—as a mode of structuring the "horizontal transcendence" that makes up the experience of consciousness through and within which the appearing of Being takes place. Subsumed within the original process of the phenomenalization of Being, the transcendence of consciousness thereby manifests its ontological constitution: it does so by *discursive appropriation of its own structure*. The phenomenological *discourse* —which enables consciousness to liberate its own essence—thus becomes the locus for further freedom: that of Being revealed to itself *in and by Philosophy*.

A feature essential to contemporary Hegelianism and existentialism is, of course, dismissing the illusion of Hegelian absolute knowledge: the coming realization of ultimate "dialectical sublation," or the revelation of the being to itself, culminates as a function of the revelation to the self of negativity (human self-consciousness), achieved through Discourse in philosophical knowledge, where human Word becomes the Word of the Being and where both identify themselves by negating their pre-existing difference. That said, the idea of a *structural link* between Being and human reality (*Dasein*) is what Hegel's philosophical heirs have retained of his phenomenology: for Being to appear, it must differentiate itself from itself, manifest itself outwards as the self; it must come out of itself (an sich) and become other than itself (*für sich*), making of itself an object, as it were, on the transcendental horizon of all "vision"—i.e., understanding—of the self. The horizon is that of existence, the *Dasein*, which is also open to understanding its own being in accordance with the modes peculiar to the In-der-Welt-sein. Hence, the notion of *Zusammengehörigkeit* will be maintained, whereby the *Dasein*'s jointly belonging is critical within the truth of Being.

In a detailed and systematic fashion, the first section of *L'Essence de la manifestation* reconstructs that "monist" notion of Being[13]: its typical thesis considers the phenomenality of Being to be homogeneous with existence's ontological structure. From a "monist" perspective, the "homogeneity of Being" (Henry 1963, p. 45 [p. 36]) establishes *the insertion of the ontological structure of Dasein* (and of its modes of existence and understanding) *within the appearing of Being*: ontological knowledge, despite its being stubbornly *different with respect to* absolute knowledge, is nevertheless *constitutively integrated into* the original process in and through which Being appears as itself; in other words, as knowing-itself-to-be-itself, of which phenomenological Discourse is in some way its achievement.

4. The *Selbständigkeit* of the Essence

To Henry, the subject of "liberation" is not human reality, but the essence. *Opposing* the monist notion of integrating Being and existence, Michel Henry's phenomenology asserts the *Selbständigkeit* of the original essence (i.e., the "autonomy" of the absolute): its *heterogeneity* relative to the finite manifestation of *Dasein, as well as* its independence relative to its modes of appropriation and understanding that are peculiar to consciousness in general, which means the independence of absolute knowledge vis à vis phenomenological Discourse[14] and its *Begriff* (cf. Henry 1963, scts. 75, 77).

Used by Michel Henry in a telling, provocative way, *Selbständigkeit* is a notion taken from Sartre's *L'Être et le Néant* (Sartre 1943). In the latter, *Selbständigkeit* refers to the character of "autonomy" assigned by natural consciousness to reality, conceived as "being in itself," substance, and reality that can exist *independently* of the human being contemplating it. That

said, a similar notion of *Selbständigkeit* appears in Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in the figure of "unhappy consciousness": a religious understanding of the essence that not only considers the latter as "autonomous", but assigns to it an ipseity, thereby acknowledging and projecting in the image of its transcendent God all the properties of perfection, eternity, infinity, etc., that human reality denies to itself on account of its mortal being.

It is only in appearance, though, that Henry's phenomenology and Hegel's "unhappy consciousness" converge: the former explicitly opposes the presuppositions governing the "unhappiness" of Hegelian religious consciousness. In the problematic context of *L'Essence de la manifestation*, the discovery of the essence's autonomy is presented explicitly for the purposes of determining the essence *which is not and cannot be* the outcome of a *Sinngebung*—the effect of a thetic act of consciousness. The assertion of *Selbständigkeit* rests rather on the phenomenological demonstration of *impossibility that constitutes* the essence, interpreted in the sense of transcendence (as the farthest horizon of all phenomenal givenness) to ensure by itself the ultimate condition of its own appearing (Cf. Henry 1963, sct. 27). That constitutive limit upon transcendence—a limit that analysis "cannot surmount" (Henry 1963, p. 368 ff. [p. 295 ff.])—is associated with the need for radicalizing the phenomenological method which, presented as the "*epoché* of the world", consists of shutting down intentionality as such (cf. Serban 2010). In contrast to Kojève, Henry's phenomenology thus wants to show that intentionality is not integrated at all within the revelation of essence. Under the aegis of the radicalized epoché, the essence reveals itself rather as a drive, a force, whereby the essence undergoes the affective experience of its self-revelation and cannot escape from it. Crushed by the passivity of its self-revelation, thus the essence realizes its manifestation: as a "pathos", a pure feeling of self, a pure feeling of suffering inherent in the experience of its manifestation. *Suffering and passive, the essence is, however, with nothing but itself.* Autonomy is thus shown to be an immanent determination relative to essence, establishing itself of itself through its ability *to ensure by itself its own receptivity, quite independently of whether consciousness operates upon it*.

