

The philosophy of Michel Henry

Personal contributions to Wikipedia *from Philippe Audinos*

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1 Article on Michel Henry

1.1 Life and work of Michel Henry

Biography

Michel Henry was a French philosopher and novelist who was born 10 January at Haiphong (Vietnam) and who died 3 July 2002 at Albi (France).

Michel Henry has lived until 7 years old in Vietnam where he has lost his father very early, who was an officer in the French Navy. He has then settled in France with his mother and has studied in Paris. He has discovered a real passion for the philosophy that has led him to the desire to do it his profession. From June 1943, he committed into the Resistance where he has joined the maquis of the Haut Jura under the code name of Kant, and he had to go down again from the mountain to accomplish his missions in Lyon occupied by the Germans and covered by the Nazis, an experience of clandestineness that has deeply marked his philosophy.

At the end of the War, he has passed the agrégation of philosophy examination, and then devoted his time to the preparation of a thesis under the direction of J. Hyppolite, J. Wahl, P. Ricoeur, F. Alquié and H. Gouhier. He has first written his book on the *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body* ended in 1950, and then his first published large book about *The Essence of Manifestation* and to which he as consecrated long years of research necessary to surmount the main deficiency of all intellectualist philosophy which is the ignorance of the life as every one experience it.

Michel Henry has been from 1960 professor of philosophy at the University of Montpellier where he has patiently edified his work keeping himself away from the philosophical fashions and far from the dominant ideologies. The only subject of his philosophy, that's the living subjectivity, that's to say the real life of the living individuals, this life who crosses all his work and ensures its deep unity despite of the diversity of the tackled themes. [He has proposed the deepest theory of the subjectivity of the twentieth century.]

A phenomenology of Life

The work of Michel Henry is based on phenomenology, which is the science of the phenomenon. The English word "phenomenon" comes from the Greek word "phainomenon" which means "that which shows itself by coming into the light". The object of phenomenology is not however what appears, such a particular thing or phenomena, but the act of appearing itself. His thought leads him to the reversal of the Husserl phenomenology, which knows as phenomenon only the appear of the world, that's to say the exteriority. Michel Henry opposes to this conception of the phenomenality a radical phenomenology of life.

Michel Henry defines life in a phenomenological point of view as what possesses the faculty and the power to "feel and to experience oneself in every point of its being". For Michel Henry, life is essentially force and affect, it is invisible by essence, it consists in a pure experience of itself which oscillates permanently between suffering and joy, it is an always begun again passage from suffering to joy. Thought is just for him a mode of life, because this is not thought that gives access to life, but this is life that allows thought to reach itself.

Life can never be seen from the exterior, it never appears in the exteriority of the world. Life feels itself and experience itself in its invisible interiority and in its radical immanence. In the world we never see life itself, but only living beings or living organisms, we cannot see life in them. It is as well impossible to see the soul of others with our eyes or to perceive it at the end of our scalpel.

Our life is not its own foundation, we don't have brought ourselves and by our own means in the condition of living, life is given to us permanently and we are for nothing in this fact. None has ever given himself life. We undergo life in a radical passivity, we are reduced to bear it permanently as what we have not wanted, that's this radical passivity of life which is the foundation and the cause of suffering. At the same time, the simple fact of living, of being alive and of feeling oneself instead of being nothing and of not existing is already the highest joy and the greatest of the happiness. Suffering and joy belong to the essence of life, they are the two fundamental affective tonalities of its manifestation and of its "pathetic" self-revelation (from the French word *pathétique* which means capable of feeling something like suffering or joy).

For Michel Henry, life is not an universal, blind, impersonal and abstract substance, it is necessarily the personal and concrete life of a living individual, it carries in it a consubstantial Ipseity which refers to the fact of being itself, to the fact of being a Self. That this life is the personal and finite life of men, or the personal and infinite life of God.

Two modes of manifestation

According to Michel Henry, two modes of manifestation of the phenomena exist that are two ways of appearing : the exteriority which is the mode of manifestation of the visible world, and the phenomenological interiority which is the mode of manifestation of the invisible life. Our body for example is given to us from the inner in the life which allows us for example to move our hand or to feel it, and it appears also from the exterior as any other object that we can see in the world.

This invisible we speak about doesn't correspond to what is too small to be seen with the naked eyes or to radiation to which our eye is not sensible, but to this life forever invisible because it is radically immanent and it never appears in the exteriority of the world : nobody has ever seen a force, a thought or a feeling in their inner reality appearing in the world, nobody has ever found them digging into the clay layers of the ground.

Some of his assertions seem paradoxical and difficult to understand at first sight, not only because they are extracted from their context, but above all because of our thinking habits which lead us to reduce everything to its visible appearance in the world instead of reaching its invisible reality in the life. That's this separation between the visible appearance and the invisible reality which allows the dissimulation of our real feelings and which founds the possibility of sham and hypocrisy which are forms of lies.

The originality of his thought

Western philosophy as a whole since its Greek origins recognizes only the visible world and exteriority as the single mode of manifestation, it is trapped into what Michel Henry calls in *The Essence of Manifestation* the "ontological monism", it ignores completely the invisible interiority of life, its radical immanence and its original revelation mode which is irreducible to any form of transcendence and to any exteriority. When it is question of subjectivity or of life, they are never grasped in their purity, they are always reduced to biological life, to their external link to the world, or as in Husserl to an intentionality, that's to say an orientation of consciousness to an external object.

Michel Henry rejects materialism, which admits only matter as reality, because the manifestation of matter itself into the transcendence of the world presupposes constantly the revelation of life itself, in order to access to it, to be able to see it or to touch it. He rejects as well idealism, which reduces being to thought and is incapable by principle to grasp the reality of being which it reduces to an unreal image, to a simple representation. For Michel Henry, the revelation of the absolute resides into affectivity and is constituted by it.

The deep originality of Michel Henry's thought and its radical novelty in relation to all anterior philosophy explains its quite limited reception, a philosophy nevertheless admirable by its rigor and by its depth. But it is a thought both difficult and demanding, even if the central and unique theme of phenomenological life which experience it tries to communicate is what is the most simple and immediate. An immediacy and an absolute transparency of life which explains the difficulty to grasp it by means of thought : it is much easier to speak of what we see than of this invisible life which escapes by principle to any external look.

The reception of his philosophy

His thesis on *The essence of manifestation* has been welcome warmly by the members of the jury who have recognized the intellectual value and the seriousness of its author, nevertheless this thesis doesn't had any influence on their later works. His prophetic book on *Marx* has been rejected by Marxists who were harshly criticized, as well as by those who refused to see in Marx a philosopher and who reduced him to an ideologue responsible from Marxism. His book on *The barbarism* has been considered by some people as a quite simplistic and too sharp anti-scientific discourse. Nevertheless technique continues its blind and without limit development too often in the contempt of life.

His books on Christianity seem to have quite disappointed some professional theologians and catholic exegetes who have only picked out and corrected what they considered as "dogmatic errors". His phenomenology of Life has been the object of a pamphlet in *The theological turn of the French phenomenology (Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française)* from Dominique Janicaud who sees in the immanence of life only the affirmation of a tautological interiority. Nevertheless Antoine Vidalin has just published a book in French entitled *The word of Life (La parole de la Vie)* where he shows that the phenomenology of Michel Henry allows a renewed approach of all the domains of theology.

