C'est Moi le Principe et la Fin:
The Mysterious "Middle" of Michel Henry's (Christian) Phenomenology of Life

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Henry's Phenomenological Fundamental Ontology: *Pathetik Materiality* and its Relation to *Ekstasis*

The profound influence of Heidegger's thinking is especially evident in the French phenomenological work of the second half of the 20th century. Even if ultimately rejecting Heidegger's main orientations, figures such as Michel Henry, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, and others, have inextricably been deeply engaged in a dialogue with him. Henry's own meeting with Heidegger very shortly after WWII, when the former was still a young man and not yet a doctoral student in philosophy, was a significant event that would precipitate a life-long conversation with and critique of Heidegger's thought which served, if not entirely to orient, then at least to perpetually fuel the unquestionable fervor of Henry's own research. And what was he re-seeking? Well, something which, in fact, he felt that he had already had a good glimpse of—or better, a good *feel* of—in his experience as a secret agent of the French Resistance during the war.[1] The clandestine nature of his missions in Lyon—in which he was responsible for gathering intelligence against the forces of Klaus Barbie, the famous "Butcher of Lyon"—led him to a deliberation upon the problem of "hidden subjectivity" (*la subjectivité clandestine*), and, as he saw it, to the solution to the problem as a self-affective and self-generative essence which he called "Life," affecting itself and revealing itself to itself *as* a self (in and as an *ipseity*) prior to any ekstatic or intentional horizon—indeed, serving as the very foundation, the ontological *effectiveness*, of any and all horizons. Henry's entire project vis-à-vis Heidegger was an attempt to articulate the ground of ekstasis itself in the (*pre*-ekstatic) light of such an effectiveness; that is, to *let be revealed* in its effectiveness—which is

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[1] See interview with Anne Henry, "Vivre avec Michel Henry," in *Auto-Donation: Entretiens et conférences* (Paris: Beauchesne, 2004), 237-67.

to say, for Henry, as phenomenological fundamental ontology—"*the bond which unites the problem of truth with the problem of the ego at the source of the two.*"[2] Heidegger, according to Henry, never did accomplish the articulation of such a ground, and he never could, since he never discovered it as an affectivity—that is, as a truly *effective* affectivity. Certainly not in *Being and Time*; and as for the *Ereignis* with its *Abgrund* of the later Heidegger, while it yet "enquivers," it is too *hesitating*[3]—a weakness for which Henry never tired of diagnosing the thinking of his early mentor (along with that of Kant, Schopenhauer, Freud, and a few others, including a certain Descartes) with "ontological impotence."[4] A certain Descartes: that means the one of what Henry calls "constituted Cartesianism," which Henry charges with promoting as its basic insight the idea that "I represent myself, therefore I am," the *ego* supposedly being shown as such in an ekstatic light. This, of course, is the Descartes which Heidegger critiques. But actually, Henry takes Heidegger to task for reading him exclusively in this way.[5] For Henry argues that, in fact, rather a different Descartes—the one of "beginning Cartesianism," as he calls it—is the more essential thinker to be encountered, one which privileges *seeing* over *seeing* (*videor* over *videre*), and *confesses* (rather than representing), in the *pure stuff*, as it were, of self-seeming, "a primal upwelling of phenomenality,"[6] "the mute immanence of its first being-to-self, in the affectivity of pure self-sensing."[7] Such an upwelling, says Henry, always originally casts the self as a 'me' (*moi*), in the dative case, *given* to itself as a self in a pure passivity, given to itself *to be a living one*, and unable *not* to be this living one in the self-affective, self-generative essence that is Life. This givenness, this pure stuff of its livingness, is the pathetik materiality of Life's originary ontological effectiveness; it is, for Henry, Life's self-*revelation* in and as this 'me,' prior to and the very foundation of any ekstatic, any intentional horizon.

But here a question arises: in what way does this 'me,' in its pure passivity, actually open an ekstatic horizon? How does it surpass the pure immanence of self-seeming in a transcendence that opens onto world? How, in other words, in its *affectivity*, is this self-seeming *effective* as a *foundation*? Henry's answer to these questions is that Life's self-revelation is twofold; it is a double revelation, the first fold of which concerns the self in its livingness which

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[2] Michel Henry, *The Essence of Manifestations,* trans. Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 6 (Henry's italics).

[3] See especially M. Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999). Of course, Heidegger's *Contributions* were not published until after his death, so Henry would have had very late access to them. Henry's main critique of Heidegger on *Ereignis* is based on his earlier reading of *Identity and Difference*.

[4] See especially Michel Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Douglas Brick (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).