Here, the decisive aspect of the religious character (in the Hegelian sense) of Henry's phenomenology becomes increasingly clear. Although it starts from the recognition of the total self-sufficiency of the absolute, i.e., from the affirmation of the independence of the original appearance to the (human) ways of its reception, this representation of the absolute is not the result of a negation that phenomenological consciousness operates towards itself. To the contrary, it is the essence that imposes by itself, by its self-revelation, its autonomy, as a determination qualifying its absoluteness.

There is nothing problematic in Henry's grasp of the inessentiality of ontological consciousness, unaccompanied as it is by a "painful" sense of being severed from essence *because no such separation ever occurs*. Although inessential, insofar as whatever consciousness may contribute to the original movement of self-revelation of the essence, consciousness proves to be founded in it, and in such a manner that neither an understanding nor failure to understand consciousness can alter or break the tie that essence in and by itself creates independently of consciousness and of its modes of understanding the self and essence: "*Nevertheless, the essence*"—stresses Henry—"*is immanent to existence as constituting its very essence*"(Henry 1963, p. 187 [p. 154]. Emphasis in original).

Here, the keyword is immanence; indeed, in *L'Essence de la manifestation* Henry tirelessly reiterates that "immanence" is "the essence of transcendence:" it is "the original mode according to which is accomplished the revelation of transcendence and hence the original essence of revelation" (Henry 1963, pp. 280–81 [p. 227]). Immanence is *selbständige* because to achieve its own appearing, it has no need of understanding and requires neither mediation by consciousness, nor its ontological structure. As immanence, essence is bound to no "experience of consciousness" where its ultimate possibility of donation is concerned.

In asserting the "autonomy" of purely passive, affective experience in the "being aware of itself" peculiar to the essence of manifestation, Henry contemplates an *essential disjunction*[15] between the original mode of appearing—which constitutes the affective self-revelation of the essence reduced to bare life as such—and the *derived mode of appearing*

(deemed in Hegelianism to be co-original with the essence's appearing) that constitutes consciousness and its being-in-the-world (i.e., its finitude and historicity: cf. Henry 1963, p. 203 [pp. 166–67]). This disjunction does not signify a "radical separation" between the original affective self-appearing of phenomenality, which Michel Henry calls life, and existence's ontological structure. In objecting to Hegelianism and existentialism, Michel Henry's phenomenology asserts the *inessential* character of all interventions that phenomenological consciousness can effect through *Verstehen* insofar as that concerns the original process within which the self-revelation of life is attained (cf. Henry 1963, p. 179 [p. 148]). That existence is "inessential" with respect to this original process nonetheless means that the latter's *accomplishment "within itself" is what constitutes the ultimate condition of possibility for opening the transcendental horizon of Being that makes up the structure of existence, the opening up of its being-in-the-world*. In other words, it is because the self-affection of life has already been given to itself in the pathetic immediacy of its immanent testing of the self that the latter *gives and allows itself to be found as that irreducible, purely "material" datum which presents itself as a reality "already present"*—as one already given or pre-given—and can thus be latched onto by phenomenological consciousness[16]. As Henry would reiterate, *immanence is the essence of transcendence*.

It follows then, that from Henry's standpoint, the aim of asserting the essence's "autonomy" is not to deny the founding link that, within life itself, binds thought to the essence it seeks to understand. Negation is unnecessary here, because between the "autonomy" of the essence and the absence of "autonomy" for finite consciousness, no conflict is possible. Nothing needs be dialectically "eliminated". Since transcendence is founded upon immanence, no work (vs. Kojève), no spiritual maturation of existence (vs. Wahl), is called for. Because self-interpreting as already founded in life by the work it accomplishes in the origin of its immediate, immanent self-revelation, phenomenological consciousness need not, in Henry's view, deny its religious attitude towards essence in order to be itself (cf. Henry 1963, p. 898 [p. 728]). It is rather owing to that distinction that Henry's phenomenology strives to clothe the founding link[17] between the self-manifestation of the essence and its "derivation" in historical and spiritual worlds with fresh meaning, one other than that reasserted by the Hegelian line of phenomenology that has been carried forward by contemporary French philosophy's main currents.