As says Alain David in an article published in the French journal *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'Etranger* (number 3, July - September 2001), the thought of Michel Henry seems too radical, its changes too deeply our thinking habits, its reception is quite difficult, even if all his readers say themselves impressed by its "power", by the "staggering effect" of a thought which "brushes all on its passage", which "provokes admiration", but nevertheless "doesn't really convinces". Because we don't know if we are confronted to "the violence of a prophetic word or to pure madness". Rolf Kühn asserts also in this same philosophical journal, in order to explain the difficult reception of Michel Henry's work, that "if we take sides with no power of this world, we inevitably submit oneself to the silence and to the critics of all possible power, *because we recall to all institution that its visible or apparent power is, in fact only powerlessness*, because nobody gives himself into the absolute phenomenological life."

His books have nevertheless been translated in many languages, notably in English, in Deutsche, in Spanish, in Italian, in Portuguese and in Japanese. An important number of books have been consecrated to his thought, mainly in French, but also in Deutsche, in Spanish and in Italian. Several seminars have also been consecrated to the thought of Michel Henry in Beirut, Cerisy, Namur, Prague and Paris. Michel Henry is considered by those who know his work and recognize its value as one of the major contemporaneous philosophers, and his phenomenology starts to "win

a following". A *Center of Michel Henry studies* has even been created in the Saint-Joseph University of Beirut (Lebanon) under the direction of Professor Jad Hatem.

1.2 Applications of his philosophy

On the problems of society

Marx

Michel Henry has done an important work on Karl Marx, which he considers paradoxically as one of the first Christian thinkers and as one of the most important western philosophers, because of the importance he gives in his thought to the living work and to the living individual in which he sees the foundation of the economic reality. The fact that the real thought of Marx has been so badly understood and so badly interpreted is due to the complete ignorance of the fundamental philosophical writings of this author in the constitution of the official doctrine of the Marxism because of their very late publication, for example in 1932 only for *The German Ideology*. This work on Marx has been translated in English under the title *Marx. A Philosophy of Human Being*.

The barbarism

In his essay on *The Barbarism*, Michel Henry questions himself on science, which is founded on the idea of an universal and thus objective truth and which therefore leads to the elimination of sensible qualities of the world, of sensibility and of life. The science is not bad by itself as long as it restricts to study nature, but it tends to exclude all others traditional cultures, namely art, ethic and religion. Science delivered to itself leads to the technique whose blind processes develop by themselves in a monstrous way without reference to life.

Science is a way of culture in which life denies itself and refuses itself any value, it is a practical negation of life, which goes on in a theoretical negation in the way of all the ideologies which bring back all possible knowledge to that of science, namely human sciences whose objectivity itself deprive them of their object : what is the value of statistics about suicide, what do they say about the despair it proceeds from ? These ideologies have invaded the university and throw it to its destruction by the elimination of life from its searches and from its teaching. Television is the truth of technique, it is the practice par excellence of the barbarism, it reduces all event to current events, to incoherent and insignificant facts.

This negation of life results according to Michel Henry from the "disease of life", from its secret dissatisfaction of oneself which leads it to deny itself, to run away from itself in order to escape its anguish and its own suffering. In the modern world, we are almost all condemned from our childhood to run away our anguish and our own life in the mediocrity of the media universe, an escape of oneself and a dissatisfaction which lead to violence, instead of resorting to the traditional and more elaborated forms of culture which allowed the surpassing of this suffering and its transformation into joy. Culture subsists only clandestinely and in a kind of incognito in our materialist society which is sinking into barbarism.

From Communism to Capitalism

Communism and Capitalism are for Michel Henry the two faces of a same death, which consists in a same negation of the life. The Marxism eliminates the individual life to the benefit of universal abstractions like society, people, history or social classes. The Marxism is a way of fascism, that's to say a doctrine which originates in the degradation of the individual whose elimination is considered as legitimate. While Capitalism substitutes economic entities such as money, profit or interest to the real needs of life. Capitalism recognizes however the life as source of value, the

salary being the objective representation of the real subjective and living work. But Capitalism gives up progressively the place to the exclusion of the subjectivity by the modern technique, which replaces the living work by automated technical processes, eliminating at the same time the power of creating value and then the value itself: the possessions are produced in abundance, but the unemployment increases and money constantly lags to buy them. These themes are developed in his books *From Communism to Capitalism, Theory of a Catastrophe*

The Book of the Dead

The next book he intended to write must have been entitled *The Book of the Dead* and dealing with what he called the "clandestine subjectivity". A theme that evokes the condition of the life in the modern world et which is also probably an allusion to his commitment in the Resistance movement and his personal experience of clandestineness.

On art and painting

Michel Henry was a great admirer and connoisseur of the ancient painting, of the great classical painting that precedes the scientist derived figuration of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also of the abstract creations that result from an authentic spiritual quest as those of the founder of the abstract art, the painter Wassily Kandinsky. Michel Henry has consecrated him a very fine book entitled *Seeing the invisible* where he describes his work in magnificent terms. He analyses in this book the theoretical writings of Kandinsky about the art and about the painting in their spiritual and cultural dimensions as a way of increasing of oneself and of refinement of our sensibility. He explores the means of the painting that are the forms and the colors, he studies their effects on the inner life of the one who looks at them filled with wonder, following the rigorous and nearly phenomenological analysis proposed by Kandinsky. He explains us that all form of painting able to rouse us is in reality abstract, that's to say it doesn't content with reproducing the world, but looks for expressing this invisible power and this invisible life that we are. He evokes also the great thought of Kandinsky, the synthesis of the arts, their unity in the monumental art as well as the cosmic dimension of the art.

On Christianity

I am the Truth

Life loves itself in an infinite love and never stops to generate itself, it never stops to generate each one of us as his beloved Son or Daughter in the eternal present of the life. The Life is nothing but this absolute of love that the religion calls God. That's why the Life is sacred and this is for this reason that nobody has the right to attack others or to hurt them. The problem of the evil is that of death, that's to say of the degeneration from this original condition of Son of God, when the life turns against itself in the hate and the resentment. Because as says John in his first epistle, anyone who does not love remains in death, whereas everyone who loves has been born of God. The commandment of love is not an ethical law, but the Life itself. Those themes are developed in his book *I Am the Truth. Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*.

This book proposes also a phenomenology of Christ, who is understood as the First Living. The living is just what reaches itself in this pure revelation of oneself or self-revelation that is Life. That's in the form of an effective and singular Ipseity that Life never ceases to generate itself. It never ceases to occur in the form of a singular Self that embraces itself, experiences itself and enjoys itself, and that Michel Henry calls the First Living. Or also the Arch-Son, as he inhabits the Origin, the very Beginning, and as he is engendered in the very process whereby the Father engenders himself.

The coming of Christ into the world aims to make the true Father manifest to people, and thus to save them from the oblivion of Life where they stand. An oblivion which leads them to feel themselves falsely as being at the source of their own powers, of their own pleasures and of their own feelings, and to leave in the terrifying lack of what gives nevertheless each ego to himself. The plenitude of life and the feeling of satisfaction it brings, this must yield to the great Rift, to the Desire that no object can fulfill, to the Hunger that nothing can satisfy.