[5] See Michel Henry, "The Critique of the Subject," trans. Peter T. Connor, in *Who Comes After the Subject*, ed. Eduardo Cadava et al. (New York & London: Routledge, 1991), 157-66.

[6] Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 26.

[7] Ibid., 33.

receives itself in its pure passivity in the givenness of itself to itself—so to speak, *a posteriori*. The self is always given to itself first as a 'me,' in an upwelling of Life in and as an *ipseity*; as Henry says, with reference to the words of Christ (to be discussed further below, but which pertain here as well): "C'est moi la Vie." The second fold, then, concerns the very possibility for this 'me' to be a *distinct self*: namely, in the appropriative structure in which it is given to itself to surpass itself in its passivity towards its self-possession as an 'I.' Yet insofar as the very movement of surpassing is by definition an action which the self in its pure passivity cannot undertake, the revelation which reveals the possibility of such a movement must necessarily be itself also the accomplishment of it. In other words, it is given to itself to be a self, and that 'being a self' has already been *effectively ontologically* accomplished for it and *given over to it*. As Henry says, "in making the ego a living person, Life has not made a pseudo-person. It does not take back with one hand what it has given with the other."[8] Such an appropriative accomplishment, then, constitutes the self as a centre of orientation for itself; for Henry, it is a *situated* self, an *organic* self, a self whose 'organs' are its appropriative powers, a self defined as *capacity*, as 'I can.' In other words, a self capable of *world*.[9]

The Self's Forgetfulness of Life and its Implications for Phenomenology

Now one serious phenomenological problem, for Henry, concerns the organic self's forgetting of its givenness to itself in Life and the closely related critique that Henry's supposed 'phenomenological fundamental ontology' is actually little more than a metaphysics of essence as an absolute. For after all, how can Henry presume to *rigorously phenomenologically* articulate Life as the essence if, on the one hand, it cannot be shown in an ecstatic light, and on the other, it has been forgotten in the *effectiveness* of its *pre*-ecstatic affectivity? To this difficulty and critique we will turn in a moment. First it will be necessary to address the question as to *how* the self forgets its givenness in Life. Henry answers this question as follows: there is an *inherent structural possibility* of it, which is itself twofold (in accordance with the twofoldness of the double revelation): the essence (that is, Life) *does not show itself in the ekstatic light*; rather it *reveals*

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[8] Michel Henry, *I Am the Truth: Towards a Philosophy of Christianity*, trans Susan Emanuel (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 141.

[9] Time does not permit us here to enter into a full discussion of how this organic self—this *flesh*, as Henry calls it—relates to the bodily exteriority, which in each case accompanies it. Suffice it to say that the spatial localization of the organic powers within the ekstatic horizon upon which it opens is what allows it to distinguish and to claim for itself an 'objective' body. That is, the organic powers find their own terminus in the objective spatiality to which they are limited by their contact with and resistance by things. In this way it distinguishes itself in its objective body from other human bodies and other objects in the ekstatic horizon, since its objective body is precisely the outermost terminus of the continuous movement and self-expression of Life which begins originarily in the self's self-surpassing in its passivity by way of the appropriative structure given in the double revelation. See Michel Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, trans. Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975).

itself in affectivity prior to any ekstatic horizon, in the double revelation's first fold. Since the essence (Life) does not show itself in the ekstatic light, the *illusion* of the self-sufficient ego is made *possible* (although perhaps not inevitable) in the double revelation's second fold. That is, the self, being appropriated to itself as a self, and given to itself as a self with powers and as a centre of orientation, as the 'I can,' genuinely acts *only* when it allows, in its self-expressive acts, the power of Life to *unfurl*, as the Self-expression of Life itself, within itself. In genuine action it retains, in other words, an intimate connection with the essential passivity in which it is originally given to itself. True action, for Henry, is thus constituted as "the maintaining close to self of the act of transcendence in the original receptivity wherein transcendence [i.e., the appropriative structure] receives itself, discovers its Being, masters itself, controls itself, coheres with self in the unity which makes it to be, to be what it is and what permits it to act."[10]

