

Introduction

The Philosophy of Michel Henry

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While Michel Henry is, in the words of Jean Leclercq, “*l’un des plus grands penseurs français du XX^{ème} siècle*,”¹ his philosophical contributions remained, throughout his career, anomalous or eccentric, in the etymological sense of that term. Still today, a perduring hermeneutic approach to his philosophy remains itself, in a certain and salient sense, extraneous or external. Such an approach characterized Jean Lacroix’s (positive, or affirmative) proclamation, in 1966, of Henry as “*le nouveau Bergson*.”² It continues today when Dominique Janicaud interprets Henry (negatively, or critically) in light of a “*tournant théologique*,” as a principal proponent of the “theologism of phenomenology.”³

Lacroix’s interpretive frame, no less than Janicaud’s influential “*constat*,” shifts our focus from Henry’s phenomenology to a comparative relation between phenomenology and French spiritualism, or phenomenology as such and theology. These two examples, one of the earliest and one still current, will suffice for present purposes to illustrate this perduring hermeneutical approach. In both cases, a close comprehension of the philosophy of Michel Henry is obscured as much as revealed, or presumed rather than accomplished. The inheritances through which its context is established, the positions that define its proper content, the mutual coherence of those positions and their implications, the development over time of its nature and extent—these integral, internal issues must remain bracketed, as the *telos* of such a hermeneutic frame lies in the definition and determination of, e.g., French spiritualism, or the proper character of phenomenology as such, rather than the specific character of Michel Henry’s philosophy.

¹ Michel Henry. *Les dossiers H*, eds. Jean-Marie Brohm and Jean Leclercq (Lausanne: Editions l’Age d’Homme, 2009), 5.

² Jean Lacroix, *Panorama de la philosophie en France* (Paris: PUF, 1966).

³ For this phrase, see Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology “Wide Open: After the French Debate*,” trans. Charles N. Cabral (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 6. See also Dominique Janicaud, *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française* (Combas: Éditions de l’Éclat, 1991) The English-language reader may see *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate*, ed. Bernard G. Prusak (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

This hermeneutic approach has predominated for more than a generation. After the initial success of *L'essence de la manifestation*⁴ and *Philosophie et phénoménologie du corps*,⁵ which earned Henry a chair at the University of Montpellier in the early 1960's, Henry's philosophy was, in fact, greeted in France by a relative silence. This was in part a product of the 'crisis' of phenomenology in the 1970's, and the extraneous character of its debates with respect to those of a predominant Marxism and Structuralism. But this "crisis" afflicted Henry's philosophy in particular still more acutely, as a result of the anti-Althusserian, anti-Marxist reading of Marx that he published in 1976.⁶ The openly conflictual, rather than merely extraneous, relation that resulted obscured the originality of a phenomenological interpretation of Marx, and resulted instead, within certain intellectual circles, in its condemnation or rejection.

This situation in France was transformed by the wider, international reception and diffusion of Henry's philosophy across the 1980's and 1990's. This diffusion accompanied a significant renewal of French philosophy and phenomenology, as a result of, e.g., the relaunching of the Husserl Archives of Paris by Jean-François Courtine,⁷ and the important debates on Jean-Luc Marion's research on *Gegebenheit*, on the necessity of a redefinition of the status of phenomenality, and on the method thereof.⁸ It was only at this point—thirty years after *L'essence de la manifestation*—that Henry could be recognized as the origin and agent of a "new French phenomenology." The particularly productive phase from *Généalogie de la psychanalyse*⁹ to *Phénoménologie matérielle*¹⁰ further established this status and significance. But only as contextualized by the earliest work can the character of the reception of Henry's philosophy at the end of the 1990's—when Janicaud met Henry and Marion, as well as Levinas and Ricoeur,

⁴ Michel Henry, *L'essence de la manifestation*, 2 vols. (Paris: PUF, 1963); *The Essence of Manifestation*, trans. Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975).

⁵ Henry, *Philosophie et phénoménologie du corps. Essai sur l'ontologie biranienne* (Paris: PUF, 1965); *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, trans. Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975).