Words of Christ

As he has said in his latest book *Words of the Christ*, that's in the heart that the life speaks, in its immediate pathetic self-revelation, but this heart is blind to the Truth, it is deaf to the word of the Life, it is hard and selfish, and that's from it that comes the evil. That's in the violence of its silent and implacable self-revelation, who testifies against this degenerated life and against the evil that comes from it, that stands the Judgment which is identical to the coming of each Self in itself and to which nobody can escape.

Incarnation

In his book *Incarnation, a philosophy of the flesh*, Michel Henry starts with the opposition of the sensible and living flesh, as we experience it permanently from the inside, to our inert and material body, as we can see it from the outside, similar to the other objects we can find in the world. The flesh doesn't fit at all in his terminology with the soft part of our material and objective body, by opposition to the bones for example, but to what he called in his previous books our subjective body. For Michel Henry, an object doesn't possess interiority, it is not living, it doesn't feel itself and doesn't feel that it is touched, it doesn't do the subjective experience of being touched.

After having placed the difficult problem of the incarnation in an historical perspective going back to the thought of the Fathers of the Church, he makes in this book a critical review of the phenomenological tradition that leads to the reversal of phenomenology. He then proposes to elaborate a phenomenology of the flesh which leads to the notion of a not constituted original flesh given in the "Arch-revelation" of Life, as well as a phenomenology of Incarnation.

Although the flesh is traditionally understood as the place of sin, it is also in Christianity the place of salvation, which consists in the deification of man, that's to say in the fact of becoming Son of God, to come back to the eternal and absolute Life we had forgotten getting lost in the world, caring only about things and ourselves. In the fault, we make the tragic experience of our powerlessness to do the good we would like to do and of our inability to avoid the evil. In this way in front of the magic body of the other, that's the anguished desire to meet the life in it that leads to the fault. In the night of the lovers, the sexual act couples two impulsive movements, but the erotic desire fails to reach the pleasure of the other where it is experienced, in a total loving fusion. The erotic relation is however doubled by a pure affective relation, foreign to the carnal coupling, a relation made of mutual gratitude or of love. That's this affective dimension that is denied in this way of violence that is pornography, which extracts the erotic relation from the pathos of life to abandon it to the world, and which consists in a real profanation of life.

On psychoanalysis

Michel Henry has done a study of the historical and philosophical genesis of the psychoanalysis in the light of the phenomenology of the life in his book *Genealogy of the psychoanalysis*, the lost beginning, in which he shows that the Freudian notion of unconscious results from the incapacity of Freud, its founder, to think the essence of the life in its purity. The repressed representation is not unconscious, it is only not formed: the unconscious is only an empty representation, it doesn't exist, or rather the real unconscious, that's the life itself in its pathetic reality. And that's not the

repression that provokes the anguish, whose existence is only due to the fact to be able to act, but the unused psychic energy or libido. As for the notion of consciousness, it simply means the power of seeing, it is only a consciousness of object which leads to an empty subjectivity.

1.3 Some quotes from Michel Henry

On affectivity

- "That which is felt without the intermediary of any sense whatsoever is in its essence affectivity." (*The Essence of Manifestation*, § 52)
- "Affectivity has ever accomplished its work when the world rises." (*The Essence of Manifestation*, § 54)
- "The suffering makes up the tissue of the existence, it is the place where the life becomes living, the reality and the phenomenological effectivity of this gradual change." (*The Essence of Manifestation*, § 70)
- "The power of the feeling is the gathering which edifies, the being seized by oneself, its blazing up, its fulguration, is the becoming of the being, the triumphant sudden appearance of the revelation. What becomes of, in the triumph of this sudden appearance, in the fulguration of the presence, in the Parousia and, lastly, when there is something instead of nothing, that's the joy." (*The Essence of Manifestation*, § 70)
- "But joy has nothing about which it may be joyful. Far to come after the coming of being and to marvel in front of it, joy is consubstantial with being, joy founds it and forms it." (*The Essence of Manifestation*, § 70)
- "The community is a subterranean affective water table and each one drinks the same water at this source and at this well that he is." (*Material Phenomenology*)

On the problems of society

- "The Marxism is the whole of the misinterpretations that have been done about Marx." (*Marx, a philosophy of reality*)
- "The culture is the whole of the enterprises and of the practices in which the abundance of life expresses itself, they all have as motivation the « load », the « over » which disposes inwardly the living subjectivity as a force ready to give unstintingly itself and constraint, under the load, to do it." (*The Barbarism*)
- " The barbarism is an unused energy." (*The Barbarism*)
- "So it's not the self-realization that the media existence proposes to the life, it's the escape, the opportunity for all those whose laziness, repressing their energy, make them forever dissatisfied of themselves to forget this dissatisfaction." (*The Barbarism*)
- "No abstraction, no ideality has never been neither in position to produce a real action nor, by consequence, what only represents it." (*From communism to capitalism*)
- "When what feels nothing and doesn't feel oneself, has no desire and no love, is put at the

principle of the organization of the world, it's the time of madness that comes, because the madness has all lost except the reason." (*From communism to capitalism*)

On art and painting

- "The spectacle of the beauty which embodies itself in a living being is infinitely more touching than that of the work the more grandiose." (*L'amour les yeux fermés*)
- "The one who will want to represent this force will represent a column, the heavy blocs of stone of the pediment and of the roof – he will represent the temple, represent the world. Briesen draws the force of the music, the original force of the Suffering and of the Life : he draws nothing." (Article « Drawing the music, theory for the art of Briesen », in *Phénoménologie de la vie*, tome III)
- "We look at petrified, motionless them also or evolving slowly on the background of a nocturnal firmament, the hieroglyphs of the invisible. We look at them : forces that lay dormant in us and waited since millenniums, since the beginning, obstinately, patiently, forces that explode in the violence and the gleam of the colors, which unroll the spaces and generate the forms of the worlds, forces of the cosmos have raised themselves in us, they carry us along out of the time in the round dance of their jubilation and do not give us up, they don't stop – because even them did not think it was possible to reach « such an happiness ». The art is the resurrection of the eternal life." (*Seeing the invisible, on Kandinsky*)

On Christianity

- "I hear for ever the noise of my birth." (*I Am the Truth. Toward a philosophy of Christianity*)
- "To be born is not to come into the world. To be born is to come into life." (*I Am the Truth. Toward a philosophy of Christianity*)
- " But then, when and why is this emotional upheaval produced, which opens a person to his own essence ? Nobody knows. The emotional opening of the person to his own essence can only be born of the will of life itself, as this rebirth that lets him suddenly experience his eternal birth. The Spirit blows where it wills." (*I Am the Truth. Toward a philosophy of Christianity*)
- "No object has ever done the experience of being touched." (*Incarnation, a philosophy of the flesh*)
- "So my flesh is not only the principle of the constitution of my objective body, it hides in it its invisible substance. Such is the strange condition of this object that we call a body : it doesn't consist at all in the visible appearance to which we reduce it since forever ; in its reality precisely it is invisible. Nobody has ever seen a man, but nobody has ever seen his body as well, if by « body » we understand his real body." (*Incarnation, a philosophy of the flesh*)
- "Our flesh carries in it the principle of its manifestation, and this manifestation is not the appearing of the world. In its pathetic self-impressionality, in its flesh itself, given to itself in the Arch-passibility of the absolute Life, it reveals this one which reveals it to itself, it is in its pathos the Arch-revelation of Life, the Parousia of the absolute. On the bottom of its Night, our flesh is God." (*Incarnation, a philosophy of the flesh*)
- "Life is uncreated. Foreign to creation, foreign to the world, every process conferring Life is a

process of generation." (*Words of Christ*)

1.4 Description of selected titles

On the problems of society

- *The Barbarism (La barbarie)* : The culture, which is the self-development of the life, is threatened in our society by the barbarism of the monstrous objectivity of the technoscience, whose ideologies reject all form of subjectivity, while the life is condemned to escape his anguish in the media universe.
- *From Communism to Capitalism, Theory of a Catastrophe (Du communisme au capitalisme, théorie d'une catastrophe)* : The collapse of the eastern communist systems corresponds to the failure of a system that pretended to deny the reality of life to the benefit of abstractions wrongly universals. But the death is also to the appointment in the empire of the capitalism and of the modern technique.