But precisely here the problem arises: in acting (in transcendence, in the sense of a surpassing of oneself in one's passivity towards an ekstatic horizon), in the unfurling of Life's Self-expression within the individual self, each self throws out before itself represented things on a horizon before which the self, then, *takes a stand*. Partly it takes a stand in order to master those things—for there is in fact something rather Nietzschean in the exhilaration with which the self affects itself in the effective employment of its powers. It also takes a stand because, inevitably meeting with resistance in its contact with those things, as well as encountering Life's self-expressions in selves which are other than its own, it finds itself often severely *limited* in the expression of its powers, and ultimately limited even in its objective spatiality, that is, as an objective body. Almost instinctually, then—because ceaselessly *prompted* by the unfurling of Life within itself—this self seeks to (re-)affirm itself, (re-)empower itself, so that there develops, according to Henry, a certain existential situation whereby the self establishes *itself*, in order to secure itself in its stand, as the very source and foundation of all its powers. Such is effectively the self's *fallenness*, or *forgetfulness* of its essence, then, in which it becomes solicitous in all its activities, precisely because denying its true source of power which alone can provide for it a secure foundation. It *misunderstands* its essential passivity in its givenness to itself in Life (in the first fold of the double revelation) as the radical powerlessness and *failure* of the self, rather than as the very condition for the possibility of its distinct action and power. And so it is, says Henry, that "in its very action and each of its acts that it has lost *the essence of action*. . . . In the action of the ego as action, supposedly issuing from itself and aimed only at itself, the very essence of absolute Life is ruled out."[11]

Let's now return to the critique of Henry's phenomenology of Life as a metaphysics of essence as an absolute in its relatedness to the problem of forgetfulness. As does Heidegger, Henry struggles with the problem of

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[10] Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 461.

[11] Henry, *I Am the Truth,* 168.

"fallenness." For Henry, the self's fallenness concerns its discovery of itself somehow always already in a state of forgetfulness of its essence. If forgetfulness holds sway, then the task set before phenomenology, according to Henry, is one of remembering. But here it is obvious that Henry's phenomenology maintains a certain dual character; there is a tension in his thinking which no doubt plagues the phenomenological tradition as a whole. On the one hand, there is something that it seeks: namely, certainty, a ground, or at the very least some kind of irrefutable final givenness—*un fait accompli*, as Jean-Luc Marion would say. On the other hand, its very seeking is ever riddled with metaphysical assumptions that color and necessarily obscure its quest and which for the most part lead it to precipitate and 'im-proper' conclusions. Such assumptions must be *bracketed out*, reduced, 'consciousness' stripped of its assumptions in order to be in a more primordial relation with that which is sought. Indeed, it might even be asked how it knows at all what it is that it is seeking.

For Henry, the self *does* know what it seeks, but not in an ekstatic representation of it. Rather, it knows it as an interior affection, in its (albeit still partly obscure) *feeling* of the originary, self-affective, self-generative, and self-expressive stirring of Life at its core. It is, so to speak, *called home* by Life. Or, as a variation on Augustine, the self is restless until its rests, in the essential passivity of its givenness of itself to itself as a 'me,' in Life. The problem now is the return. For if the revelation consists (at least in its first and ultimately nuclear fold) in the effective concreteness of the pure passivity of being given to oneself as a 'me,' then the essence (Life) necessarily must give itself, *unfurl* itself, by its own power and as it were of its own accord. Yet to speak in such a way suggests that the essence is still experienced as 'other' to the one who searches for it; in fact, the very opening of such an "interior ekstasis" in which the essence is posited ideally as that which is to be remembered only obscures its effectiveness further. And yet, without the givenness of absolute Life in its full effectiveness— without the *feeling* of the mysterious *gift* of absolute Life—such an 'othering,' and indeed alienation, from the essence is inevitable. To that extent, the phenomenological path of 'return' leads only to an aporia: "You can't get there from here," such a paradoxical situation seems to say.

Indeed, you *can't* get there from here—so Dominique Janicaud says. Janicaud, author of a controversial 1991 work[12] which accused French phenomenologists of abandoning tried and trusted phenomenological principles and introducing into their thinking certain hidden (or perhaps not so hidden) theological themes, charges Henry with promoting not a truly phenomenologically fundamentally ontological pathetik structure at all, but only a conceptually tautological interiority, a form of presumptuous metaphysical essentialism. Janicaud writes: "Henry supplies his work with all the appearances

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[12] Dominique Janicaud, *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française* (Paris: Éditions de l'Éclat, 1991). English translation : "The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology," trans. Bernard G. Prusak in *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn': The French Debate*, co-authors Janicaud, Jean-François Courtine, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, Paul Ricouer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 16-103.

