

Kant and Henry: An Inheritance of Idealism and a 'Turn' for Phenomenology

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What you would have as an inheritance from your fathers,
you must earn again, in order to possess.

Goethe, *Faust I*, 682-683

1. Introduction

In the following essay, I suggest that the founding text of the “phenomenological turn to theology,” Michel Henry’s *L’essence de la manifestation*, offers a particularly, even uniquely, significant “refiguration of divinity.”¹ This significance is accomplished by means of Henry’s hermeneutical recovery and reinterpretation, of phenomenology’s own past; in particular, its inheritance of idealism. I argue that Henry’s early reception and critique of Kant’s philosophy of knowledge in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is a pre-condition for comprehending the specific character of Henry’s philosophy of religion, and that the latter arises not independently but as a function of the former. Kant’s *Critique*, then, both for Henry in *L’essence* and for this essay, offers a horizon in which we may (1) identify the proper context for, and character of, this ‘turn’ or refiguration; (2) establish its right *quid juris*; and, on this basis (3) begin to examine and evaluate Henry’s extension of his early phenomenological philosophy of religion to his late phenomenological theology.²

¹ *L’essence de la manifestation* (Paris: P.U.F., 1963); *The Essence of Manifestation*, trans. G. Etzkorn (The Hague, Nijhoff, 1973). Research for this essay was made possible by a McGill University Social Sciences and Humanities Development Grant (2012), and was conducted at the Université Catholique de Louvain (Louvain-la-Neuve). I am grateful to Professors Jean Leclercq and Grégori Jean for their collaboration and collegiality during my stay at Louvain-la-neuve, and my consultation of the Bibliothèque du Fonds Michel Henry.

² For the purposes of this essay, I distinguish the philosophy of religion present in the early *Essence of Manifestation* from the fully developed ‘phenomeno-theology’ of the late trilogy—*I Am the Truth*, *Incarnation*, and *Words of Christ*. See, respectively, (1) *C’est moi la Vérité, pour une philosophie du christianisme* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996) [*I Am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003)], (2) *Incarnation: Une philosophie de la chair* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000), and (3) *Paroles du Christ* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002)

2. Kant's Critique of Reason as a Critique of Religion: A Horizon for Henry's Phenomenology

The Preface to the first-Edition of the first *Critique* already announces Kant's intention to take up "that most difficult of tasks," the "self-critique of pure reason." By setting out "reason's eternal and immutable laws" and structure (*Gliederbau*), this self-critique would "adjudicate the sources, scope, boundaries, and limits" of valid cognition and possible experience. Kant differentiated "positive" from "negative" aspects of this adjudication (A xi). By assigning the "limits" of possible or valid cognition, Kant would establish a "tribunal" that would "differentiate reason's rightful claims from its groundless pretensions."

Kant contrasts the "satisfaction" that issues from his transcendental self-critique of reason to the "dissatisfaction" and necessary incompleteness that issues from these 'groundless pretensions' of an inherited metaphysical, or theological, "program." In its analysis of our experience, this "most common" program "ascends ever higher, to more remote conditions." It traces the possibility conditions for physics to philosophy, and the possibility conditions for philosophy to theology (A viii). Such a program, Kant recounts, proceeds from objects of experience to the subject of experience or soul, and from "the simple nature of the soul" to "the necessity of a first beginning of the world" (A xiv). Once there it finds itself "compelled to resort to principles that go beyond all possible use in experience." For that reason "plunges into darkness and contradiction." This darkness, this "realm of endless conflicts," from which Kant would liberate us, is "metaphysics" (A viii). The compulsion toward metaphysics Kant would arrest by means of "a determination of the sources, range, and bounds of reason." Of these, Kant claims a "complete, and final, specification." Kant's determination is not without cost for the "most common program," however (A xii). Kant warns us, negatively, "of the [necessary] destruction of the most highly extolled and cherished delusions"—that of the metaphysical and theological itineraries just named (A xiii). To establish both this positive claim to a 'complete specification,' and this negative claim regarding the very possibility of metaphysics and theology, Kant cannot merely claim, but must deduce, the principles for this division between the valid and the invalid sciences, within the structure of reason itself. He does so by means of an "architectonic," through the full articulation "of all the components which constitute the structure of human cognition" (A 13, B 27). For this reason, the "internal structure of our knowledge" will be set out in a "transcendental topic" or topography of the cognitive faculty.