5. The Meaning of Phenomenology

This redefining of the relations between absolute life and human existence is accompanied by a re-examination of the relations between life and how philosophy thinks about life, i.e., between the essence and its "first phenomenology", since life, being *index sui*, in its original movement of appearing has no need of being revealed through mediation of consciousness in general, and, in particular, by that determined mode of In-der-Welt-sein, which is philosophical understanding. In a preparatory note to *L'Essence de la manifestation* (probably dating back to the early 1950s), Henry writes: "One should not believe that our life is empirical and that there must be an exceptional operation which the philosopher alone can accomplish, for it [i.e., life] to become a pure life" (Henry Archive n.d., Ms. A 5878; cf. Rogozinski 2011, p. 19). However, to the extent that philosophy discovers the inessential character of its mediation, in the sense that its descriptions and discourse in no way constitute an "active" contribution to achieving the original process in which they do nonetheless allow access to phenomenological consciousness, the question *for philosophy* is inevitably to seek the meaning corresponding to its inner demands and efforts to adhere to *die Sache selbst*—to that essence considered in its movement that constitutes immanent self-revelation.

Once one accepts the impossibility of phenomenological discourse being deemed a "moment" that constitutes the original appearing, Henry states that "if philosophy is secondary in relationship to life, nevertheless there must exist a mode of philosophizing which does not in any way prejudice the essence" (Henry 1963, p. 56 [p. 43]). Accordingly, in reflecting upon philosophy's mission with respect of life, Henry writes: "As a matter of

fact, the aim of this work is to show that there exists *absolute knowledge* and that the latter is not dependent upon some isolated bit of progress. Actually, such knowledge is not bound to a determined mode of existence, it is not the privilege of the moment" (Henry 1963, p. 55 [p. 43]. Emphasis in original). *Nevertheless,* such knowledge *is not* that of philosophy: "It is rather the very milieu of existence, the very essence of life" (Henry 1963, p. 55 [p. 43]). That absolute knowledge, heterogeneous to phenomenality of all *Verstehen* generally, is that of affectivity and its self-affection admitting of no outside mediation and of no intervention by thought in general. However, what then of philosophy? What then of phenomenological knowledge that insists upon rigorously describing that "invisible" appearing which is the "experiencing the self" (*s'éprouver soi-même*) that is so peculiar to life? What meaning can be assigned to such work that would distinguish it from all other forms of knowledge, and how may it be clothed in legitimacy?

Henry does not, of course, neglect the issue (cf. Henry 1963, sct. 17). In his introduction to *L'Essence de la manifestation*, he asserts that "the ultimate meaning of phenomenology in the last analysis hangs upon the fact of the discovery of a 'phenomenon' which is itself the foundation (*fondement*)" (Henry 1963, p. 54 [p. 42]). As to the meaning that should be vested in this discovery and in the phenomenological work of elucidation designed to capture, as it were, essence in a "rigorous" and "loyal" manner, that question is not even raised. It is as though the mere will to adhere to essence, which constitutes the phenomenological method, calls for no further justification. Leaving thought externalized with the original process where the self-affection of absolute life occurs is presented as a clue to the solution, rather than as an obstacle. At the end of the day, it is *because* philosophy comes second to life (being is *shut out* from its original mode of donation that accomplishing the latter *lays the groundwork for its description,* thereby supplying the criterion for uncovering "which mode of phenomenological treatment should be submitted to the foundation (*fondement*)" (Henry 1963, p. 55 [p. 43]; see also Henry 2000). Indeed, it is from the essence alone, in accomplishing that phenomenalisation attained in itself, that phenomenology can assert access to absolute life, legitimizing its descriptions (i.e., at least phenomenological knowledge's certainty that it is aimed at "flesh and blood" reality and can thus define the distinctive trait of philosophy, as opposed to other paths to understanding)[18].

Here, there does creep in a subtle ambiguity: *philosophy's descriptive labors take on legitimacy not because they adhere to the givenness of life, but only because of the autonomy that, "in principio", the phenomenalisation of life secures to itself* (cf. Henry 1963, p. 180 [pp. 148–49]). Philosophical or natural knowledge: these are modes of being of existence in the world, to which life, in its immanent, pathetic movement, proves to be "*indifferent*"[19] because it has always been "present to itself at the heart of an internal transcendental experience which strictly speaking can neither be 'obtained' nor 'lost'" (Henry 1963, p. 54 [p. 42]). Philosophical knowledge is legitimate to the degree that *it is up to life to lay the foundations for its own possibility*, without philosophy contributing in any way to those foundations—just as is the case for any other type of knowledge[20].