(and titles) of phenomenology in order to achieve the most fantastic restoration of essentialism. . . . By means of the originary, he instills himself in the essential, autonomizes it, even celebrates it. . . . Henry authorizes himself, from the investigation of a (determined) *eidos*, to go back to a purely auto-referential foundation."[13] He transforms "precise, limited, clarifying [phenomenological] procedures" into "*incantations*" . . . "gesturing towards invisibility."[14] "We cannot help but object that it is a question, here, of a fantastic metaphysical essentialism autopromoting itself."[15]

Now, on the one hand, I would argue that Janicaud's critique misses the mark if it does not take into account and appreciate the import that the concept of *givenness* has for Henry—in its relation to the essential passivity of the self in its *always-already-being-given-to-itself-as-a-self*. Missing such an emphasis, it is inevitable that Janicaud ends up interpreting Henry as though he spoke of the essence in its revelation as Life only in the *nominative*—a necessary orientation if the charge of tautological metaphysical essentialism is going to stick. On the other hand, Janicaud is not wrong concerning the highly *incantatory* nature of Henry's writing. Indeed, were all conceptually repetitive content to be removed from Henry's massive work *The Essence of Manifestation* (over 900 pages in the original French), it would be *considerably* shorter. It is as if 'Life,' 'absolute Life,' has become for Henry a sort of *conceptual mantra*, already half revealing its effectiveness to him, and the repeated utterance of which would lead to the phenomenologist's complete realization and embodiment of it. *Embodiment* of it. This is significant. For insofar as Life gives *itself* (its *Self*) to each self to be a living self, the 'me' which each self is in its essential passivity is necessarily cast not merely in the dative case (always-already-being-given-to-itself), but also in the *genitive*, which in fact underlies and founds the dative, *consubstantial* in its affective concreteness with absolute Life itself. It is this *consubstantiality*, then, marrying in the genitive the *a posteriori* of the dative to an *a priori* nominative (absolute Life), which is most at issue vis-à-vis Janicaud's critique. Is such a marriage valid? As far as Henry is concerned, not only is it valid, but it precisely defines *the very mode of phenomenality that revelation is* as a fundamentally ontological mode—the mode of phenomenality, that is, serving as "*the bond which unites the problem of truth with the problem of the ego at the source of the two*."[16] For the nominative never reveals itself—it cannot—*except* in the givenness to itself of the self in and as an *ipseity*. The nominative in itself, apart from this givenness, would be an immemorial. There is no such thing, for Henry, as an absolute Life which is not *always already* precisely a *Living One*.

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[13] Dominique Janicaud, "The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology," 73.

[14] Ibid., 86.

[15] Ibid., 75.

[16] Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 6. Henry's italics.

The Problem of Solipsism and Henry's 'Christian Turn'

Here, of course, we are already entering into the domain of Henry's late Christian thinking—a turn, I would argue, which is in part an attempt to address yet another phenomenological problem which has not yet been mentioned here: namely, the problem of solipsism. As Dan Zahavi argues, Henry "never presents us with a convincing explanation of how a subjectivity essentially characterized by such a complete self-presence can simultaneously…be capable of recognizing other subjects."[17] The only access we have to other ipseities, it would seem, is through analogy. But analogy always maintains itself within a certain metaphysics, and it is a distinctly metaphysical leap that Henry makes if, by analogy, he merely projects and posits the existence of an absolute Life which gives for *all* ipseities to be selves, without truly establishing this so-called absolute Life *phenomenologically* as anything other than the ground for this *individual* living ipseity—in other words, if its *nominativity* as a *universal* is assumed in order to support the genitive into which the originarily dative self has been cast. There is a certain point at which Henry simply can no longer deny that his primary concern, while remaining more or less phenomenological in orientation, is nevertheless founded upon theological principles[18]—in particular, upon the Logos theology of John which unfolds, for Henry, the articulation of the *archetypally pathetik structure* of ipseity. This is the 'Arch-Ipseity,' which Christ *is*, and which grounds the multiplicity of individual selves in being "the true [pre-ekstatic] Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world" (John 1:9). We will return to the question of the universality of this ground as it applies to the problem of solipsism after a short discussion of this 'Arch-Ipseity.'

The auto-affection of absolute Life in its self-generation as a Self constitutes, for Henry, the eternal relation between the Father and the Son— consubstantial and co-eternal in the process of the self-begetting of absolute Life as a Self in the Arch-Ipseity, that is, as the *Living One*. Now as expressed above, there is no such thing, for Henry, as an absolute Life which is not always already precisely a *Living One*. But there is also some sense in which the Father is eternally shrouded (as something of an Immemorial) in the mystery of His self-gifting of Himself to Himself as the Son in and as the Arch-Ipseity.[19] Thus Henry's casting of Jesus' "I Am" utterances in the dative (or dative-genitive): *C'est Moi la Voie, la Vérité, et la Vie*, instead of the traditional *Je suis . . .*, a distinction unfortunately entirely lost in the English translation of Henry's

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[17] Dan Zahavi, "Michel Henry and the Phenomenology of the Invisible," *Continental Philosophy Review* 32/3 (1999): 223-40 at 232-3.