Though I can only adumbrate Kant's exposition of this 'topic' here, its two most basic structural elements are provided by the doctrine of intuition and the doctrine of intellection, which Kant names as the faculty of sensibility and the faculty

[*Words of Christ*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2012)]. Thus, this essay concerns itself with the question of the condition for the possibility of such a phenomenological refiguration rather than with that of the fully constituted character, and implications, of that which is refigured, eventually, in the later phenomeno-theological trilogy itself.

of understanding respectively.³ This doctrine of intuition, set out in the first principal division of the work, the Transcendental Aesthetic, obtains as the principal element in Kant's exposition of this structure. Kant argues that intuition serves, necessarily, as a "condition of the existence of objects as appearances," as objects of experience and knowledge rather than 'mere concepts' with no objective reference (Bxxv). In this context, Kant claims that "we can have no cognition of any object except insofar as the object conforms to the character of our intuition" (B xxvi). In other words, the character of our intuition, or sensibility, determines the limits of experience, the limits of what can become an object, a phenomenon for us. Importantly, Kant amplifies this claim to the importance of intuition with another, regarding the priority of intuition: Kant writes that "the conditions under which alone the objects of human cognition are given precede the conditions under which they are thought" (A 16, B 30). Kant insists that "an intuition must be given prior to any activity of the understanding" (B 145). This intuitive manifold, Kant continues, "in order to be turned into a cognition, must then be gone over, run through, taken up, and combined in a certain manner," intellectually (A 78, B 103). As one knows, it is for Kant "through intuition that objects are given to us," and is instead "through understanding that they are thought" (B 30). Only, Kant continues, "in the case of a unity between sensibility and understanding, can an object be cognized" (A 50, B 74).

On this basis, and in the second major division of the work, the Transcendental Analytic, Kant set out the initial, "positive" part of the critique, his account of the nature of cognition. There, Kant depicted the function of intuition in the order of cognition, and the order in terms of which intuitions could be "subsumed under" concepts. This order of cognition proceeds, paradigmatically, from outer sense, the realm of objects of our common experience, to inner sense, in which the discrete data of the five senses appear together 'before the mind.' Kant writes that it is only then, and "by means of this [inner] intuition," that we encompass within or "take up into our faculty of representation all outer intuitions" (A 37, B 53). This function of inner sense is, in this acceptance, universal; "all cognitions are nothing for us and are of no concern to us whatever if they cannot be taken up into consciousness" *by means of* inner sense (A 116), and *in* inner sense, as an *Inbegriff aller Vorstellungen*, an "inclusive, universal representation." The inclusiveness, or universality, of inner sense is necessary in order that we accomplish an "[intellectual] representation of our [intuitive] presentation" (A 113), a formal concept of a material object.

³ I have treated this theme in requisite detail in my *The Aporia of Inner Sense: The Self-Knowledge of Reason and the Critique of Metaphysics in Kant* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). I extended this exegesis of Kant's theory of cognition into an examination of Fichte's reception and critique thereof in my "Fichte's Critique of Kant's Doctrine of Inner Sense," in *Idealistic Studies* 37, 3 (December 2007): 157-78. I extended that examination into a specifically phenomenological (Husserlian) context in "Self-Consciousness and Temporality; Fichte and Husserl," in *Fichte and the Phenomenological Tradition*, eds. Violetta Waibel, Daniel Breazeale, and Tom Rockmore (Walter de Gruyter: Berlin, 2010). I gratefully acknowledge permission to reproduce (in slightly different form and to a distinct end) some of the introductory, Kantian materials discussed therein (in § II).

For this reason, Kant “amplifies” inner sense in three steps in his ‘positive’ account of the nature of cognition. First (A 99-100), in the “Synthesis of Apprehension,” Kant argues for a spatio-temporal unity in inner sense, in order that inner sense be able to contain within it the outer object as intuited originally in outer sense. He asserts that “regardless of the place of origin of our presentations, as modifications of the mind they yet belong to inner sense” (A 99). Second, in the “Synthesis of Reproduction” (A 100-A102), Kant argues for a constancy in inner sense. Kant recognizes that “if I always lost from my thoughts the preceding presentations . . . and did not reproduce them” in a constant series, “there could never arise a whole presentation” (A 102). This constancy across time, Kant writes, must “amount to a determination of inner sense” (A 101). Kant builds in this way to a third ‘synthesis’ or moment, a “synthesis of recognition” (A 103). In the latter (A 103-110), Kant will combine these claims to (spatio-temporal) unity and (temporal) continuity in order to argue for the conceptual determinability of inner sense. Kant thus builds gradually toward “that unity that only consciousness can impart” to inner intuition, in order that the order of cognition be consummated. Inner intuition, in other terms, must be amplified with the characteristics of spatiality, constancy, and conceptual determinability in order that it perform its function within the order of cognition. Only then can inner sense serve its integral role within Kant’s account of the nature of cognition, as “the formal a priori condition of all appearances universally.” Only then can inner sense serve as an *Inbegriff*, such that “any progress of perception, no matter what the objects may be” is “nothing but an expansion . . . of inner sense” (A 210, B 255).