More generally, what distinguishes philosophy from all other modes of being is that it not only exercises its understanding vis à vis the essence, but it knows, grasps, and expresses through its language the reason on which the legitimacy of its word rests, and, in it, there is accomplished the self-awareness of existence striving for "loyalty" to the essence. The *critical work* that philosophy, as a "critique of all revelation" (Henry 1963, p. 55 [p. 43]), directs at itself and history is realized in and through that self-awareness[21]. Since such self-awareness will prove to be *heterogeneous*[22], and thus *external* vis à vis life, the inevitable question is, again, *what should be the meaning of that appropriation that philosophy can secure to the foundation that life—and certainly not its self-awareness—accomplishes in its originary phenomenalisation*? Since, for Henry, the aim is not to supersede the irreducible, even religious, heteronomy of life, one must seek to know *whether awareness of that heteronomy*, although it is unable to contribute more to life, might bring to philosophy the determination it needs—not for life, *but for itself*, justifying its labor of elucidation. Is the mere *eidos* of life—

the only eidos to which one may legitimately appeal in Henry's phenomenology—able to secure for philosophy every condition for responding to the question?

6. The Problem of Freedom

The question seems to remain entirely open in *L'Essence de la manifestation*, where Michel Henry's line of argument, focusing as it does on the need to avoid "causing harm to the essence", leaves in the background the transcendental issue concerning philosophy, which "comes second to life"—foreign to the order of questions particular to a "first phenomenology". Perhaps the answer may be found in works written after *L'Essence de la manifestation*, where Michel Henry deals with works of art, cultural criticism, the issue of history, and notably the possibility of a philosophy of Christianity[23]. It would, for example, be worthwhile to check whether the "phenomenology of Christianity" that Henry developed from *C'est moi la vérité* (Henry 1996) onwards—surrounded as he was by the debate over the "theological turn in French phenomenology"[24]—might suggest solutions to these theoretical difficulties. Unfortunately, systematical analyses of this type on Michel Henry's "Christological" texts are not yet available. Here, I will focus only on some aspects relating to the reflections that Henry develops on Christian ethics in *C'est moi la verité* (see Henry 1996, chp. 10).

The heterogeneity between essence (i.e., the phenomenality of Being as "immanence", "pure affectivity", or "immediate self-affection") and Discourse (i.e., the transcendence of the *Dasein*) reappears in Henry's text, re-modulated and radicalized in the terms of a new phenomenological opposition between "absolute Life" and the phenomenality of the "World". This opposition guides how Henry approaches the phenomenon of Christianity. For example, this is clearly visible in the separation that, from the introduction, Henry establishes between the theoretical content of the latter and its historical manifestations[25]. Once again, Henry's arguments aim to underline the aporias of "objectivity", in contrast to the internal coherence of the immanence of absolute life. The presupposition of this approach is, therefore, again, the principle of the *Selbständigkeit* of the pure essence.

Henry also based his interpretation of Christian ethics on this same principle. The object of ethics is action. However, according to Henry, the action that Christian ethics deals with is not the action of man in the world: "Christianity proceeds to overthrow the concept of reality as well as that of action. In tearing action from the external Being and from the process of objectification leading to it, Christianity situates action in its rightful place, where to do is to make an effort, take pains, suffer [...]. To do refers to life's internal *pathētik* (*pathétique*) transformation and finds there its sole motivation, its unique purpose, not to mention the very milieu in which it is accomplished and is possible" (Henry 1996, p. 218 [pp. 172–73]). The achievement that *ab origine* and in itself—regardless of any external mediation or objectification—absolute life realizes in the very act of its pathētik self-revelation determines the ultimate transcendental condition of the action as such. This condition is absolute life in itself: "Because, in Christianity, doing is situated in the dimension of life and belongs to it, so its achievement is mixed up with life's movement, to the point of being nothing but the self-achievement of absolute Life" (Henry 1996, p. 216 [p. 171]). Thus, considered on the level of pure essence, *it is absolute life that acts, not man*.