[18] Janicaud actually critiques Henry from two different angles, one concerning his metaphysical essentialism, and the other concerning the underlying theological principles in Henry's work. The second is the stronger of the two critiques, for the reason as already discussed above concerning Henry's emphasis on givenness, which Janicaud does not really take into account at all.

[19] On this point, Wayne Hankey discovers a certain thread of Christian Neoplatonism in Henry's work. See especially his *One Hundred Years of Neo-Platonism in France: A Brief Philosophical History* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006).

work.[20] This, then, would constitute the revelation of Life in the first fold of the double revelation as discussed above—in the Son's essential passivity in the givenness of Himself to Himself as the Arch-Ipseity precisely to *be* the Self-expressing Word of the Father. In the second fold of the double revelation, then, that Word is *appropriatively*, even *auto-referentially*, revealed.

For Henry, this is how the Son reveals the Father, and how the Father reveals Himself in the Son. In fact, Jesus is, following this line of argument, in a sense the phenomenologist *par excellence*. For in Jesus' "I Am" sayings, Henry finds what one might call wholly, perfectly ontologically effective speech-acts. In being uttered precisely by Jesus who is "one with the Father" (i.e., with absolute Life), in the rigor of the correspondence between Henry's phenomenological method and its object— that is, in being spoken *from out of the immediacy* of the inseparability of the two folds of the double revelation—the utterance "I Am" is, for Henry, the ultimate phenomenological utterance. For such an utterance not only immediately reveals absolute Life in the passivity of its self-givenness to itself in its self-generation in and as the Arch-Ipseity, but it also reveals Life in its capacity for "auto-referentiality," as Life's own Self-expressing power and effectiveness within an ekstatic horizon which it itself opens and indeed the possibility of which it itself *is*. And this is the very essence of action for Henry: that the Arch-Ipseity ever *maintains itself close to its essence*—because the Son loves the Father, and the Father indwells the Son—so that in appropriating itself *as* Son, and acting, without falling into a forgetfulness of its essence, the Arch-Ipseity does not assume itself in its power to be its own ground and thus act for itself alone; it rather allows for the *unfurling* of the power of the Father, the power of absolute Life, within itself. On this point, Henry quotes John: "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do" (John 5:19).[21]

Now the *individual* selves are each uniquely begotten within the Arch-Ipseity as "sons within the Son." This is what Christ means, says Henry, when he speaks his "I Am" utterances—especially "before Abraham was, I Am" (John 8:58), "I am the gate of the sheepfold" (John 10:7), and "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). In their original begottenness, Christ "led Life to the living *by first leading it to itself in him*, in and through his essential Ipseity—and then by making a gift of this ipseity to any living being so that, within that ipseity, each of them becomes

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[20] See Michel Henry, *C'est moi la vérité. Pour une philosophie du christianisme* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996).

[21] It should be pointed out that it is on the basis of this phenomenology of genuine action, together with Jesus' "I Am" utterances as the exemplar of this action, that Henry argues, provided forgetfulness has been overcome, for the authorization and allowance for the possibility of the self's (indeed, the phenomenologist's) speaking not so much *of* the essence (in the light of an interior ekstasis), but rather *from out of it*, with *its* voice, allowing oneself to be *spoken through* by it, confessing and prophesying in *revealing* the Self-expression of absolute Life itself. To that extent, Henry's own phenomenological writings have, as far as he's concerned, almost the status of Scripture. For indeed, he says: "Because the Hearing in which I hear the Word of Life is my own life engendered in absolute Life's self-engendering, this Hearing has no freedom at all with respect to what it hears" (Henry, *I Am the Truth*, 227).

possible as a living Self."[22] In other words, we are first born, first begotten, first given to ourselves as selves in the Arch-Ipseity which is Christ. To that extent, we participate *consubstantially* in Christ, in the pathetik materiality defining the Arch-Ipseity as the very revelation (as an Ipseity) of the Father. It is furthermore precisely this *consubstantial co-participation in Christ* through which Henry attempts to solve the problem of solipsism, appealing to the *continuity* of the pathetik materiality—what Henry calls *flesh*—of all individual ipseities in Christ's Flesh: "In my flesh I am given to myself, but I am not my own flesh. My flesh, my living flesh, is Christ's."