On art and painting

- *Seeing the Invisible. On Kandinsky (Voir l'invisible. Sur Kandinsky)* : The art can save from his confusion the abandoned man of our technical civilization. This is this quest that has led Kandinsky to the creation of the abstract painting. This is no longer a matter to represent the world but our inner life, with lines and colors that correspond to forces and inner sonorities.

On Christianity

- *I am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity (C'est moi la Vérité, pour une philosophie du christianisme)* : This book explains the kind of truth that Christianity tries to transmit to men. The Christianity opposes to the truth of the world the Truth of Life, according to which the man is the Son of God. The self-revelation of the Life who experience itself in its invisible interiority is the essence of God that founds any individual. In the world, Jesus has the appearance of a man, but that's in the Truth of the Life that he is the Christ, the First Living.
- *Incarnation, a Philosophy of the Flesh (Incarnation, une philosophie de la chair)* : The living flesh opposes radically to the material body. Because this is the flesh which, experiencing oneself, enjoying of oneself according to always reviving impressions, is able to feel the body which is exterior to it, to touch it and to be touched by it. That's the flesh which allows us to know the body. The fundamental word of the prologue to John's Gospel, who says that the Word became flesh, asserts this improbable thesis that God has embodied in a mortal flesh like ours, it asserts the unity of the Word and the flesh in Christ. What is the flesh to be the place of God's revelation, and in what consists in this revelation ?
- *Words of Christ (Paroles du Christ)* : Can the man understand in his own language the word of God, a word that speaks in an other language ? The words of the Christ seem to many people of an immoderate claim because they do not only claim to transmit the truth or a divine revelation, but to be itself this Revelation and this Truth, the Word of God himself, of this God that the Christ says to be himself.

Literary works

- *The Young Officer (Le jeune officier)* : This first novel evokes the struggle of a young officer against the evil embodied by rats on a ship.
- *Love with Closed Eyes (L'amour les yeux fermés)* : This novel which has obtained the Renaudot price is the account of the destruction of a city arrived at the top of its development and of its refinement and which is suffering from an insidious evil.
- *The Son of the King (Le fils du roi)* : This book is the story of the life locked up in a psychiatric hospital and confronted to the rationality of the psychiatrists.
- *The Indiscreet Corpse (Le cadavre indiscret)* : This novel tells us the anxiety of the assassins of the too honest occult treasurer of a political party which finance an investigation to know what is really known about then and to reassure themselves.

1.5 Bibliography of Michel Henry

Philosophical Works

- *L'Essence de la manifestation* (1963)
- *Philosophie et Phénoménologie du corps* (1965)
- *Marx* :
 - *Une philosophie de la réalité* (1976)
 - *Une philosophie de l'économie* (1976)
- *Généalogie de la psychanalyse. Le commencement perdu* (1985)
- *La Barbarie* (1987)
- *Voir l'invisible, sur Kandinsky* (1988)
- *Phénoménologie matérielle* (1990)
- *Du communisme au capitalisme. Théorie d'une catastrophe* (1990)
- *C'est moi la Vérité. Pour une philosophie du christianisme* (1996)
- *Incarnation. Une philosophie de la chair* (2000)
- *Paroles du Christ* (2002)

Posthumous Books

- *Auto-donation. Entretiens et conférences* (2002)
- *Le bonheur de Spinoza* (2003)
- *Phénoménologie de la vie* :
 - *Tome I. De la phénoménologie* (2003)
 - *Tome II. De la subjectivité* (2003)
 - *Tome III. De l'art et du politique* (2003)
 - *Tome IV. Sur l'éthique et la religion* (2004)
- *Entretiens* (2005)

Literary Works

- *Le jeune officier* (1954)
- *L'Amour les yeux fermés* (1976)
- *Le Fils du roi* (1981)

- *Le cadavre indiscret* (1996)

1.6 Books on Michel Henry

Books in English

- Michael O'Sullivan : *Michel Henry: Incarnation, Barbarism and Belief* (2006)

Monographies in French

- Gabrielle Dufour-Kowalska : *Michel Henry, un philosophe de la vie et de la praxis*, Vrin, 1980, réédition 2000
- Dominique Janicaud : *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française*, Editions de l'éclat, 1991
- Gabrielle Dufour-Kowalska : *L'Art et la sensibilité. De Kant à Michel Henry*, Vrin, 1996
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2 Article on Wassily Kandinsky

[Wassily Kandinsky (first name sometimes spelled as "Vasily," "Vassily" or "Vasilii") (December 4, 1866 – December 13, 1944) was a Russian-born painter and art theorist. One of the most important 20th-century artists, alongside Picasso and Matisse, he is credited with painting the first abstract works in the history of modern art.]

[Kandinsky was born in Moscow but spent his childhood in Odessa. He enrolled at the University of Moscow and chose law and economics. Although quite successful in his profession, he started painting studies (life-drawing, sketching and anatomy) at the age of 30.]

[In 1896 he settled in Munich and studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich. He went back to Moscow in 1918 after the Russian Revolution. Being in conflict with official theories on art, he returned to Germany in 1921. There he was a teacher at the Bauhaus from 1922 until it was closed by the Nazis in 1933. At that time he moved to France. He lived the rest of his life there, becoming a French citizen in 1939. He died at Neuilly-sur-Seine in 1944.]

2.1 Artistic periods

[The creation by Kandinsky of purely abstract work did not arrive as an abrupt change], it is the fruit of a long development, of a long maturation and of an intense theoretical thought based on his personal experience of painter and on this fervor of the spirit to the inner beauty and this deep spiritual desire which he called the inner necessity and which he placed at the principle of art.

Youth and Inspirations (1866-1896)

[Kandinsky's youth and life in Moscow brought inspiration from a variety of sources. As a child he would later recall being fascinated and unusually stimulated with color. This is probably due to his synaesthesia which allowed him to quite literally hear as well as see color. The fascination with color continued as he grew up in Moscow, although he seems to have made no attempt to study art. In 1889 he was part of an ethnographic group that traveled to the Vologda region north of Moscow.] He tells in *Looks on the past* that he had the impression to move into a painting when he entered in the houses or the churches decorated with the most shimmering colors. [His study of the folk art in the region, in particular the use of bright colors on a dark background was reflected in his early work. Kandinsky would write a few years later that 'Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with the strings'.]

