

Summary

The aim of this monograph is to present the last, Christianized phase of the phenomenology of Michel Henry and the relationship of this phase to the original form of his phenomenology as introduced in his two first books. The monograph is divided into seven chapters; the three introductory chapters outline, first, the original form of the phenomenological project of Michel Henry with respect to the question of the subjectivity of appearing and, second, the shift towards the critique of modern culture in Henry's works from the 1980's. The next four chapters analyze the "Christian trilogy", i.e. the books *I am the Truth*, *Incarnation* and *Words of Christ*, and try to answer the question, How is it possible to conceive of salvation in the Christian sense in the context of phenomenological philosophy?

The philosophical project of Michel Henry was founded as an ontology of subjectivity – subjectivity identified with the Ego. At the same time, it was the question of *how* this Ego appears, the question of immanence and affectivity, that guided this philosophical research from the outset. We may therefore say that the individual is the focal point of Henry's philosophical interest. The Christian trilogy represents a certain climax in this tendency: the right conception of an individual – i.e. the rootedness of individual human self in God's self – becomes the question of salvation both in the religious and cultural sense. From this perspective, the Christian trilogy offers a phenomenologically reformulated religious solution to the problem Henry addressed in his preceding work, mainly in *Barbarism* and *From Communism to Capitalism*: the deadly threat to the human individual allegedly posed by the development of modern technology and science.

The first chapter of the book sketches the "material phenomenology" – the term coined by Michel Henry in a book with the same title and adopted here as a name for the entirety of his phenomenological project – using a description of the main ideas of Henry's principal work, *The Essence of Manifestation*. It deals with the onto-phenomenological maxim that "Being must be able to show itself," with the idea of "duplicity of appearing" and affectivity as a mode of appearing in the realm of immanence; it also pays attention to the inspiration of the central concepts of material phenomenology in Meister Eckhart's mystical thought.

The second chapter outlines the concept of subjectivity as understood by material phenomenology; it suggests that material phenomenology conceives of subjectivity as an event, as an "im-plosion of life" (the term of Rolf

Kühn and Isabelle Thireau). It claims that is not clear whether *The Essence of Manifestation* deals with human subjectivity or the subjectivity of God in the end. It also reacts to the criticism of Dominique Janicaud, who accused Henry's phenomenology of being a speculative metaphysics, and it argues that Henry radicalises phenomenological enterprise in terms of searching the very basis of all appearing yet can still be understood as a phenomenology.

The third chapter gives an idea of how material phenomenology understands a human culture and its alleged modern crisis. The main focal point here is Henry's book *Barbarism*.

The fourth chapter searches the ways material phenomenology was Christianized in *I Am the Truth* and how it changed its concept of subjectivity. It shows how the uncertainty concerning the status of subjectivity as found in *The Essence of Manifestation* disappears and how human and divine subjectivities are distinguished now. It expounds the Christology and new anthropology of material phenomenology and describes the idea of a "second birth". There are also difficulties to be found in the process of the Christianization of material phenomenology. The chapter finds the following as the most important: It is impossible to describe positively the reality of human subjectivity considered in itself, without its relatedness to its base in the subjectivity of God. The determination of human subjectivity considered in itself is negative; it is only the story of its apostatisation from divine life (which means, for the human subject, becoming "ghostly and unreal") and its return to divine life which is meant as losing ourselves - the proper reality of the human subjectivity seems to be only God Itself. This feature leads to a certain Docetism present in both the Christology and the anthropology of Christianized material phenomenology.

The fifth chapter demonstrates how material phenomenology conceives of salvation. It states that salvation has become a redeeming turn in the conditions of *appearing*. Salvation in the biblical sense is emancipation from a material or spiritual (individually or collectively experienced) crisis through God's redeeming intervention; to a certain degree already in the Old, but then especially in the New Testament, present salvation becomes especially the prototype of future salvation conceived of as the eternal abidance of redeemed human in God's proximity. Material phenomenology appropriates the concept of salvation by conceiving of this future eternal abidance in God's proximity as the (present) renewed penetration of the human transcendental subject by the divine foundation of all revelation. This foundation is the absolute auto-donation of affective life in the non-intentional sphere of immanence. Salvation is the renewal of the appropriate proportion between

appearing in immanence (in God) and in transcendence (in the world): the redeemed human self realizes, in its self-forgetting and loving action, the maxim which Henry expressed in *The Essence of Manifestation*: “Immanence is the original mode according to which is accomplished the revelation of transcendence itself and hence the original essence of revelation.” The action of the human self once again becomes the unity of the inner and the outer – the action of the redeemed self in the exterior of the world is also penetrated by God’s self-revelation.

The sixth chapter presents Henry’s phenomenology of the living body. It first shows its original conception as introduced in *The Philosophy and Phenomenology of Body*, then it describes how this conception shifted in *Incarnation*. The first version of Henry’s reinterpretation of the thought of Maine de Biran, which guided Henry’s phenomenology of the living body, considered the transcendent “resisting continuum,” where organic and objective body are constituted, as the transcendental capacity of subjective body, with the subjective body thus being in an essential relation with the transcendence of the world. The Christianized phenomenology of living body placed, nevertheless, all three layers of the incarnation of the living subjectivity into the immanence closed to the external world; the “resisting continuum” and together with it the entirety of the lived world constituted by the incarnated subjectivity have become immanent realities now.

The sixth chapter deals with the last book of Michel Henry, *Words of Christ*, and it introduces the concept of hermeneutics present in this book. The proper understanding of the biblical text is, according to Henry, borne by the identity of Christ who speaks in the Gospels with the Christ who constantly speaks the “word of life” in the heart of the reader. Yet this unity of the transcendental (Christ as self-generation of God) and the empirical (Christ’s words in Gospels) is attained at the expense of the empirical: a comprehending reading of the Scripture means the abolition of the sign-character of the text in favor of a tautological self-expression of the subjective life. The Christianized version of material phenomenology postulates the naturalization of reading which represents such a movement of understanding that goes against the movement of signifying – it is equivalent to the movement carried out by the redeemed subjectivity, the movement of withdrawal from the world to the immanence of life.

The conclusion of the book describes the mechanism by which material phenomenology was Christianized. Material phenomenology shifted the interest of Husserlian phenomenology, which moved primarily in the direction of investigating the phenomenon and the manner of its givenness, to

the investigation of the very conditions of appearing. After this shift, it established the conditions under which any phenomenon could manifest itself to the process of affective self-manifestation by which transcendental subjectivity is constituted. Material phenomenology thus defined appearing as a revelation: The radicalisation of phenomenological reduction reached the non-intentional sphere in which no objectivity is constituted and which is accessible only to itself – the basis of the apparentness of every phenomenon is this self-revelation of affective subjectivity. This establishes the possibility of paralleling the fundamental postulates of material phenomenology with the diction of the New Testament writings. Both discourses are phenomenological in Henry's understanding and are related to the same internal regularities of appearing. This enables a translation from one discourse to the other – the foundation stone of the “plot” of Christian trilogy is the translation of Christian texts into the language of material phenomenology. Yet many mutual identifications of phenomenological and theological concepts presuppose a Christian faith (although Henry does not speak about this); some postulates of material phenomenology in this phase thus find themselves out of the reach of the phenomenality of the general human self-experience.