Bringing the sense of action back into the dimension of the autonomous, immediate, immanent self-revelation of absolute life produces a different conception of human reality, no longer considered as an anonymous *In-der-Welt-sein*, nor as a man[26], but as an individual, a living ego (see Henry 1996, pp. 218–19 [p. 173]). The phenomenological analysis of life shows that, although closed in the movement of its immanent self-revelation, life can generate new living egos. Indeed, it is precisely because the movement of its self-revelation is already always achieved in itself that life constitutes the ultimate transcendental condition for the generation of each living ego. The achievement of his self-revelation is what founds the possibility of the donation of his flesh as essence for the self-revelation constituting the flesh and the transcendental body of each living ego (Henry 1996, p. 220 [p. 174]). This means that the action of absolute Life is always and only one, whether it is the generation

of the original Self (the selfhood of the First Living—"le *Premier Vivant*"—Christianly described as the Arch-Son, i.e., Christ), or whether it is the process of sonship that, in and through the flesh of the First Living, generates the multitude of living egos (i.e., the Sons of God). In both cases, the action of life is nothing other than the absolutely passive process of its own self-affection, its being revealed to itself in the passion of its immanent and originary self-revelation. The action does not change or modify itself, nor does it adapt to an external law. Indeed, its principle is totally immanent to it, to the point of identifying itself with its own process and merging with it.

Absolute Life is its own law (see Henry 1996, p. 229 [p. 182]), nothing other than this law identifying itself with the flesh of its "*s'éprouver soi-même*". However, this same law defines the commandment that absolute Life transmits to each living ego, in the very act of its generation, as a task inscribed in his phenomenological condition as Son. Hence Henry states: "This is the first commandment of the Christian ethic: you will live, or, more precisely, you will be the living Self, this one and none other" (Henry 1996, p. 230 [p. 183]).

In the achievement of the originary self-revelation of life, and on the foundation guaranteed by this achievement, therefore, every single ego is revealed to itself, constituted as a self, a transcendental body that feels itself, and thus participates and lives in the very essence of absolute Life. It is under this participation that each ego comes into possession of the powers that are proper to every transcendental self: the power to feel and touch, but also to desire, to intuit, to think (see Henry 1996, pp. 172–73 [pp. 136–37]). This means that each of these powers essentially occurs in the originary self-revelation of absolute Life and is substantiated by this. However, while the original essence, tight in its immanence, does not know any form of negativity, it happens that in the generation of the living a new type of difference is established. Generated in the flesh of the First Living, the life of the living ego is not identical with the self-affection of absolute Life. Henry distinguishes, in fact, "between a strong and a weak concept of self-affection" (Henry 1996, p. 135 [p. 106]), i.e., between the originary self-affection of absolute Life and the self-affection of the living ego. The distinction corresponds to the possibility, for the living ego, of being able to live in adhesion to the essence, or even to transgress it, as happens for example when the living being, in possession of the powers of his own living body, gives in to the illusion of being the master of his own being, forgetting his essential debt with life (see Henry 1996, pp. 176–78 [pp. 139–41]).

It must be said immediately, however, that this freedom of the living ego is of a particular kind. The living ego can, of course, forget its origin and represent itself as the source of its own being, but this possibility never constitutes a real threat to absolute Life. The possibility of forgetting or transgressing one's own essence does not belong to absolute Life, whose self-revelation constitutes an unbreakable process that is already always achieved in itself[27]. The effects of the freedom of the living ego can do nothing to the indissoluble unity of originary self-affection; in fact, since the only *real* action is that of life, what arises from the "free" action of the living ego, insofar as it is not the action of absolute life, is only something derivative that can in no way affect the autonomy of the essence.

Just as, in *L'essence de la manifestation*, the phenomenological power of transcendence fades in contrast with the invisible force of life's original self-affection, so too does the freedom of the living ego, however inscribed in the flesh generated by the action of life, seem to undergo the same destiny, which is the inevitable destiny of all those forms of appearing that do not coincide in all respects with pure original self-revelation.

Nevertheless, as it is generated by life in its own flesh, the freedom of the living ego somehow happens: the living ego *is given to itself*. This freedom and its powers are not an invention of the living ego; they are not an illusion or a mere representation. Generated in the flesh of life, the power to give meaning to the experiences that its original condition as Son makes possible belongs to the living ego and its flesh. Of course, this power and this freedom are nothing compared to the original process of self-affection of absolute Life. However, even if fleeting, transient, vulnerable, and passing, the dynamics of meaning,

generated in the wake of the difference that distinguishes and at the same time unites the two forms of self-affection, unfolds its power on the basis of life, on the achievement that the originary self-revelation of life realizes in itself. Thus, if it is life itself that motivates this difference, and if this difference cannot in any way be reduced to that of the world, should not the task of philosophy be to clarify the meaning of this difference that belongs to the being of the living ego as a participant in the originary truth?