[It was not until 1896, at the age of 30, Kandinsky gave up a promising career teaching law and economics to enroll in art school in Munich. Also in 1896, prior to leaving Moscow, he saw an exhibit of Monet and was particularly taken with a depiction of a haystack which, to him, had a powerful sense of color almost independent of the object itself.]

Artistic Metamorphosis (1896-1911)

[Kandinsky's time at art school was helped by the fact that he was older and more settled than the other students and he began to emerge as a true art theorist in addition to being a painter. Unfortunately very little exists of his work from this period, though presumably it was extensive. This changes at the beginning of the 20th Century and much remains of the many landscapes and towns that he painted, using broad swathes of color but recognizable forms. For the most part, however, Kandinsky's paintings did not emphasize any human figures. An exception is *Sunday, Old Russia* (1904) where Kandinsky recreates a highly colorful (and no doubt fanciful) view of peasants and nobles before the walls of a town. *Riding Couple* (1907) depicts a man on horseback, holding a woman with tenderness and care as they ride past a Russian town with luminous walls across a river. Yet the horse is muted, while the leaves in the trees, the town, and the reflections in the river glisten with spots of color and brightness.]

[Perhaps the most important of Kandinsky's paintings from the decade of the 1900s was *The Blue Rider* (1903) which shows a small cloaked figure on a speeding horse rushing through a rocky meadow. The rider's cloak is a medium blue, and the shadow cast is a darker blue. In the foreground are more amorphous blue shadows, presumably the counterparts of the fall trees in the background. The Blue Rider in the painting is prominent, but not clearly defined, and the horse has

an unnatural gait (which Kandinsky must have known). Indeed, some believe that a second figure, a child perhaps, is being held by the rider though this could just as easily be another shadow from a solitary rider. Kandinsky shows the rider more as a series of colors than of specific details. In and of itself *The Blue Rider* is not exceptional in that regard when compared to contemporary painters, but it does show the direction that Kandinsky would take only a few years later.]

[From 1906 to 1908 Kandinsky spent a great deal of time travelling across Europe, until he came to live in the small Bavarian town of Murnau. *The Blue Mountain* (1908 – 1909) painted at this time shows more of his trend towards pure abstraction. A mountain of blue is flanked by two broad trees, one yellow, and one red. A procession of some sort with three riders and several others crosses at the bottom. The face, clothing, and saddles of the riders are each of a single color, and neither they or the walking figures display any real detail. The broad use of color in *The Blue Mountain*, illustrate Kandinsky's move towards art in which the color itself is presented independently of form.]

The Blue Rider (1911-1914)

The paintings of this period are composed of large and very expressive colored masses evaluate independently from forms and lines which serve no longer to delimitate them or to bring them out but which combine between them, are superimposed and overlap in a very free way to form paintings of an extraordinary force.

The influence of music has been very important on the birth of abstract art, as it is abstract by nature and as it doesn't try to represent vainly the exterior world but simply to express in an immediate way the inner feelings of the human soul. Kandinsky used sometimes musical terms to designate his works : he called many of his most spontaneous paintings "improvisations", while he entitled "compositions" some others much more elaborated and worked at length, a term which resonated in him like a prayer.

[In addition to painting Kandinsky developed his voice as an art theorist. He helped to found the Munich New Artists' Association in and became its president in 1909. The group was unable to integrate the more radical approach of those like Kandinsky with more conventional ideas of art and the group dissolved in late 1911. Kandinsky then moved to form a new group *The Blue Rider* (*Der Blaue Reiter*) with like minded artists such as Franz Marc. The group released an almanac, also called *The Blue Rider* and held two exhibits. More of each were planned, but the outbreak of World War I in 1914 ended these plans and sent Kandinsky home to Russia via Switzerland and Sweden.]

[Kandinsky's writing in *The Blue Rider Almanac* and the treatise *On the Spiritual In Art*, which was released at almost the same time, served as both a defense and promotion of abstract art, as well as an appraisal that all forms of art were equally capable of reaching a level of spirituality. He believed that color could be used in a painting as something autonomous and apart from a visual description of an object or other form.]

Return to Russia (1914-1921)

During the years 1918 to 1921, Kandinsky deals with the cultural development politic of Russia, he collaborates in the domains of art pedagogy and museum reforms. He devoted his time to artistic teaching with a program based on forms and colors analysis, as well as the organization of the artistic culture Institute at Moscow. He made little painting during this period. He meets in 1916 Nina Andreievskaja who will became his wife the next year. Kandinsky received in 1921 the mission to go in Germany at the Bauhaus of Weimar, on the invitation of its founder, the architect Walter Gropius. The next year, the Soviets have officially forbidden all form of abstract art because judged as harmful for socialist ideals.

The Bauhaus (1922-1933)

The Bauhaus was an architecture and innovative art school which had as objective to merge plastic arts with applied arts, and whose teaching was built on the theoretical and practical application of the plastic arts synthesis. Kandinsky taught the basic design class for beginners and courses on advanced theory and conducted painting classes and workshop, where he completed his colors theory with new elements of form psychology. The development of his works on forms study, particularly on point and different forms of lines, will lead to the publication of its second major theoretical book *Point and Line to Plane* in 1926.

Geometrical elements have taken an increasing importance in his teaching as well as in his painting, particularly circle, half-circle, the angle, straight lines and curves. This period has been for him a period of intense production. The freedom of which testifies each of his work, by the treatment of planes rich in colors and in magnificent gradations as in the painting *Yellow – red – blue* (1925), Kandinsky shows his distance from constructivism and suprematism movements whose influence was increasing at this time.

The main forms which constitute this large painting of two meters of width entitled *Yellow – red – blue* are a yellow vertical rectangle, a slightly inclined red cross and a large dark blue circle, while a multitude of black straight or sinuous lines and of arcs of circles, as well as some monochromatic circles and some colored checkerboards contribute to its delicate complexity. This simple visual identification of forms and of the main colored masses present on the canvas only correspond to a first approach of the inner reality of the work whose right appreciation necessitates a much deeper observation, not only of forms and colors involved in the painting, but also of their relation, their absolute position and their relative disposition on the canvas, of their whole and reciprocal harmony.

In front of the hostility of the right political parties, the Bauhaus left Weimar and settled in Dessau from 1925. Following a fierce slander campaign from the Nazis, the Bauhaus has been close at Dessau in 1932. The school pursued its activities in Berlin until its dissolution in July 1933. Kandinsky leaves then Germany and settles in Paris.

The Great Synthesis (1934-1944)

In Paris, he is quite isolated, as abstract painting, particularly geometric, is not recognized : the artistic tendency into the fashion where impressionism and cubism. He lives and realizes his work in a small apartment where a studio has been fit up in the living room. Biomorphous forms with supple and non geometric outlines appear in his paintings, forms which evoke externally microscopic organisms but which always express the artist inner life. He uses original colors compositions which evoke the Slavonic popular art and which look like precious watermark works. He uses also sand mixed to the colors to give a granular texture to his painting.