I would like to suggest, however, that Kant also advanced a restrictive and contravening construal of inner intuition: Kant also asserted the *incapacity* of inner intuition. In the third major division of the work, the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant argued that inner sense cannot include, but rather excludes, these same characteristics and capacities. In the Paralogisms, we read, for example, that inner sense cannot contain spatiality and its conditions. He wrote that; “in us,” in inner sense, “there does not occur any relation of place, or motion, or shape, or any determination of space at all” (A 381). In the same context, Kant asserted that inner sense possesses only an inconstant and indeterminate succession (B 413): “in inner intuition we have nothing permanent at all” and in fact only a “mere flux, chaos” (B xl, A 33, B 49-50; B 291). For this reason, Kant asserted, inner intuition “yields absolutely no [conditions required for] cognition.” Inner intuition yields “knowledge only of the succession of determinations,” and “not of any object that can thereby be determined [conceptually]” (A 381). Thus, the spatio-temporal unity, the constancy, and the conceptual determinability of inner intuition that Kant required for his account of the nature of cognition, Kant now denies to inner intuition in his account of the limits of cognition, in order to negate the possibility of rational-psychological (and rational-theological) doctrine of the soul. To this end, Kant asserted that “the thinking I, the soul (a name for the transcendental object of inner sense)” must not have “any use whatever extending to actual objects, and hence cannot expand in the least our cognition” (A 361).

In this way, Kant hoped to make impossible any pretension to a cognition of the soul as an object of inner sense and thus as an object of possible appearance. But the restrictions on inner sense that Kant asserts would negate not only the formal conditions required for rational psychology, but also those conditions required for his own account of the proper function of the order of cognition. In this tension, or antinomy, lies the significance of this theme for Kant's theoretical philosophy. But this tension—however cursorily adumbrated—obtains also as the problem-context for Henry's early engagement of Kant's theory of the nature and limits of cognition, to which I now turn.

3. Michel Henry: An Inheritance of Idealism

In his early essay '*Le Concept d'âme a-t-il un sens?*,' Henry entered into a confrontation that would help to establish both the thematic character of his early work and—I would suggest—that of French phenomenology as such.⁴ Henry there "rejects the Kantian critique" of metaphysics by issuing his own "critique of the Kantian critique" (6). Henry identifies, and focuses upon, the role of inner sense in Kant's "decisive limitation" of "the idea of phenomenality." This restriction, for Henry, is established "in Kant's theory of inner experience," and through Kant's depiction of the "pure inner intuition of time, which constitutes inner sense." In and through the latter, "the empirical element" of cognition, "received" in external experience, is to be "submitted to the activity of the categories of the understanding" (11). Henry notes, however, that this positive function of inner intuition is jeopardized by Kant's exposition of the "[same] structure of [inner] intuition" as found in "the paralogism of rational psychology." The latter exposition, reviewed above, "excludes a priori the possibility of an [inner] intuition" as an *Inbegriff aller Vorstellungen*, to use the term of the first-edition Deduction (12). This exclusion, made in order to advance Kant's critique of *Seelenlehre*, Henry names the "failure [*échec*] of inner sense," a failure that results from the conflict between two opposed expositions of inner sense made by Kant, in the first-edition Deduction of the Transcendental Analytic and in the Paralogisms respectively.

This construal of Henry's critique of Kant is confirmed by the newly published "*Destruction ontologique de la critique kantienne du paralogisme de la psychologie*," written during the preparation of, but not included in, *L'Essence*.⁵ Therein, Henry rehearses the requirements of the amplified construal of inner sense in the first-Edition Deduction and its determination of the *ordo cognoscendi*. An

⁴ "Le concept d'âme a-t-il un sens?," *Revue philosophique de Louvain*, n. 81 (1966): 5-33.

⁵ "Destruction ontologique de la critique kantienne du paralogisme de la psychologie," *Studia Phaenomenologica* IX (2009): 17-53. I hope to publish an English-version of this still untranslated article soon. For a more detailed critique of Kant, the reader may consult, in addition to *L'essence*, also *Généalogie de la psychanalyse. Le commencement perdu* (Paris: PUF, 1985), ch. 4 (translated by Douglas Brick in *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993] as "Empty Subjectivity and Life Lost: Kant's Critique of 'Soul'"). I cannot treat the intricacies of this long and complex chapter in this short space. I note only its conclusion, and Henry's assertion there that this "ambiguous" or antinomial status of inner sense "*is the crux of Kantian thought and its aporia*" (ibid., 107).