7. Conclusions

In *C'est moi la vérité*, whenever Henry approaches this kind of question, his analysis takes on a characteristic transcendental posture. Systematically, Henry pauses to consider and clarify what the ultimate phenomenological condition is on which the possibilities that the original essence offers to each living ego are based insofar as this is revealed to itself. Methodically, he insists on the ultimate presupposition of the living ego's freedom. However, it is precisely in this way that Henry equally systematically avoids addressing the other side of the transcendental problem, that relating to the determination of the *spiritual effects of that freedom*, i.e., the freedom considered in its *concrete and historical realization*.

Understood in the light of the imperative immanent in the original self-revelation, the commandment "You will live!", which Henry's phenomenology claims to find in Christianity, means nothing more than "Become what you already are". However, what must this "becoming" mean, *not for life but for the living ego*? If the disposition to transform itself belongs to the flesh of the living ego, in what way does that disposition realize itself *historically*? What must be its effects in the horizon of the difference that constitutes an unavoidable dimension of the flesh and of the freedom of the living ego? How can this transformation transform the phenomenological dimension in which the living ego employs its phenomenological powers?

The question still seems to be open in Henry's thought. Nonetheless, it is in the light of these difficulties that, in my opinion, a comparison between Henry's transcendentalism and the French Hegelianism of the 20th century appears to be at least urgent, if not necessary. As has been shown, it is from the comparison with Hegelianism that the young Henry drew the conceptual tools necessary to radicalize phenomenology and, by expunging any form of exteriority or external mediation, to isolate life in its constitutive process of pure self-affection. Now, however, that his "philosophy of Christianity" shows the existence of an internal difference in the immanence of life itself, in the process generating the living ego, a renewed confrontation with Hegelianism could prove to be extremely useful in determining the indispensable categories to describe (and rearticulate) this new situation.

Regardless, there is no doubt that bringing Henry's philosophy back to its appropriate hermeneutic context certainly constitutes the first indispensable step to "free" his phenomenology from some misunderstandings that have conditioned its reception. For example, considering the early period of Michel Henry's philosophical training, and its belonging to the existential–Hegelian French debates, the results of *L'Essence de la manifestation* turned out to be more a continuation and an outcome of a well-defined historical process involving 20th century French phenomenology from its earliest stage[28] rather than the product of an isolated genius. Moreover, if Henry's theory of the *Selbständigkeit* of essence nevertheless represents (from the Hegelian point of view) a reversal (*Umkehrung*) of phenomenological consciousness, it is always within this process that it occurs, and not as a distortion of the phenomenological vocation of French philosophy.

As it has been shown, in contrast with Janicaud's analysis, the real question is not whether Henry's philosophy legitimately falls within the category of phenomenology (or within its method); rather, it is a question of deepening the phenomenological significance of this transcendental attitude, which is actually found at the source of Henry's work and seems to equally determine his mature production. Additionally, affirming the principle *Selbständigkeit* of absolute Life, Henry's phenomenology calls into question the need for an analysis regarding the meaning of philosophical research in general. From this perspective, Henry's discovery of phenomenality as pure affectivity and self-affection reveals itself to

not be immune from certain aporias that Hegelianism recognizes as typical of all "religious" approaches to the essence.

Placing Henry's phenomenology alongside Hegelianism would not attempt a further "turn", nor a "return", to Hegelian phenomenology. It has only a purely heuristic value, helping show that, with Henry, "tension" persists between life and the thinking of life. A tension that Henry's "religious phenomenology" declines to acknowledge within absolute Life itself[29], and that it restricts to the philosophical representation of life alone. However, as it happens, it is precisely this representation that is Henry's phenomenology as such: a knowledge of the concept that demands, down to our own day, that its meaning be elucidated no more for life, but for philosophy itself. The transcendental self-analysis of this kind of phenomenological rationality appears to be the critical inheritance of Michel Henry's "religious" phenomenology.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1　Manuscript fragment, transcribed by Grégori Jean and Jean Leclercq (Henry Archive n.d.) and published in (Rogozinski 2011, p. 23).

2　In-text citations always refer first to the original version of quoted texts. Corresponding English translations are in brackets.

3　It should not be forgotten that Janicaud was a specialist in the history of contemporary French philosophy, with a particular interest in 19th and 20th century French spiritualism (see Janicaud 1969).

4　Cf. (Salvadori 1974), but also (Baugh 1993) and (Mudimbe and Bohm 1994).

5　"*Vers le concret*" is the programmatic title of a text by Jean Wahl, published in France in the early 1930s (see Wahl 1932).