This period corresponds in fact to a vast synthesis of his previous work, of which he uses the all the elements, even enriching them. He paints in 1936 and 1939 the two last major compositions, these canvas particularly elaborated and slowly ripped that he had stopped to produce since many years. *Composition IX* is a painting with highly contrasted powerful diagonals and whose central form evokes a human embryo in the womb of his mother. The small squares of colors and the colored bands seem to stand out against the black background of *Composition X* as stars fragments or filaments, while enigmatic hieroglyphs with pastel tones cover the large maroon mass which seems to float in the upper left corner of the canvas.

In Kandinsky's works, some characteristics are really obvious while certain sonorities are more discrete and like veiled, that's to say they reveal only progressively to those who make the effort to deepen their connection with the work and to refine their sight. We must not content with a first and

very superficial impression or a coarse identification of the forms that the artist has used and which he has subtly harmonized and put in pitch in order to enter efficiently in resonance with the soul of the observer.

Assessment

From the death of Wassily Kandinsky and during thirty years, Nina Kandinsky has never stopped to diffuse the message and to divulge the work of her husband. All the works in her possession have been legated to the Centre Georges Pompidou, in Paris, where we can see the largest collection of his paintings.

2.2 Theoretical Writings on Art

The analysis made by Kandinsky on forms and on colors don't result from simple arbitrary ideas associations, but from the inner experience of the painter who has passed years creating abstract paintings of an incredible sensorial richness, working on forms and with colors, observing for a long time and tirelessly his own paintings and those of other artists, noting simply their subjective and pathetic effect on the very high sensibility to colors of his artist and poet soul.

So it is a purely subjective form of experience that everyone can do and repeat taking the time to look at his paintings and letting acting the forms and the colors on his own living sensibility. These are not scientific and objective observations, but inner observations radically subjective and purely phenomenological which is a matter of what the French philosopher Michel Henry calls the *absolute subjectivity* or the *absolute phenomenological life*.

On the Spiritual In Art

Kandinsky compares the spiritual life of the humanity to a large Triangle similar to a pyramid and that the artist has the task and the mission of leading to the top by the exercise of his talent. The point of the Triangle is constituted only by some individuals who bring the sublime bread to men. A spiritual Triangle which moves forward and rises slowly, even if it sometimes remains immobile. During decadence periods, souls fall to the bottom of the Triangle and men only search for the external success and ignore purely spiritual forces.

When we look at colors on the painter palette, a double effect happens : a *purely physical* effect on the eye charmed by the beauty of colors firstly, which provokes a joy impression as when we eat a delicacy. But this effect can be much deeper and causing an emotion and a vibration of the soul, or an *inner resonance* which is a purely spiritual effect by which the color touches the soul.

The *inner necessity* is for Kandinsky the principle of the art and the foundation of forms and colors harmony. He defines it as the principle of the efficient contact entry of the form with the human soul. Every form is the delimitation of a surface by an other one, it possesses an inner content which is the effect it produces on the one who looks at it attentively. This inner necessity is the right of the artist to an unlimited freedom, but this freedom becomes a crime if it is not founded on such a necessity. The art piece is born from the inner necessity of the artist in a mysterious, enigmatic and mystic way, and then it acquires an autonomous life, it becomes an independent subject animated by a spiritual breath.

The first obvious properties we can see when we look at isolated color and let it acting alone, that's on one side the warmth or the coldness on the colored tone, and on the other side the clarity or the obscurity of the tone.

The warmth is a tendency to yellow, the coldness a tendency to blue. The yellow and the blue form the first big contrast, which is dynamic. The yellow possesses an eccentric movement and the blue a concentric movement, a yellow surface seems to get closer to us, while a blue surface seems to move away. The *yellow* is the typically terrestrial color whose violence can be painful and aggressive. The *blue* is the typically celestial color which evokes a deep calm. The mixing of blue with yellow gives the total immobility and the calm, the *green*.

The clarity is a tendency to the white and the obscurity a tendency to the black. The white and the black form the second big contrast, which is static. The *white* acts like a deep and absolute silence full of possibilities. The *black* is a nothingness without possibility, it is an eternal silence without hope, it corresponds to death. That's why any other color resonates so strongly on its neighborhood. The mixing of white with black leads to gray, which possesses none active force and whose affective tonality is near that of green. The *gray* corresponds to the immobility without hope, it tends to despair when it becomes dark and regains little hope when it lightens.

The *red* is a warmth color very living, lively and agitated, it possesses an immense force, it is a movement in oneself. Mixed with black, it leads to *brown* which is an hard color. Mixed with yellow, it gains in warmth and gives the *orange* which possesses an irradiation movement on the surround. Mixed with blue, it moves away from man to give the *purple*, which is cooled red. The red and the green form the third big contrast, the orange and the purple the fourth one.

Point and Line to Plane

Kandinsky analyses in this writing the geometrical elements which compose every painting, namely the *point* and the *line*, as well as the physical support and the material surface on which the artist draws or paints and which he calls the *basic plane* or BP. He doesn't analyze them on an objective and exterior point of view, but on the point of view of their inner effect on the living subjectivity of the observer who looks them and let them acting on its sensibility.

The *point* is in the practice a small stain of color put by the artist on the canvas. So the point used by the painter is not a geometric point, it is not a mathematical abstraction, it possesses a certain extension, a form and a color. This form can be a square, a triangle, a circle, like a star or even more complex. The point is the most concise form, but according to its placement on the basic plane it will take a different tonality. It can be alone and isolated or on the opposite put in resonance with other points or with lines.

The line is the product of a force, it is a point on which a living force has been applied in a given direction, the force applied on the pencil or on the paint brush by the hand of the artist. The produced linear forms can be of several types : a *straight* line which results from an unique force applied in a single direction, an *angular* line which results from the alternation of two forces with a different direction, or a *curved* or *wave-like* line produced by the effect of two forces acting simultaneously. A *plane* can be obtained by condensation, from a line rotated around one of its ends.

The subjective effect produced by a line depends on its orientation : the *horizontal* line corresponds to the ground on which man rests and moves, to flatness, it possesses a dark and cold affective tonality similar with black or blue, while the *vertical* line corresponds to height which offers no support, it possesses on the opposite a luminous and warm tonality close from white and yellow. A *diagonal* possesses by consequence a more or less warm or cold tonality according to its inclination according to the horizontal and to the vertical.

A force which deploys itself without obstacle as the one which produces a straight line corresponds to *lyricism*, while several forces which confront or annoy each other form a *drama*. The *angle* formed by the angular line possesses as well an inner sonority which is warm and close to yellow

for an acute angle (triangle), cold and similar to blue for an obtuse angle (circle) and similar to red for a right angle (square).

The *basic plane* is in general rectangular or square, thus it is composed of horizontals and verticals lines which delimitate it and define it as an autonomous being which will serve as support to the painting communicating it its affective tonality. This tonality is determined by the relative importance of these horizontals and verticals lines, the horizontals giving a calm and cold tonality to the basic plane, while the verticals give it a calm and warm tonality. The artist possesses the intuition of this inner effect of the canvas format and dimensions, which he chooses according to the tonality he wants to give to his work. Kandinsky even considers the basic plane as a living being that the artist "fertilizes" and of which he feels the "breathing".