⁶ Michel Henry, *Marx*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1976); *Marx. A Philosophy of Human Reality*, trans. Kathleen B. McLaughlin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

⁷ On phenomenology in France in the 1970's and 1980's, the reader may see Jocelyn Benoist's excellent "Vingt ans de phénoménologie française," in *Philosophie contemporaine en France*, ed. Yves Mabin (Paris: Ministère des Affaires Étrangères/ADPF, 1994), 27-51.

⁸ As Jean-Luc Marion's article in this journal ("The Reduction and "The Fourth Principle") testifies, his critical approach to phenomenology found a privileged interlocutor in the accomplished philosophy of Michel Henry.

⁹ Henry, *Généalogie de la psychanalyse* (Paris: PUF, 1985); *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993). It may be noted that *Généalogie* is itself an effect of the international diffusion of Henry's philosophy; it was the upon the invitation of Yorihiro Yamagata of the Osaka Centre for French Philosophy that Henry developed the lectures on the unconscious that were published as the *Généalogie*.

¹⁰ Henry, *Phénoménologie matérielle* (Paris: PUF, 1990); *Material Phenomenology*, trans. Scott Davidson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

with the famous “*constat*” in the context of the debate on the “*tournant*”—be understood and evaluated.¹¹

One need not reject such extraneous thematic frames, of course. There is no reason to underdetermine Henry’s relation to the history of French spiritualism, or to negate his founding role in the “*tournant théologique*.” But the genuine reception and comprehension of Henry’s phenomenology will be accomplished, one might suggest, only when this hermeneutic strategy is contextualized and complemented by another, capable of evincing Henry’s historical inheritances, examining the full range of his thematic engagements, and investigating the internal coherence and relation between his definitive philosophical positions. (The latter may, indeed, provide clarifications and justifications of Henry’s positions within aforementioned extraneous debates.) While the hermeneutics of the ‘theological turn,’ for instance, may uncover Henry as a contextualizing source for subsequent French phenomenology, it does not reveal the sources of Henry’s own work, the syntheses of them as effected by Henry, the coherence of those syntheses, or the new possibilities for phenomenology—and for philosophy and theology more generally—that Henry’s work thus contains. It evinces the influence and effects, but not the horizon, the intrinsic character, or the motive forces of Henry’s philosophy.

In order to identify and to explore the relations between Henry and his own sources, one must return to the French philosophy of the 1930’s, to the decline of a predominant ‘*idéisme français*’ at the Sorbonne, exemplified by the work of Léon Brunschvicg, and to the renewal of interest in both 19th and 20th century German philosophy, reinterpreted and renewed for a new generation. In this context of both generational and philosophical change there emerged privileged new sources such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. Others, too—as the unpublished manuscripts of the Archives evince—had decisive influence over the development of Henry’s philosophy, including Kant (as interpreted by Jean Nabert and Pierre Lachièze-Rey), of Fichte (as interpreted by Gueroult) and Hegel (as interpreted by Jean Hyppolite, Alexandre Kojève, and Jean Wahl), and indeed of Boehme (as interpreted by Alexandre Koyré) and Eckhart. It is not, then, only from the phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger, but from a more complex constellation of traditions, sources, themes, and problems—including of course French Cartesianism (through Alquié) and Spiritualism (of Maine de Biran and Bergson)—that this formation-process is constituted.

¹¹ Today, and importantly, the 2010 foundation and subsequent development of the *Fonds d’archives Michel Henry* at Louvain-la-Neuve—about which, more below—has allowed scholars to consult the unpublished manuscripts that make clear that Henry’s philosophy of Christianity develops across work undertaken already in the 1940’s and 1950’s, the years of the initial development of Henry’s philosophy, even though it was not fully developed and disseminated until the first years of this millennium, across *C’est moi la Vérité* (Paris: Seuil, 1996), *Incarnation* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), and *Paroles du Christ* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