6　In this regard, see the judgements of (Merleau-Ponty 1948, pp. 158, 164) and (Hyppolite 1971, vol. I, p. 233).

7　This research file (now: Dossier CNRS) has recently been transcribed by Christophe Perrin and published in (Leclercq and Perrin 2017, pp. 299–356).

8　Drawing on Hegel's texts from the Bern and Frankfurt periods (Hegel 1907).

9　See (Dossier CNRS, pp. 309–10), which includes, among others, the names of Kierkegaard, Schelling, Hyppolite, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, accompanied by the studies of Lachièze-Rey and Jankélévitch devoted to German idealism; in the following year (October 1948), the list of readings was significantly enriched with the names of Böhme, Maître Eckhart, Fichte, Guéroult, Kojève, Maine de Biran, Merleau-Ponty, Niel, and Nietzsche.

10　In 1950, Henry stated that he would devote "the sixth and final section" of his thesis (Dossier CNRS, p. 330) to the issue of freedom not dealt with in *L'Essence de la manifestation*, despite a reference to it late in the introduction. Henry writes in a footnote that "the analyses to which allusion has just been made [. . .] could not be included in this work; they will be the object of subsequent endeavors" (Henry 1963, p. 58 [p. 47]). To date, that research has never been published. Nevertheless, a selection of handwritten notes on the problem of freedom was published posthumously (see Jean 2012, pp. 143–52).

11　Cf. (Henry Archive n.d., Ms. A 2048) (unpublished text, emphasis in original): "Ko[jève 1947, p.] 527. *Vérité* = '*révélation*' (= *description*) (→ probl[ème:] ph[ilosophie] et révélation) correcte et complète de l'Être et du Réel par le Discours.

([Kojève 1947, p.] 528) [mot illisible] *Vrai* = Être-révélé-par-le-discours-de-sa-réalité. → Philosophie dit décrire non seulement l'être mais encore l'Être révélé, et rendre compte du fait de la révélation de l'Être par le Discours.

Philosophie–totalité de ce qui est:
$$\left\{\begin{array}{lcll} \text{Être} & = & \text{Substance} & \text{Philosophie de la nature} \\ + & & & \\ \text{Discours} & = & \text{Sujet} & \text{Anthropologie} \end{array}\right.$$

Le philosophe ne dit pas seulement parler de l'Être-donné mais de lui-même qui parle de l'être → découverte de la catégorie de négativité et de la dialectique. *Le Discours est intégré à la totalité de l'Être, i.e., un monisme*".

[12] "Destroying" Kojève's discourse means neither its "refutation" nor its "annihilation". Henry thinks of "destruction" rather along the lines of *Destruktion* as announced by Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*: "The task of Destroying the history of ontology" (Heidegger 1927, p. 19 [p. 41]). Referring neither to criticism of an error, nor to mere exclusion that negates an earlier philosophical interpretation, the word "destruction", taken in its rigorously phenomenological sense, here means de-structuring or "the shake-up (*ébranlement*) needed to reveal the structures, strata, system of the deposits" (Derrida 2013, p. 34) covering the essence. While for Heidegger, destruction refers to a form of negativity—safeguarding and defending through conflict the life, the truth of the essence by the tension of its workings (in the sense that the truth of essence resides in such conflicting interpretations)—with Henry destruction takes on another, a further, meaning. It is the discovery of an essence that, while constituting the ultimate foundation of all thought of the being and from which it cannot be severed, lives "beyond" and independently of that opening. Henry's destruction (attained in the first part of *L'Essence de la manifestation*) is the discovery of the "autonomy" of essence. See *infra*, sct. 4.

[13] About "ontological monism", cf. also (Kojève 1947, pp. 485–86).

[14] Here, one glimpses, if but as a sketch, the general groundwork to the distinction drawn by Henry between the "Word of Life" and the "*logos* of the World", later elaborated in his "Christological trilogy" (1996–2002); see more especially (Henry 2002, chp. VII).

[15] It is that idea of "disjunction" or "disarticulation", referring to the essence and its manifestation, that Michel Henry finds in the Fichtean doctrine of religion. Cf. (Hyppolite 1971, vol. 1, pp. 32–52) on the meaning of this "disconnection" in Fichte. See also (Rametta 2016, pp. 173–88) and (Formisano 2018, pp. 147–64) on the way Henry made the Fichtean notion his own.

[16] On this point turns the critical difference vis à vis Husserl's "hyletic phenomenology". See (Henry 1990).

[17] Cf. (Henry 2004, pp. 108, 159). In this regard, see (Canullo 2019).

[18] Regarding this aspect, and its consequences, see (Leclercq 2018).