> The gate of the sheepfold, which according to this strange parable provides access to the place where the sheep graze—thus founding the transcendental Ipseity from which each me, being connected to itself and growing in itself, draws the possibility of being a me—this gate *provides access to all transcendental living me's*, not to only one of them, to the one I am myself. . . .
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> In fact it is impossible to come to someone, to reach someone, except through Christ, through the original Ipseity that connects that person to himself, making him a Self, the me that he is. It is impossible to touch flesh except through this original Flesh, which in its essential Ipseity gives this flesh the ability to feel itself and experience itself, allows it to be flesh. It is impossible to touch this flesh without touching the other flesh that has made it flesh. It is impossible to strike someone without striking Christ. And it is Christ who says: "Whatever you did for one of
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> the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).[23]

In other words, Christ, the *archetypally pathetik structure*, is absolute Life in its self-givenness which gives its Self for there to be—and which grasps and experiences and suffers and enjoys itself in and as—multiple ipseities.

But certainly one must ask here: has Henry really *rigorously phenomenologically* established this core ontological content? In fact, one must distinguish *three* 'contents' here. The first concerns Christ himself—Christ *in himself as the Son*—who is eternally begotten by the Father as the Arch-Ipseity in the *process* through which absolute Life in the mysterious gifting of itself comes into itself and thus becomes a *Living One*. Taken purely in itself, this is without question a *theological* assertion. Henry simply cannot establish a *phenomenology* of Christ *in himself* as begotten in such an eternal process—even if all individual ipseities are themselves generated in Christ by way of this same process—for Henry admits that the asymmetry of the relation between the Arch-Ipseity and any individual, 'me' "marks the infinite distance that separates Christ

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[22] Ibid., 128.

[23] Ibid., 166-67. Emphasis mine.

from other people. . . . God could just as well live eternally in his Son and the latter in the Father without any other living ever coming to Life."[24] Thus Henry's establishment of this eternal process as the model for the generation in Christ of all ipseities is a theological move, I argue, made primarily to solve the epistemological problem of solipsism. In the end, however, it is debatable whether it does even this. For the second 'content' at issue here concerns Christ as the Arch-Ipseity through whom absolute Life begets *individual* ipseities (albeit not eternally) and grasps and experiences itself, suffers and enjoys itself in and as these multiple ipseities; it concerns the precise *phenomenological* relation between the finite, individual self and the Arch-Ipseity in its eternality. Or better, it concerns the precise phenomenological relation between the two folds of the double revelation. For there is a sense in which the individual ipseity itself, in the radical passivity of its being given to itself in Life in the first fold of the revelation, is (phenomenologically speaking) indistinguishable from the eternal passivity of the Son as the Arch-Ipseity in his begottenness by the Father. What distinguishes the individual self from Christ, it would seem, is the specifically finite nature of the individual self's unique *expression* of Life—i.e. through the employment of its limited powers through which, in its appropriation of itself as an 'I' in the double revelation's second fold, it opens world.[25] A rigorous phenomenological establishment of this content would, then, depend upon a clarification of Henry's understanding of genuine action: that is, action undertaken precisely by an ego which has overcome its forgetfulness, action by an ego which *maintains itself close to its essence* in all acts, which knows, indeed which *feels* that it draws its very power for action from an infinite source which precedes it (namely, Life)—action, as Henry says, in which "*the ego's power is extended to the hyper-power of absolute Life in which it is given to itself.*"[26] The ego, in thus acting, becomes itself something of a *witness* to this essence which acts primordially *through* it. Thus Henry says: "I am not my own flesh," "my flesh, my living flesh, is Christ's."[27] And further, quoting Paul: "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).[28]

The third 'content' concerns the fact that this flesh—my flesh concerning which I *witness* that it is Christ's—is continuous, *consubstantial*, with the pathetik materiality of all other ipseities whose flesh is also Christ's. Of course, this much has already been established, provided we allow for the second content above and that content's theological underpinning by the first, namely, the postulate of the eternal self-generation of the Father in and as the Arch-Ipseity. The real difficulty of this third content, however, is this: in what does the revelation of other ipseities to the ipseity that is this 'me,' within the continuity of Christ's flesh, ultimately consist? Put differently, how is it possible for there to

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[24] Ibid., 129.

[25] The distinction would lie, then, presumably in the fact that, in the case of the Arch-Ipseity, the second fold of the double revelation would open a horizon which is infinite.

[26] Ibid., 169.

[27] Ibid., 116.

[28] Ibid., 169.

be an *intelligibility of otherness* (concerning multiple ipseities each *other* to one another) within the immanent phenomenality of the continuity of pathetik materiality in which each individual ipseity co-participates in Christ? To again quote Dan Zahavi, how could each individual ipseity, "essentially characterized by such a complete self-presence", ever "be capable of recognizing other subjects?"[29] In what would such an *intelligibility of otherness* consist? Would it pertain also, somehow, to the specifically finite nature of each individual ipseity's unique *expression* of Life? In addressing these questions, I would like to turn briefly to a discussion of the title of this paper.

