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Review of Michelle Rebidoux, *The Philosophy of Michel Henry (1922 – 2002): A French Christian Phenomenology of Life* (The Edward Mellen Press: Lewiston, NY, 2012). 296 pages.

This is a vivid and articulate account of Michel Henry's idiosyncratic and highly original phenomenology of life. Rebidoux also has much to say about the somewhat more orthodox phenomenologist, Jean-Luc Marion. Indeed, she finds in the latter resources to correct some of Henry's more intractable problems, for example, Henry's tendency toward solipsism, which sits so uneasily with his later theological and ethical agenda. The place of meeting between the two thinkers is elaborated as their common effort to underwrite the synthesizing acts of the ego with a more primordial, pre-theoretical, capacity of the self to be affected.

Henry's phenomenology of life stands apart from the central currents of 20th century phenomenology. It does not share the drive towards objectivity which characterizes the phenomenology of the post-Husserlians (Scheler, Ingarten, von Hildebrandt). Nor does it follow the early Heidegger, Gadamer, Foucault and Derrida into hermeneutics, deconstruction and studies of the historical conditions of basic phenomenological concepts. Both these central and largely opposed movements in phenomenological philosophy remain for Henry caught in the net of representationalism. Henry, by contrast, wishes to radically revise phenomenology as a reflection upon the non-apparent, not the being that is always *for a* subject but the being that is *before* the subject. In this regard, Henry is closer to Deleuze and neo-Spinozistic philosophies of substance than he is to the transcendental reflections of early phenomenology. Henry's problem with transcendental phenomenology is that it consolidates the exteriorization of being, which, according to him, is the ground for the forgetting of "life" (Henry's master signifier) in the Western tradition. Being for transcendental phenomenology is ecstatic, "worlding," the intending of the *intentum* as the term of the *intentio*, or the historical mediation of Dasein in the thrown projection of temporality. Such phenomenology remains bound up with the metaphysics of the visible, which in Henry's view typifies Western thought since Plato. Henry, then, takes on not only Husserl and Heidegger but the whole history of the West in a bid to think immanence, immediacy, and substance, on its own terms, as the necessary presupposition of any ecstatic project.

The book is divided up into five dense chapters: (1) "(En)countering Heidegger"; (2) "Phenomenology and Givenness," which is mostly on Marion; (3) "Material Phenomenology," which brings us into the central claims of Henry's

work; (4) “Henry’s Christianity,” a fascinating overview of Henry’s heterodox reading of Christianity as life’s own attestation of itself; and (5) “Community, Time, and the Call,” which endeavours to solve the problem of solipsism in Henry by recourse to both his late work on the Christ figure and Marion’s notion of “the call.” Rebidoux’s language tends to be technical but her mastery of the terms helps the reader to keep afloat of the jargon and not miss the forest for the trees. I found myself quite unable to put the book down. The book should be recognized as the best introduction in English to Henry’s work. Henry’s phenomenology is laid out in terms that are often clearer than Henry’s own.

We discover in these pages Henry’s relentless exploration of “clandestine subjectivity,” the immediate life of the self which grounds all representation, even if it itself remains unrepresentable. Henry’s lineage is Spinoza, Merleau-Ponty, and Marx. Materialism is affirmed for at least resisting total exteriorization. Not all being is reducible to being-for-a-subject if a material substratum makes the subject itself possible. The other feature of materialism Henry endorses is the primordial passivity posited by materialists at the basis of all experience. For Henry, experience is not a product of synthesizing acts but rather effect, suffering, or auto-affection. Rebidoux reconstructs how Henry follows Heidegger in tracing the concept of the phenomenon back to its Greek sources: the phenomenon is that which appears in the light of appearing (*phainesthai*). As such the concept is connected to the metaphysics of light which inaugurates Western thought. To be is to participate in *eidōs*, to be rendered visible by virtue of the showing of form. Henry wishes to revise phenomenology as the logos not of the visible but of the self-manifesting, where the accent falls on the self of the manifest. That which manifests itself from itself is not reducible to the manifestation. Something which is never manifest, the self of the self-manifest, is presupposed in every manifestation. Phenomenology is called to elaborate the hidden depths of that which shows itself, thematizing the invisible conditions of what appears. Henry’s reduction to the invisible leads to a rethinking of the significance of intentionality. The subject’s directedness to an object or another subject is only possible because of a non-intentional presence of the individual to itself, a non-mediated suffering by means of which life experiences itself as auto-self affection.

The difficulty here, Rebidoux points out, is that, as non-intentional, life tends toward the non-communal, which is not particularly fertile ground for building an ethics a central concern of the late Henry. Henry deploys the Christ figure to rescue life from solipsism. Christ is the ‘Arch Ipseity’ who can mediate between the individual ipseity and absolute life, as well as between the individual ipseity and other ipseities, without, however, being exterior to the life of the self. The encounter with the Christ “opens the inherent solipsism of the *ipseity* to a sort of *intelligibility* of the ‘other’ (Christ) which is not intentional and which remains affecting in a degree which cannot simply be resettled in an ‘impropriation’ of the ego—and yet, which, for Henry, in terms of the ‘pure stuff’ of affectivity, is paradoxically *substantially continuous* with the ego.” (199-200).

In my view, Henry’s immanentist reading of Christianity is a bit of a mess. The most important features of the Christ encounter, the personal quality of the

intimacy between Creator and creature which it makes possible, and the ontological elevation of person over substance (which is both the presupposition and the cultural effect of the doctrine of the Trinity) are eclipsed by Henry's insistence on remaining in the autism of a life feeling itself without relation. In lieu of a community based on personal encounter, Henry offers us a community of unconsciousnesses, like the community of the hypnotic and the hypnotist, who interact without relating. What kind of community is this? A community of somnambulists who 'know' each other without seeing each other, a community the members of which do not interact in space and time. No surprise that in Rebidoux's reading of him, Henry's phenomenology of life is closer to Hindu non-dualism (although Henry scarcely mentions the East), than it is to Christian personalism.

Rebidoux's carefully written book is at the vanguard of a new era in phenomenology, proving that phenomenology is not merely of historical interest; it bristles with new questions that call for original research. A superb, critical analysis of a major figure in contemporary continental philosophy.

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