object must be “*reçu dans l’intuition,*” and transposed from outer sense to inner sense, “*telle que elle [l’impression sensible] est recueillie dans le sens interne*” (26). Then, “*l’impression dans le sens interne doit encore être soumise aux principes purs de l’entendement.*” In this way the *processus* of synthetic cognition “*s’accomplira...par la détermination intuitive d’un concept,*” according to the order of cognition set out above (26). However, this *processus* is risked by the tension within Kant’s exposition of inner sense. For Henry, “*le sens interne remplit successivement dans le kantisme les deux fonctions que lui confèrent,*” first in the Analytic, and then in the Dialectic. In the first context, “*elle est soumise à l’action déterminante de la catégorie qui lui assigne une place dans un univers objectif*” (34). Here, inner sense plays a positive role in the order of synthetic cognition; “*la sensation est d’abord donnée comme une impression empirique qui se trouve la selon un processus*” of cognition, in which “*le “sens interne” prend à sa charge*” the task of functioning as an *Inbegriff aller Vorstellungen* or inclusive representation. But the restrictive construal of inner sense in the Paralogisms, Henry reviews, requires that “*le sens interne est impuissant*” to exhibit such characteristics and capacities; in the latter context, Kant requires its indeterminability rather than its determinability; “*il n’est rien d’autre que la forme temporelle dans laquelle tout s’écoule et rien ne demeure*” (26).

For this reason, according to Henry, “*la critique des paralogismes est minée par une contradiction profonde.*” The doubled and in fact antinomial argumentative exigence of the doctrine of inner sense leads Henry to insist on “*une critique vraiment philosophique de l’interprétation kantienne de l’être du moi*” (*ibid.*). Henry hopes to “*met à nu le principe de la critique kantienne des paralogismes,*” to show the manner of its conflict with the requirements of the three syntheses noted above. For Henry, Kant cannot secure the critique of rational psychology without sacrificing his claim to the *ordo cognoscendi*, with its positive doctrine of inner sense as an *Inbegriff* in the Analytic (46). This “*moment essentiel de l’histoire de la philosophie moderne*” provided by Kant’s critique of médiéval and early modern metaphysics and theology, is for Henry “*un échec total*” (34). Perhaps surprisingly, Henry claims that we ought “*reconnaître la validité du projet de la psychologie rationnelle,*” even if its traditional forms in Descartes, Leibniz, and the ‘Cartesian Augustinian,’ Malebranche, will require a phenomenological revision rather than recapitulation. Indeed, “*une fois comprise et dénoncée, cette erreur fondamentale qui est à la base de toute la critique de la psychologie rationnelle*” will allow for the reconsideration of Kant’s critique of metaphysics as such (53).

In this way, a tension between two opposed construals of the nature and limits of inner intuition provides the problem-context for Henry’s early engagement of Kant’s theory of the nature and limits of cognition as such. For Henry, and for this essay, this tension is most significant not in a hermeneutical address of Kant’s theory of cognition, but in a phenomenological redress of Kant’s critique of metaphysics and theology. In this latter context, however, it is not clear that Henry’s critique (of Kant’s critique) of rational psychology affords a critique of (Kant’s critique of) rational theology. How, then, could such an extension—from doctrine of soul to doctrine of God—be established, and justified? How can Henry’s foundation

of the ‘theological turn’ of French phenomenology be established on the basis of such a *Seelenlehre*? To this next question I would like now to turn.

4. A Return to Kant

Kant prosecuted his critical argumentation throughout the Transcendental Dialectic, from the critique of “transcendental psychology” reviewed above to a critique of “transcendental theology (*Gotteserkenntnis*).” Kant conceives of these disciplines not as distinct but as interdetermining and interdependent. In fact, “among the transcendental ideas [of the soul and God] there can be seen a certain coherence and unity,” and in fact a “system” or systematic character. Kant will write of an ascending series or “*progressus*” from the first transcendental idea of the “unity of the thinking subject,” and its theoretical expression in a “doctrine of the soul,” to the latter transcendental idea [of God] (A 336-37, B 394).⁶ Kant worries over the apparently natural and unproblematic character of this *scala Jacob*, which “proceeds from the cognition of oneself (the soul)...to [the cognition of] the original being.”⁷ Its trajectory proposes “so natural an advance that it seems similar to reason’s logical progression from premises to conclusion” (A 337, B 395). This “Platonic soaring,” and its itinerary from physics to philosophy to theology, would instantiate or enshrine theology at the level of “our speculative power of reason” (B 395 note). Against this theoretical possibility, Kant asserts that inner sense must not allow for any “objective use” whatever (A 327, B 384). For this reason, *Seelenlehre*, as well as *Gotteserkenntnis*, is said to “surpass the boundary of all experience.” Both must necessarily remain “problematic” and unprovable (A 339, B 397).

Kant later (A 631, B 659) distinguishes *theologia rationalis* from *theologia revelata*, a theology of reason from a theology of revelation. The first “thinks its

⁶The standard approach to Kant’s philosophy of religion focuses on his epochal critique of Aristotelian proofs for the existence of God as first cause, as prime or unmoved mover, employed variously by Avicenna, Maimonides, and Aquinas. This critique of the proofs of natural theology (“*Gotteslehre*,” or doctrine of God) appears in sections of the *Critique of Pure Reason* entitled the “Antinomies of Pure Reason” and the “Ideal of Pure Reason.” For such an approach, see Allen W. Wood’s excellent *Kant’s Rational Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978). I leave Kant’s critique of these unquestioned; in fact, as we will see, Michel Henry’s ‘turn to theology’ explicitly rejects such a (neo-Aristotelian) theological style. But Kant attacked theology in not one, but two, contexts in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant’s second argument against rational theology, which began already in the *Paralogisms*, is advanced against a second type of theology, founded upon a doctrine of the soul (*Seelenlehre* in Kant’s term). In the latter context, I suggest, there may be a more intricate relation—an antinomy—within Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, between his own self-critique of reason and his critique of religion, or rational theology, as “doctrine of the soul.” I suggest this approach in order to establish the conceptual horizon for Henry’s critique of Kant and to thus justify his turn to (a specific type of) theology.