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The following monographic special issue of *Analecta Hermeneutica* is dedicated neither to the philological reconstruction of such a genealogy, nor to the history of past interpretations of Michel Henry. Our intention is not to assert either, or any, single guise or profile that then would pretend to define yet again Henry's philosophy as such. Our intention instead is to present many such guises, none of which, we would suggest, can claim to be definitive in abstraction from its others. As we have solicited individual contributions, we have sought to promote profiles that have been underdetermined or undetermined in predominant scholarly treatments—in order that from their number and character, readers may glimpse, and appreciate (as a result of a collective, interdisciplinary, and international effort) the unacknowledged richness of Henry's thought. The latter remains very much to understand, rather than already understood. Its definitive positions, range, and scope, in an important sense, remain open, and are still to be decided. The full contextualization thereof is not a given, but is rather a task: over 50 years after *L'essence de la manifestation*, it remains to be accomplished.¹²

This intention would be impossible, or unrealizable, without the existence and support of the *Fonds d'archives Michel Henry* at Louvain-la-Neuve. The determination of Henry's inheritances and their relative values, as well as the dynamics of the genesis, formation-process, and development of his philosophy, would simply be impossible without this unique and precious resource. The thorough comprehension of Michel Henry's published works requires the patient consultation of his unpublished works; the former positions questions that only the latter can resolve. Thus, the intention to provide North American readers with the best-informed and most recent scholarship on Michel Henry involved the collection of work from scholars who, in virtually every case, have utilized and benefited from this resource. The institution, one could almost say, makes the hermeneutic strategy possible.¹³

We wish, then, to recover a plurality of possible profiles (in the Husserlian sense of *Abschattungen*) through which we may constitute the identity and dynamic unity of Henry's philosophy. For this reason, we are pleased to present together scholars of Michel Henry's phenomenology, of phenomenology more

¹² This effort to determine Henry's reception and recapitulation of a range of sources and issues that surpasses those of Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenologies can be seen as an important tendency of the most recent Henry scholarship. It was undertaken, for example, at the 2015 Padova conference dedicated to Henry, now published by Vrin under the title *Vivre la raison. Michel Henry entre histoire des idées, philosophie transcendantale et nouvelles perspectives phénoménologiques*, eds. Roberto Formisano, Fabio Grigenti, Ilaria Malaguti and Gaetano Rametta (Paris: Vrin, 2016). It was also the topic of a special round table on "Henry et la religion" at the international conference of the Société Francophone de Philosophie de la Religion (SFPR; Montréal, 2015), which will be published under the title *Religion et vérité: La philosophie de la religion à l'âge séculier*, eds. Garth W. Green and Jean Grondin (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, [forthcoming] 2016).

¹³ For this reason, it was important to include in this journal work by scholars currently working as researchers within the Archive, whose contributions we have left in their original French, as a solicitation for the reader and in recognition of the scholarly demands of such a close comprehension of Michel Henry.

generally, and of the historical figures through whom Henry's phenomenology accomplishes its specificity. In addition to a work of Henry's here translated into English and published for the first time,¹⁴ we have solicited contributions from prominent contemporary phenomenologists whose own work is indebted to Michel Henry, including Marion¹⁵ and Lavigne.¹⁶ We have included works by senior specialists on Michel Henry's philosophy, including Leclercq,¹⁷ Canullo,¹⁸ Jean,¹⁹ and Welten,²⁰ as well as younger specialists from the Archives including Hardy²¹ and Del Mastro.²² We also have included articles by scholars whose work focuses instead on the inner dynamics of Henry's philosophy (Bancalari,²³ Hefty²⁴ and Seyler²⁵), on Henry's relation to figures in the history of phenomenology (Serban,²⁶ Formisano²⁷), and to figures in the history of modern European philosophy (Green,²⁸ Hart,²⁹ Rametta³⁰).

¹⁴ Henry, "Ontological Destruction of the Kantian Critique of the Paralogism of Rational Psychology," trans. Garth W. Green, *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 7-37; from "Destruction ontologique de la critique kantienne du paralogisme de la psychologie rationnelle," *Studia Phaenomenologica* 9 (2009): 17-53.