[19] (Henry 1963, p. 540 and p. 563 ff. [p. 431, p. 449 ff.]). Indeed, that "indifference" is what constitutes "the essence of Christianity" (Henry 1963, p. 564 [p. 450]).

[20] Cf. (Henry 1963, p. 173 [p. 143]): "Being is the pure manifestation. The manifestation of Being is the self-manifestation of pure manifestation. The self-manifestation of the pure essence of manifestation is in no way the result of reversal, rather it belongs to the pure essence of manifestation itself. That Being be able to manifest itself does not mean that the self-manifestation of Being can or must be joined to the essence of Being in the course of or at the end of a process which would permit this essence to realize itself; it means that the essence of Being is self-manifestation. *Self-manifestation is the essence of manifestation*. Again, we should understand how this self-manifestation of manifestation occurs: it is original. Original means that it is not the fact of philosophical knowledge but that of the essence itself. The self-manifestation of the essence is so little dependent on the fact of philosophical knowledge that the latter constantly presupposes it as the very condition of its accomplishment".

[21] Here, one finds revealed in its ultimate effect what *phänomenologische Destruktion* means for Henry: a labour—essential (in terms of thought-method at least) to philosophical knowledge—*but inessential from the standpoint of essence* (i.e., relative to its autonomous, immediate, and immanent self-revelation).

[22] All the more so that it interprets his method—and thus self-interprets—as "the self-justification of the transcendental life of absolute subjectivity in its self-objectivation (*in the form of its self-objectivation*)" (Henry 1990, p. 129 [p. 95]).

[23] A significant example of an analysis discussing the elements of continuity and discontinuity in *L'Essence de la manifestation* and *C'est moi la vérité*, considering Henry's phenomenological interpretation of religion and Christianity, is offered by (Green 2017). See also (Formisano and Green 2016); especially (Hefty 2016).

[24] For a discussion about this debate, see (Canullo 2004).

[25] See (Henry 1996, pp. 7–19 [pp. 1–11]). The same separation also involves language, and any phenomenon attributable to the phenomenological structure of the world, i.e., the phenomenality that, in opposition to Kojève, has been previously described and discussed as "Discourse" (see *supra*, sct. 3).

[26] "*The man of the world is merely an optical illusion. 'Man' does not exist*" (Henry 1996, p. 157 [p. 124]. Emphasis in original).

[27] On this subject, see the illuminating remarks by (Chrétien 1988).

[28] In light of analysis of the Dossiers CNRS and the results set out here, the idea of a "theological turn"—the interpretative paradigm initiated by Dominique Janicaud (see Janicaud 1991) that prevails insofar as our current understanding of French phenomenological philosophy in the second half of the 20th century is concerned—should be subjected to wide-ranging reexamination. Is the attention paid by contemporary French phenomenology to the phenomenon of religion (i.e., to religion as a phenomenon) truly the subject of an arbitrary decision by certain philosophers? Might it not rather be a philosophical

demand typical of a specific era in the history of French contemporary philosophy? Indeed, the relation of French philosophy to Hegelianism has enabled us to show that the discovery of religion as a philosophical problem—around which fundamental philosophical issues gravitate, casting doubt upon the meaning, method, and concept as such of phenomenological research—makes up the decisive humus for the way in which contemporary phenomenology was first received and understood in France. One can be allowed to speak of a "turn" only if one leaves out, or even buries, a decisive moment in the history of contemporary French thought. It is possible to see this otherwise; however, it is predicated upon a philosophical understanding of religion, and thus on the horizon of characteristic continuity that one locates the two trends—the two "souls"—of French philosophy: on the one side, the "atheistic" interpretation of phenomenology, which aims at secularizing phenomenality; and on the other hand the religious trend (to which, among others, Michel Henry belongs). Nevertheless, these two opposite orientations originate from the same source (the mutual influence of phenomenology, Hegelianism, and existentialism in the general process of renewal that characterised French philosophy in the first half of the 20th century) and both belong to the same history.

[29]   Owing to the notion that, unlike philosophy, religion is neither a determined mode of existence, nor one of *Verstehen*. Understood in the "original" (cf. Henry 2004, pp. 108, 159) sense of the Latin verb "*religare*" (see Leclercq 2008, 2011; and Canullo 2019), and accordingly free of "positivity" (in the Hegelian sense of the term), religion to Henry is assimilated to absolute Life: to the immanent movement of its self-revelation, the same and the only process by which life institutes the founding tie to each individual, to each fleshly ego, that makes up the community of living (human) beings. It is that founding life that preserves the foundation's unity, and upon which *no external mediation—in other words, philosophy—can act* (cf. Henry 1963, sct. 49).

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