⁷The three, and “only possible” doctrines or “systems” of the soul in relation to the body are named at A 390 as (1) Descartes’ “physical influence” or interactionism; (2) Leibniz’s “predetermined [or pre-established] harmony”; and (3) Malebranche’s “supranatural assistance” or occasionalism. These “*psychological*” theses are evidently already “*theological*” theses not only for the latter’s identity for Kant as the “Cartesian Augustinian,” but because Leibniz’s harmony is pre-established *by God*, and because Malebranche’s “system” is established *in God*. Each positions its *Seelenlehre* in and through a *Gotteserkenntnis*.

object (as *ens originarium, ens realissimum, ens entium*) merely through pure reason,” and by means of the traditional predicates of natural theology. This is and can become, according to Kant, both “deistic” and “onto-theological,” as it focuses on the divine being as an object and as “*cause* of the world.” The second, however, “thinks its object—as a supreme *intelligence*, through a concept which it borrows from... *the nature of our soul*.” The latter proposes a (neo-Platonic rather than neo-Aristotelian) ascent from the nature and dynamics of human intelligence to the nature and dynamics of God as a “*summa intelligentia*,” and as a model for a full self-understanding of the structure of our intellectual activity. But in spite of this recognition of the very different histories, methods, and trajectories of these two basic ‘theological styles,’ in von Balthasar’s sense, Kant’s critique here will be less refined; “I maintain that *all attempts* to make a speculative use of reason in regard to theology are entirely fruitless and are, by their intrinsic character, null and void, and that the principles of reason’s natural use lead *to no theology whatever*” (A 636, B 664).⁸

In the first *Critique*, Kant merely intimates this distinction between two principal forms of theology. The *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, however, depict this second form of theology more thoroughly. There, too, he opposes a “deistic” to a “theistic” concept of God. In the latter, again, we “cognize God as supreme intelligence.” God, here, is not advanced as a first cause, but rather an “author of all things, through understanding and freedom” (*ibid*). Whereas a “deist” possesses a concept of God as “a blindly working eternal nature as the root of things,” and an “original being or highest cause of the world,” the theist advances a “concept of a living God,” and the “theistic concept of God as a *summa intelligentia*” (28: 1047). This *cognitio Dei* begins, as above, from our “knowledge of our self” (*ibid*), when “we find in our soul the faculty of cognition” (28: 1048). It develops or “proceeds” on the basis of “psychological predicates, borrowed from the nature of our own soul” and our *Selbsterkenntnis* thereof. In this self-cognition, we

⁸ Kant’s (1) critique of *Gotteslehre* involves the “remarkable fact that we require intuition” in order to establish the necessary conditions for synthetic cognition, or knowledge (B 289). On the basis of the general *doctrine of intuition*, Kant grounded the “remarkable fact” that “from mere categories no synthetic propositions can be formed” (*ibid*). Kant utilized this principle to argue against the (neo-Aristotelian) theological claim that “existence is a predicate,” such that (God’s) existence could be contained analytically within the mere concept thereof (A 602, B 630). This “transcendental illusion,” of course, consists in conflating the purely logical possibility of a concept with the transcendental (real) possibility of an object, and is the best-known element within Kant’s critique of theology. Kant’s (2) critique of *Seelenlehre*, instead, involves, in the terms of B 291, the “even more remarkable” fact that “we need not merely intuitions, but indeed always outer intuition” in order to form synthetic propositions. For “in order to give as [an object] something permanent,” Kant argued, we require the stability and positionality of a manifold of intuition that inner intuition as such cannot provide (B 291). However, the conditions required for asserting, against *Seelenlehre*, the inapplicability of the categories to inner sense, requires that inner sense not contain within itself, according to its most basic capacity or character, a *totum* of representations—inclusive of the material, spatial, and substantial determinations of outer intuition. In other words, as Henry asserted above, it seems that Kant cannot have both his positive account of the nature of synthetic cognition and his negative account of the limits of synthetic cognition, against the *Seelenlehrer*, to argue against the (neo-Platonic) theological claim that one may ascend *ab exterioribus ad interioribus* and *ab inferioribus ad superioribus*, from outer sense and its *Koerperlehren* to inner sense and its *Seelenlehre* to a *Gotteserkenntnis*.

take “the way of analogy,” but in the form of an *analogia mentis* rather than an *analogia entis*. A *similitudo* is to be established between the formal structure and dynamics of mental activity, and the formal structure and dynamics of God’s relation to the world as such.