¹⁵ We are particularly pleased to be able to publish Jean-Luc Marion, "The Reduction and 'The Fourth Principle,'" trans. Daniel Gillis, *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 39-59 (first published in *Archivio di Filosofia* 83 [2015] 1-2: 13-31), in which Henry's legacy in subsequent French phenomenology is considered by a principal contemporary figure therein.

¹⁶ Jean-François Lavigne, "Suffering and Ipseity in Michel Henry: The Problem of the Ego's Transcendental Identity," *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 61-74.

¹⁷ Jean Leclercq, "Religion as the Ethical Form of Self-Regulation: Reflections After Michel Henry," trans. Daniel Gillis, *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 75-91.

¹⁸ Carla Canullo, "Michel Henry: Between *Krisis* and Critique. Philosophy in the Age of Barbarism," trans. Garth W. Green, *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 93-110.

¹⁹ Grégoire Jean, "Expérience d'autrui et érotisme chez Henry et Sartre," *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 111-23.

²⁰ Ruud Welten, "Community from the Perspective of Life," *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 125-

41.

²¹ Jean-Sébastien Hardy, "Life Turned Against Itself: Is There a Theory of the Passions in Michel Henry?," *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 143-58.

²² Cesare Del Mastro, "L'intériorité pathique des mots: langage, littérature et auto-affection chez Michel Henry," *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 159-74.

²³ Stefano Bancalari, "Phenomenological Models of Inter-Subjectivity: The Position of Michel Henry," trans. Federico Tedesco and Garth W. Green, *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 175-86.

²⁴ Karl Hefty, "Phenomenality or Revelation: Michel Henry's Approach to Christianity," *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 187-207.

²⁵ Frédéric Seyler, "The Ethics of Affectivity and the Problem of Personhood: An Overview," *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 209-24.

²⁶ Claudia Serban, "Beneath Time and Reflection: The Shadow of Husserl in Michel Henry's Non-Intentional Phenomenology," *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 225-34.

²⁷ Roberto Formisano, "Phenomenality and Finitude: Michel Henry's Theory of Immanence," trans. Alessandro Chiessi and Garth W. Green, *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 235-54.

²⁸ Garth W. Green ("The Significance of Self-Affection: Michel Henry's Critique of Kant," *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 [2016]: 255-74) interprets the essay by Michel Henry, here translated for the first time into English, that opens this issue. (See note 14, above.)

²⁹ Kevin Hart, "'Spiritual Acoustics': On Being in Common (Kierkegaard, Husserl, Henry)," *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 275-93.

³⁰ Gaetano Rametta, "Fichte, Henry, and the Problem of Manifestation," trans. Marco Dozzi and Garth W. Green, *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 295-306.

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It is in in this context, and for these reasons, that we have assembled the essays that constitute this issue of *Analecta Hermeneutica*. The figure that emerges is inserted inextricably within the context of the French phenomenological reception of Husserl and Heidegger; from within this context, and with this phenomenological method, Henry inherits and interprets sources that surpass the phenomenological canon, including classical French (Cartesianism, Spiritualism) and classical German (Kantian, post-Kantian, Idealistic) sources, in order to produce a synthesis that is uniquely his own.

With these essays, we do not intend to produce a definitive or exhaustive, but rather only a suggestive, result. We hope to provide a variety of historical, systematic, and thematic contexts through which contemporary scholars are approaching Henry's philosophy. It is our hope that this effort will evince for the Anglophone and North American reader the fact that, while Henry is indeed at the origin of the theological turn, he can only be understood through a wider range of thematic inheritances, as well as historical engagements and philosophical positions. While controversial for the former, he remains rich in significance for the latter. This work of recontextualization can be still further prosecuted; it is only intimated herein. Even so, we imagine that the extraordinary potency and significance of Henry's philosophy is, in these profiles, already visible. We look forward enthusiastically to the debates that this scholarship will engender, and to the further evolution of the reception of Henry's philosophy.

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