Every *part* of the basic plane possesses an proper affective coloration which will influence on the tonality of the pictorial elements that will be drawn on it, which contributes to the richness of the composition which results from their juxtaposition on the canvas. The *above* of the basic plane corresponds to the looseness and to lightness, while the *below* evokes the condensation and heaviness. This is the work of the painter to listen to know these effects in order to produce paintings which are not just the effect of a random process, but the fruit of an authentic work and the result of an effort toward the inner beauty.

This book contains many photographic examples and drawing from Kandinsky's works which offer the demonstration of its theoretical observations, and which allow the reader to reproduce in him the inner obviousness provided that he takes the time to look at those pictures with care, that he let them acting on its own sensibility and that he let vibrating the sensible and spiritual strings of his soul.

2.3 Quotes from Kandinsky

- "But, as well as the body, the spirit fortifies itself and develops itself by the exercise. As a neglected body which becomes weak and finally impotent, the spirit becomes weaker. The innate feeling of the artist is like the talent of the Gospel which must not be buried. The artist which lets its gifts unemployed is the lazy servant." (*On the Spiritual In Art*)
- "Painting is an art, and the *art* in its whole *is not a vain objects creation* which get lost in the void, but a power which has a goal and must serve to the evolution and to the refinement of the human soul, to the moving of the Triangle. It is the language which speaks to the soul, in its proper form, of things which are the *daily bread* of the soul and which it can receive only under this form." (*On the Spiritual In Art*)
- "Is beautiful what proceeds from an inner necessity of the soul. Is beautiful what is inwardly beautiful." (*On the Spiritual In Art*)
- "Every phenomenon can be experienced in two ways. These two ways are not arbitrary, but are bound up with the phenomenon – developing out of its nature and characteristics : Externally – or – inwardly." (*Point and line to plane*)
- "The geometric point is an invisible thing. Therefore, it must be defined as an incorporeal thing. Considered in terms of substance, it equals zero. [...] Thus we look upon the geometric point as the ultimate and most *singular union of silence and speech*. The geometric point has, therefore, been given its material form, in the first instance, in writing. It belongs to language and signifies silence." (*Point and line to plane*)
- "The geometric line is an invisible thing. It is the track made by the moving point; that is, its product. It is created by movement – specifically through the destruction of the intense self-contained repose of the point. Here, the leap out of the static to the dynamic occurs. [...] The

forces coming from without which transform the point into a line, can be very diverse. The variation in lines depends upon the number of these forces and upon their combinations." (*Point and line to plane*)

- "In this painting, I was in fact in quest for a certain hour, which was and which remains always the most beautiful hour of the day in Moscow. The sun is already low and has reached its highest force, which it has searched all the day, to which it has aspired all the day. [...] The sun dissolves all Moscow in a spot which, as a frenzied tuba, makes entered into vibration all the inner being, the whole soul. [...] Rendering this hour seemed the biggest, the most impossible of the happiness for an artist. These impressions renewed every sunny day. They brought me a joy which shattered me until the bottom of the soul, and which reached until ecstasy." (*Looks on the past*)
- "The world is full of resonances. It constitutes a cosmos of things exerting a spiritual action. The dead matter is a living spirit." (article entitled *On the question of the form*)

2.4 Quotations on Kandinsky

- "The 'Pioneer' [Kandinsky] did not just produce a body of work whose sensuous magnificence and rich inventiveness eclipse even the most remarkable of his contemporaries. He also provided an explicit theory of abstract painting, exposing its principles with the utmost precision and clarity. So, the painted work is accompanied with a group of texts that at the same time clarify his work and make Kandinsky one of the main theorists of art. Facing the hieroglyphs of the last canvases of the Parisian period (which are said to be the most difficult), they provide the Rosetta stone on which the meaning of these mysterious figures is inscribed." (Michel Henry, *Seeing the invisible, on Kandinsky*, p. 2)
- "Kandinsky was fascinated by the expressive power of linear forms. Lyricism is the pathos of a force whose triumphant effort enters into action and encounters no obstacle. Because the straight line results from the initiative of a single, unopposed force, its domain is that of the lyric. When two forces are present and thus enter in conflict, as this is the case with the curve or the zigzag line, we are in domain of drama." (Michel Henry, *Seeing the invisible, on Kandinsky*, p. 52)
- "Kandinsky calls abstract the content that painting must express, that's to say this invisible life that we are. In such a way that the Kandinskian equation, to which we have alluded to, can be written in reality as follows : Interior = interiority = invisible = life = pathos = *abstract*."» (Michel Henry, *Seeing the invisible, on Kandinsky*, p. 11)

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3 Contributions to existing articles

3.1 Article on Phenomenological Life

Phenomenological life is the life considered from a philosophical and rigorously phenomenological point of view. It has been defined by the philosopher Michel Henry as what possesses the faculty and the power "to feel and to experience oneself in every point of its being". For Michel Henry, the life is essentially subjective force and affectivity, it consists in a pure subjective experience of oneself which oscillates permanently between suffering and joy. A "subjective force" is not an impersonal, blind and insensitive force like those we meet in nature, but a living and sensible force experienced from the interior and resulting from an inner desire and from a subjective effort of the will to satisfy it. He also establishes a radical opposition between the living flesh endowed with sensibility and the material body, which is by principle insensitive, in his book *Incarnation, a philosophy of the flesh*.

The word "phenomenological" refers to phenomenology, which is the science of the phenomenon and a philosophical method which is reduced to study the phenomena as they appear. What he has called the "absolute phenomenological life" is the subjective life of the individuals reduced to its pure inner manifestation, as we live it and feel it permanently. It is the life as it reveals itself and appears inwardly, its self-revelation : the life is both what reveals and what is revealed.

This life is invisible by nature because it never appears in the exteriority of a look, it reveals in itself without gap nor distance. The fact of seeing supposes indeed the existence of a distance and of a separation between what is seen and the one who sees it, between the object that is perceived and the subject who perceives it. A feeling for example can never be seen from the exterior, it never appears in the "horizon of visibility" of the world, it feels itself and experiences itself from the inner of the radical immanence of life. Love can't be seen, no more than hatred, feelings are felt in the secret of our heart, where no look can penetrate.

This life is composed of sensitivity and affectivity, it is the unity of their manifestation, the affectivity being however the essence of the sensibility as Michel Henry has shown it in his book on *The Essence of the Manifestation*, which means that any sensation is affective by nature. The life is the foundation of our subjective experience (like the subjective experience of a sorrow, of seeing a color or the pleasure of drinking fresh water in summer) and of our subjective powers (the subjective power of moving the hand or the eyes for example).

This phenomenological definition of life is founded on our concrete subjective experience we make of life in our own existence, it thus corresponds to human life. About the other forms of life studied by biology and from which Heidegger derives its own philosophical conception of life, Michel Henry writes in his book *I am the Truth. Toward a Philosophy of Christianity* : "Is it not paradoxical for someone who wants to know what life is to go and ask protozoa, or, at best, honeybees ? It is as if we had a relation with life that was every bit as totally external and fragile as the one we have with beings about which we know nothing – or very little. As if we were not ourselves living."

For more precision on phenomenological life, see also the articles on the Philosophy of Life and on the Truth of Life.

3.2 Article on God

Phenomenological Definition of God

The philosopher Michel Henry defines God in a phenomenological point of view. He says : « God is Life, he is the essence of Life, or, if we prefer, the essence of Life is God. Saying this we already know what is God, we know it not by the effect of a learning or of some knowledge, we don't know it by the thought, on the background of the truth of the world ; we know it and we can know it only in and by the Life itself. We can know it only in God. » (*I Am the Truth. Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*).