Just as God, *qua* author, obtains as a “single enduring force,” an “effective power” which “poured [himself] out, as it were, in this world-whole” (28: 1096), so too does the mind generate the concepts of its effective and manifest life only to withdraw or recede from view. Just as God, then, obtains as invisible origin and *principium* of the world, taken as the *principiatum* thereof, so, too, does our mind obtain as the invisible origin and *principium* of the ideas, concepts, and judgments that it produces. In both cases, it seems, a “visible image” is made manifest from, or poured out of, an “invisible ground” that cannot itself be brought to visibility. In this way, we would establish our *Selbsterkenntnis* with reference to a (specifically Christian, and neo-Platonic) *Gotteserkenntnis* (and vice versa).⁹ We “derive [our faculty of cognition]” as an *imago Dei* from the supreme intelligence of the highest original being,” and derive our understanding of the latter by means of the dynamic movements of the life of conscious activity (28: 1050-51). Kant distinguishes these two theological styles, then, according to the *history* (notes 7, 9), the *method* (note 8), and the *concept* of God, of each.

Of course, for Kant, the concept of a “ground of all things,” not unlike that of the ‘cause of all things,’ is found to be “a true abyss [*Abgrund*] for human reason.” Here, for Kant, “everything falls away beneath us” (28: 1033). But if the disorientation effected by this *Abgrund* is for Kant (subjectively) intolerable, it is not, for that, (objectively) invalid. While Kant’s critique of *Gotteslehre* may be thought to be unproblematic, his critique of *Seelenlehre* is and remains antinomial. It relies upon a negative construal of the character and capacities of inner sense, even though Kant had himself relied upon an opposite, and positive construal of inner sense as an *Inbegriff* in his depiction of the *ordo cognoscendi* in the *Analytic*. The recognition of this aporia or antinomy is productive, then, to our understanding of both (1) Kant’s theory of knowledge, and (2) Kant’s critique of theology (as *theologia revelata*). But I will now suggest that it also allows us to situate (3) the phenomenological character of, and the philosophical justification for, the ‘theological turn’ of Michel Henry.

⁹ For Kant, the “Platonic idea” that underlies such an *analogia mentis* “properly signifies [a] simulacrum,” in which the life of the divine mind would be the ideal or archetype of human cognition (28: 1058). According to this conception, “particular human beings” and their faculty of cognition “would be formed in accord with this idea” and according to its pattern or process of emanation (28: 1059). Kant supposes that this general conception of the relation between the human (mind) and the divine (mind) “finally emerged” as a doctrine “in the second century.” The neo-Platonic School following Plotinus “dreamed of the possibility of participating in the divine ideas” (ibid.). For Kant, “the whole school of mystic theosophy based itself on this,” a “corrupt Platonic philosophy” (28: 1059). Thus Kant warns of “the delusion of the Neo-Platonic philosophers,” and their *progressus*, “the progression . . . made through common reason from the visible world to its invisible author” (ibid.).

5. The Essence of Manifestation: A Turn to Theology

The thematic engagement of Kant's theory of inner intuition, as outlined above, is not restricted to Henry's early essays. It is repeated in, and central to, his *magnum opus*, *L'essence de la manifestation*. Therein, Henry redresses the problem of the "receptivity" or representative capacity of inner sense, and its "immanent sphere" (§§ 22-30, 37). Indeed, *L'essence* unfolds from the initial engagements of "exteriority" (§ II, 26), to the relation between such "transcendental content," its "immanent appearance," and its conceptual determination (§ I, 30). In these sections, Henry again critically engages Kant's doctrine of inner sense, its character and capacities, in order both (1) to disclaim Kant's "unelaborated concept of immanence" and (2) to claim an unproblematically amplified account of inner sense (§ II, 24; 275). Throughout, Henry identifies Kant's "incorrect concept of [the] internal unity" of the spheres of outer and inner sense, a concept based on an "equally incorrect concept of the 'internal' unity of intuition" (270). Henry attempts instead to secure a "unity of [space and time in] temporal intuition" as an *Inbegriff aller Vorstellungen*. But instead of repeating the details of Henry's critique of Kant's theory of cognition and the role of inner intuition therein, I would like instead to examine *L'essence de la manifestation* for the implication that Henry draws from this critique, and for a post-Kantian, indeed anti-Kantian, philosophy of religion. What will result, I would ask, from Henry's insistence on "*une critique vraiment philosophique de l'interprétation kantienne de l'être du moi*" (*ibid.*), and his claim that we ought "*reconnaître la validité du projet de la psychologie rationnelle*"? What form will this "*monadologie henryenne*" (in Tilliette's sense) take?¹⁰