Between *le Principe* and *la Fin*: The Mysterious "Middle" of Life's "Multiple-Self-Community"

As already mentioned, Henry casts Jesus' "I Am" utterances in John into the dative-genitive: *C'est Moi la Voie, la Vérité, et la Vie*. His dependence upon John's Logos theology, furthermore, leads him to establish a nominative *process* grounding the dative-genitive—namely, the eternal Self-generation of the Father (absolute Life) in and as the Son, or the Arch-Ipseity, in and through whom all individual ipseities come into being. The Arch-Ipseity is, to that extent, the Alpha, the First (*le Premier*), and the Beginning (*le Commencement*, or *le Principe*, as *La Bible de Jérusalem* translates it) (Rev. 1:11; 21:6; 22:13). Now while Henry himself does not actually quote from the book of Revelation (he sticks to John's Gospel), it is quite easy to see the appropriateness of the title *le Principe* for the Arch-Ipseity. But what about the other side of the equation: the Omega, the Last (*le Dernier*), and the End (*la Fin*)? Relative to Henry's thinking, we might ask: what is this End, and between the Beginning and the End, what constitutes the "Middle?" A quick (although ultimately inaccurate) answer might be: the 'return,' here understood as the self's overcoming of forgetfulness. Fallen, in a state of forgetfulness of its essence as each self is, the End would be the realization, the remembrance of the essence (as Life) with which it is consubstantial, within the 'gate of the sheepfold' that is the Arch-Ipseity. But in this case, how is the End actually any different from the Beginning (*le Principe*)? Further, if in fact there is no difference, then isn't the middle, as a state of forgetfulness or fallenness, as an attempt to *return* to 'Truth,' actually little if anything more than an illusion, having no real being, or no real pertinence to either pole? And one more thing should be pointed out here: we still have no explanation from Henry, if the middle is to be understood only in this way, as to how multiple ipseities *within* the Arch-Ipseity's Flesh might recognize one another, the exteriority of their respective limited actions here put out of play. Indeed, Henry must, in order to solve the problem of solipsism, seriously think this 'End' as something *different* from the Beginning. In fact, this is exactly what he finally does, in a very late work published just two years before his death.

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[29] Zahavi, "Michel Henry and the Phenomenology of the Invisible," 232-3.

In this work—*Incarnation. Une philosophie de la chair*[30] (as of yet untranslated into English)—Henry turns in its final chapters to a meditation on the Mystic Body of Christ, of which Christ Himself is traditionally the Head, while the Body has traditionally been understood as the Church. In Henry's phenomenological vocabulary, however, we have the following: Christ, as the Arch-Ipseity, is the Head, while the Body—and herein lies Henry's new move in order to solve the problem of solipsism—the Body is absolute Life's "multiple-self-community," which, even prior to any particular individual self, comes into *itself* in the Arch-Ipseity as "the potential and indefinite multiplicity of all possible me's"[31]—in which Life grasps and experiences itself, suffers and enjoys itself in and as multiple ipseities in consubstantial community with one another. Selves which are given to themselves within this potentiality, furthermore, are not just numerically distinct from one another; nor are they distinct from one another solely on the basis of the difference of the self-expression of Life through them (in terms of the expression of their limited capacities in action). Rather, their limited capacities—indeed the very character of their expression and action—is *already*, for Henry, in some sense (indefinitely) determined by the relations which bind them (or, better, which *harmonize* them) within Life's "multiple-self-community" in its *potential* form. In other words, the harmony which harmonizes the individual expressions is *prior* to those expressions. Such a harmony of community—which Henry calls "la personne commune de l'humanité," and again "la personne universelle de l'humanité"[32]—is second-born only after the Arch-Ipseity itself, and is first-born *within* the Arch-Ipseity, prior to and the very condition of there being any individual selves. This harmony is furthermore the condition for there being *finite* selves, co-participating consubstantially in the Body according to particular and unique Self-expressions of Life in each self which is (indefinitely) determined by the harmony which precedes it and which serves as the principle of its distinct growth. For all selves, says Henry, find in this harmony "at once their origin and the principle of their development."[33]

The middle, to that extent, is neither meaningless nor after all missing; it is rather *mysterious*, insofar as it unfolds, it grows, between *le Principe* and *la Fin*, the Mystic (and that is to say here, *Living*) Body of Christ—this "personne commune," "personne universelle de l'humanité," this *Person* to whom, according to Henry, "it is given . . . to accomplish and to complete that which has not yet been completed in Christ."[34] The middle, in other words, is the period of the "auto-growth" (auto-accroissement)[35] of the *Living One*. Furthermore, this auto-growth, of each individual self as much as of the Universal Person, makes of it, according to Henry, "a becoming (the opposite of a 'substance' or a

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[30] Michel Henry, *Incarnation. Une philosophie de la chair* (Paris: Seuil, 2000).