This Life is not biological life defined by objective and exterior properties, nor an abstract and empty philosophical concept, but the absolute phenomenological life, a radically immanent life which possesses in it the power of showing itself in itself without distance, a life which reveals permanently itself. A manifestation of oneself and a self-revelation which doesn't consist in the fact of seeing outside of oneself or of perceiving the exterior world, but in the fact of feeling and of feeling oneself, of experiencing in oneself its own inner and affective reality.

As Michel Henry says also in this same book, "God is that pure Revelation that reveals nothing other than itself. God reveals Himself. The Revelation of God is his self-revelation". God is in himself revelation, he is the primordial Revelation that tears everything from nothingness, a revelation which is the pathetic self-revelation, that's to say the absolute suffering and self-enjoyment of Life. As John says, God is love, because Life loves itself in an infinite and eternal love.

Michel Henry opposes to the notion of *creation*, which is the creation of the world, the notion of *generation* of Life. The creation of the world consists in the opening of this exteriority horizon where every thing becomes visible. Whereas Life never stops to generate itself and to generate all the livings in its radical immanence, in its absolute phenomenological interiority that is without gap nor distance.

As we are living and by consequence generated continually by the infinite Life of God, as he never stops to give us life, and as we never cease of being born into the eternal present of life by the action in us of this absolute Life, God is for Christianity our Father and we are its beloved Sons, the Sons of the living God. This doesn't only mean that he has created us at the time of our conception or at the beginning of the world, but that he never stops to generate us permanently into Life, that he is always at work in us in the least of our subjective impressions.

Quotes on God

- « God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. » (1 John 4:16)
- « God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. » (1 John 1:5)

3.3 Article on Truth of Life

The Truth of Life

The French philosopher Michel Henry explains in his book *I am the Truth. Toward a philosophy of Christianity* what Christianity considers as being the Truth and which he calls the **Truth of Life**. He shows that this Christian conception of Truth opposes to what men usually consider as the truth, which comes from the Greek thought and which he calls the truth of the world. But what is truth ?

Truth is what shows itself and proves in this way its reality by its effective manifestation in us or in the world.

The truth of the world refers to an external and objective truth, a truth in which everything appears as an object visible in front of our sight and at distance of us, that's to say in a representation form which is distinct from what it shows : when we're looking at an apple, that's not the apple in itself that we see but a simple image of the apple which appears is our sensibility and which changes according to the light and our view angle. Similarly, when we're looking at the face of a person, that's not this person in herself that we perceive, but a simple image of her face, its visible appearance in the world. According to this conception of truth, life is only an ensemble of objective properties, characterized for example by the need of eating or by the aptitude to reproduce itself.

In Christianity, Life is brought back to its inner reality which is absolutely subjective and radically immanent. Life considered in its phenomenological reality, that's simply the faculty and the subjective power to feel sensations, small pleasures and big sorrows, to feel desires or feelings, to move our body from the inside exerting a subjective effort, or even to think. All those faculties possess the fundamental characteristic of appearing and of showing themselves in themselves, without gap nor distance, we never perceive them in the outside of our being or in front of our sight, but only in us : we coincide with every one of these powers. Life is in itself a power of manifestation and of revelation, and what it manifests that's itself, in its pathetic self-revelation. A revelation power which is at work in us permanently and which we always forget.

The Truth of Life is *absolutely* subjective, that's to say that it is independent from our subjective beliefs and tastes : the perception of a colored sensation or of a pain for example is not a matter of personal preference, that's a fact and an incontestable inner experience which is the concern of the *absolute* subjectivity of Life. The Truth of Life doesn't differ from what it makes true, it is not distinct from what manifests in it. This Truth is the manifestation itself in its pure inner revelation : that's this Life that Christianity calls God.

The Truth of Life is not a relative truth variable from one individual to an other, but the absolute Truth which founds from the inside every one of our faculties and every one of our powers, and which enlightens the lesser of our impressions. This Truth of Life is not an abstract and indifferent truth, it is on the opposite for man what is the most essential, because it alone can lead him to salvation by identifying inwardly with it and by becoming Son of God, instead of losing himself in the world.

References

- Henry, Michel 2002. *I am the Truth. Toward a philosophy of Christianity*, Stanford University Press.

Initial version of the 07/10/2005 (too complicated and too dense)

The French philosopher Michel Henry opposes what he calls the Truth of Christianity or the Truth of Life to the truth of the world in his book *I Am the Truth. Toward a philosophy of Christianity*. The truth of the world shows itself in an horizon of visibility which is that of the exteriority, of the "out of itself", all what manifests itself in this radical exteriority appears as an object, a representation distinct from what it shows. On the opposite, the Truth of Christianity doesn't differ from what it makes true, from what manifests in it, this Truth is the manifestation itself in its pure Revelation which is the self-revelation of Life, of this absolute phenomenological life that Christianity calls God. This Life is invisible by essence, as the Truth it founds, it never appears in the exterior and objective appearance of the world, because it is radically immanent, because it adheres to itself in its radical interiority. This Truth of Life is not an abstract and indifferent truth, it

is on the opposite for man what is the most concrete and essential, because it alone can lead him to salvation by identifying inwardly with it and by becoming Son of God.

3.4 Article on Evil

For the French philosopher Michel Henry, God is the invisible Life that never stops to generate us and to give us to ourselves in its pathetic self-revelation. God is Love because Life loves itself in an infinite love. By consequence life is good in itself. The evil corresponds to all what denies or attacks life, it finds its origin in death which is the negation of life. This death is an inner and spiritual death which is the separation with God, and which consists simply in not loving, in living selfishly as if God didn't exist, as if he was not our Father of us all and as if we were not all its beloved Sons, as if we were not all Brothers generated by a same Life. The evil peaks in the violence of hatred that is at the origin of all forms of barbarism, of all crimes, of all wars and of all genocides. But the evil is also the common origin of all those blind processes and of all those false abstractions that lead so many people to misery and exclusion.

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4 Rough outlines of articles

4.1 Article on the Philosophy of Life

Life is traditionally understood on an exterior point of view as an ensemble of objective properties which define the life in the biological sense of the term, that of the material body. Nevertheless, life possesses an inner component which is the concern of the most radical subjectivity, of an absolute immanence sphere in which we are permanently immersed and with which we coincide.

In a sense, life is the most simple, but the most simple is also often what is the most difficult to think. This is the immense merit of the phenomenological work of the philosopher Michel Henry to have reduced the life notion to the essential, because it is simply what we are and the foundation and the essence of the manifestation, which is the self-affection.

We know what is life in an absolute knowledge which precedes all knowledge and all philosophy because we are livings, we already belong to this life that we know from the interior, which founds our being and every one of our powers, as for example the thought.

Michel Henry defines life in a phenomenological point of view as what possesses the faculty and the power to feel and to experience oneself in every point of its being. For Michel Henry, life is essentially force and affect, it consists in a pure experience of itself which oscillates permanently between the suffering and the joy. He opposes radically the living flesh and the material body in his book *Incarnation, a philosophy of the flesh* .

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