Henry notes that the "intuited datum is only one element of the nature of cognition." Such a datum is, as well, "surrounded by a [formal] horizon" (16), a formal-transcendental structure. The latter, as an intellectual rather than intuitive principle, "opens and thus makes the manifestation [of such intuitive data] possible" (19). This result allows for a reorientation of Henry's theory of knowledge; "the theme of phenomenological ontology is in no way constituted by the determined, and material, content of any manifestation whatever." While intuition is necessary to cognition, it is not thereby sufficient: phenomenology must "deal with the 'how' of this manifestation and of every possible manifestation in general" (39). Henry for this reason turns his attention from the faculty of sensibility to the faculty of understanding, and its generation of ideas, concepts, and judgments as the data of intentional life. In this second, intentional rather than intuitive context, Henry repeats Husserl's most general formula for the comprehension of such data; "all consciousness is consciousness *of*" an object. All consciousness, in other words, is ob-jective, is about something. Here, Henry's transcendental phenomenology becomes less recognizably transcendental, and more phenomenological. But for Henry, this accomplishment of consciousness—its production of an objective

¹⁰ Xavier Tilliette, "Une nouvelle monadologie: la philosophie de Michel Henry," *Gregorianum* 61 (1980): 633-51.

reference—is equally its failure; a second *échec*. For Henry, consciousness covers over itself *as* subject, in discovering its object *as* an object. In gaining an object, consciousness loses itself as subject. Consciousness, for its objectivity, makes objects of experience visible only by itself receding perpetually into invisibility. The question of the nature of conscious activity, then, cannot be effectively determined by means of the activity of objectifying consciousness that by definition covers over its own ground. Rather than end with “a preoccupation over the problematic of the object,” phenomenology in this renewed form must “bring into question the ontological primacy of transcendence” and “advance into a new region” (*ibid.*).

Henry thus issues his own critique of pure reason. Henry’s does so by tracing the “movement” or activity definitive of conscious life, our production of the ideas, concepts, and judgments, in which “the mind separates itself from itself in order to manifest itself.” In this movement, the mind as a point of origin and generation is revealed, veiled over, as it is revealed (93). The objective content of a judgment as is contained in its *terminus ad quem* is attained only through the loss or disappearance of its *terminus a quo*. Phenomenology, then, “must receive a radically different meaning,” or self-understanding, and “ask itself if there does not exist another mode of revelation” which “can introduce us to the problem of the foundation” (42).

In this way, Henry would attempt to indicate the ground of appearance invisible to “natural vision” (intuitively), or objective consciousness (intellectually). He would do so by depicting the appearance “as” a manifest content, and by ‘subtracting’ its character as a product or production from its own necessary point of origin. The irreducible remainder to any manifest content cannot be comprehended in abstraction from, or independently of, the products of conscious activity. Henry’s phenomenology requires the visible, but it *uses* the visible in order to produce a depiction of that which does not, and cannot, appear. We must subtract or negate the formal object or concept *as* a concept, in order to determine conceptually that which precedes and exceeds the concept, as objective. This excess or surplus, however, will be lost by reflection, necessarily, once again. In the attempt to capture the presupposition by means of reflection, to determine it conceptually and as objectified, one again confronts one’s necessary inability to render this preconceptual condition for consciousness “as” preconceptual. For Henry, “the universal light [of objectivity] is not the [first] home of all phenomena. The invisible is the mode of a positive and truly fundamental revelation.” It is here that “the problem of self-knowledge,” or *Selbsterkenntnis* in Kant’s term above, can be posited on a correct basis.” Here, Henry concludes, the “invisible is the mode of a positive and truly fundamental revelation” in which “every manifestation is in principle inadequate” or unfulfilled (45). For this reason, Henry suggests that phenomenology must become “a critique of all revelation, of its different forms and its fundamental conditions” (43). Not uncontroversially, then, Henry would direct our attention to “a more fundamental ‘how,’ whose law bestows a presence.” The imperative to make this surplus appear, to realize or to actualize its excess, provides the incentive for the prosecution of Henry’s phenomenology, even as he recognizes the impossibility, interminability, or infinity of this task.