[31] Henry, *Incarnation*, 349. My translation.

[32] Ibid., 358.

[33] Ibid., 357. My translation.

[34] Ibid., 359. My translation.

[35] Ibid., 357.

'thing')—a process which is at bottom nothing other than the process of absolute Life [i.e. coming into itself in and as multiple living ones, in its harmony of multiple-self-community]."[36] Of course, in saying that such a becoming is the opposite of a substance or thing does not mean that Henry has here given up his notion of pathetik consubstantiality. "Substance or thing" is meant to denote here their classic definitions as articulated within philosophies of ekstasis. Pathetik consubstantiality remains throughout Henry's work defined as the auto-affectivity of pre-ekstatic revelation.

However, something does change in Henry's very late thought, and it is this: that now the auto-affective character of revelation auto-affects itself specifically in *becoming*, in *growing* towards a *telos*. Individual selves are, thus, less forgetful (although they are that too) than they are *incomplete*. For it is precisely within the Universal Person that all selves, because guided in their growth by the harmony which precedes them, discover themselves therein as being *always-already-with-others* in Life's multiple-self-community. That is, their being-with-one-another, which implies an *intelligibility of otherness*, at the same time *constitutes* the very continuity of their consubstantiality. This *being-with-one-another*, in their incompleteness, in the incompleteness of the Universal Person itself, has not yet been fully revealed. To that extent, if individual selves encounter resistance, and if they respond in *taking a stand*, against others and against the world, or in trying only to master things—causing them to fall (even further) into forgetfulness—it is because *through* them absolute Life is trying to extend itself, to unfurl its "hyper-power,"[37] and to uniquely express itself, in order to realize its multiple-self-community, along pathways of harmonization that have not yet been unfolded in *actuality*; and incomplete selves, quite instinctually (because they are obscurely guided by Life) will perhaps inevitably attempt to force the development along. But in such a forcing they go astray, and they are most often primarily interested in their own development; they lose sight (if they ever had it at all) of the development of the community as a whole; or else, even if indeed having the development of the whole as their utmost concern, they fail to see the very rich and organic many-sidedness of it, and so impose only a sterile, necessarily abstract concept of universality upon it which stifles rather than liberating its further unfolding. Thus, to overcome forgetfulness, and to that extent to *do the will*, even in partial knowledge of it, of absolute Life in its unfolding towards universal completeness, what is called for is neither a forcing nor a 'return'—which in either case would only solicit the essence in the light of an interior ekstasis in which the essence, because phenomenally *pre*-ekstatic, could not be shown. Rather, what is required, says Henry, are "acts of mercy."

Note, however, that such acts of mercy are not ultimately a matter of duty, or concern for the other *per se*: "It is neither the neighbour nor the mercy with which we should treat him that explains the way of acting required by the

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[36] Ibid., 357. My translation.

[37] Henry, *I Am the Truth,* 169.

Christian ethic."[38] Rather, it is a matter of overriding the ego's tendency to *take a stand*. For it is precisely in this *taking a stand* that a decisive moment of forgetfulness is initiated and perpetuated: both in casting the essence as an (ideal) object within an interior ekstasis from which power can (presumably) be drawn, and in answering resistance from others with a counter-resistance, which sooner divides selves than allowing for the unfolding of their relations towards the harmony of community which precedes and secretly guides them all. To that extent, paradoxically, the remedy for overcoming the forgetting of the self in its givenness in absolute Life is precisely also a forgetting of sorts, but of an altogether different kind—namely, the ego's forgetting of its solicitous self-concern, or even, solicitous concern for the whole. Henry insists, in fact, that Dasein itself quite literally has to forget itself as a being for whom its being is a concern. Henry says: "*Only the work of mercy practices the forgetting of self in which, all interest for the Self (right down to the idea of what we call a self or a me) now removed, no obstacle is now posed to the unfurling of life in this Self extended to its original essence.*"[39] It is *through* this unfurling of life, then, unfurling of *Life* in all selves, that—in the *theological* (if not rigorously *phenomenological*) vision of the very late Henry—the multiple-self-community of Life, the "personne universelle de l'humanité", headed by the Arch-Ipseity, will come of age.

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[38] Ibid., 168.
[39] Ibid., 170. Henry's italics.