Importantly, Henry places this *inspectio mentis* under a theo-logical sign. Henry attempts, in other words, not only to indicate formally that which resists indication, but to do so in the specific terms of a theo-logic. Henry here orients his analysis no longer from a transcendental-philosophical analysis of the conditions for the possibility of synthetic cognition, but from the theology of Jacob Boehme, and the latter's figure of the "primitive night of the *Ungrund*" (*ibid.*). In these engagements of Boehme and Eckhart, Henry's phenomenology adopts not a philosophical but a theological figuration; "that which is at the beginning is not the modesty of an obscure *Grund*, it is the *Verbum*" (167). Within this dynamic, "alienation is the condition of manifestation, as alienation is the essence of manifestation" (70). All manifestation points to the absence that is its origin, and all existence points thus to a *Grund* that is a *Verbum*, the *Logos* or First-Born of the *theologia revelata*. In this way, Henry orients phenomenological analysis *with* the conceptuality of Boehme (the concepts of the *Abgrund*, *Adgrund*, *Ungrund*, *Urgrund*, etc.), and *in* the variety of strategies for formally indicating that generative absence 'whose law bestows presence.' In doing so, Henry also orients his analysis *by means of* the construal of the *Grund* that Kant had experienced as a 'disorientation,' with which Kant had argued for the Enlightenment prohibition against any such theological claims. Thus, if the *terminus a quo* of Henry's analysis itself is found in the critique of Kant's modern philosophical determination of the process of cognition and the role of inner sense therein, the *terminus ad quem* of Henry's analyses is found only in Boehme, and then Eckhart, in whom alone Henry finds "the exhaustive concept of phenomenality" (437).¹¹ For our purposes in this essay, it is important to note that this 'exhaustive concept' is not only theo-logical in an indeterminate sense, but rather that it takes the precise and justifiable form of an *analogia mentis* and a *theologia revelata*, in Kant's terms above.

Henry's decision against a modern philosophical horizon, and for a medieval theological horizon, is intentional: it is established as a matter of principle. In this latter context, Henry will assert that "the self-manifestation of the essence" of knowledge is not "dependent on...philosophical knowledge." Rather, the latter "constantly presupposes it as the very condition for its accomplishment" (143). According to Henry, "*philosophical knowledge* [as such] misses its goal when it interrogates itself concerning itself." *Philosophy*, beholden to the objectivity, and thus self-alienation, of discursive knowledge, "always comes along too late..." (169). In this way, a strictly theological figure, "the visible image of an invisible ground," is "not the exception or the paradox" to an autonomous and sovereign philosophy, but is instead "the universal law of all existence." This universal law is open only to a phenomeno-theology that supersedes the false and derivative certitudes of the philosophical form of representation, knowledge (307). This phenomenological theology is not only opposed to any philosophy of knowledge that refuses to countenance such an excess (whether idealistic or phenomenological), however, but also to the *theologia rationalis*. For example, in *I Am The Truth*, Henry

¹¹ For this reason Wayne Hankey has depicted Henry "*l'un des porte-étendards actuels de néoplatonisme*," in *Cent Ans de Néoplatonisme en France* (Vrin: Paris, 2004), 136, 206.

“clears away from the start *the massive misconception that equates the essence of the Christian God with Being*” (28; italics added). For Henry, God is not to be thought, in Christianity and after Kant, as “a Being endowed with all the conceivable attributes conferred on an absolute power . . . a being than which nothing greater can be conceived’ and who for this reason necessarily exists.” For Henry, “the Christian God has nothing in common” with “Aristotle’s prime mover,” with “the infinitely great Being of Saint Anselm, which will be taken up in all the classical proofs of the existence of God and will serve as their pillar” according to the principles of *theologia rationalis* as depicted above (54). Indeed, “any rational representation, even more so any proof of God’s existence, is absurd in principle” in this case, since to prove is to “make seen,” rather than to recognize and reveal the limits of visibility. Indeed, this recognition, for Henry, is “what separates it [Christianity] from other monotheisms,” its accomplishment of the visible as a trace and formal indication of the invisible (*ibid.*).¹²

In accordance with our review of the “second form” of theology in Kant, Henry moves from a rational psychology or *inspectio mentis* to a determinate form of the (Christian, and neo-Platonic) *theologia revelata*. Thus, Henry argues that we cannot comprehend the mind’s generation of concepts except as a process of manifestation, and as “a sojourn under the form of the *Logos*.” In this way, as above, *Seelenlehre* is guided by *Gotteserkenntnis*, in the specific form of a theology of revelation. In this movement, God appears—is refigured—not only as that which cannot and should not be conceived at all, as in Kant’s transcendental idealism, but as that which is and must be conceived in Henry’s transcendental phenomenology, according to a particular and determinate character—as a *summa intelligentia*.

6. Conclusion: The Future of this Past

Henry’s ‘refiguration’ incorporates a philosophy of knowledge and a philosophy of religion. Indeed, he founds the latter upon the former, and thus establishes the right

¹² For Henry’s extended critiques of *theologia rationalis*, see *ibid.*, 67-68, and 154-57. For Henry, instead, “the first Relationship constitutive of Christianity’s content,” is not that of a God as first existent and first cause of a world, but “a Relationship of reciprocal interiority . . . between the Father and the Son,” as the visible image, and manifestation, thereof. This reciprocity obtains between the Son, as “revealed only in [and as] the Father’s self-revelation,” and the Father, whose “self-revelation takes place only in, and as, the revelation of the Son.” This reciprocal interiority is, further, an “inconceivable unity . . . whose self-engendering is one with the engendering of the Engendered.” This unity of identity and difference, of engendering and engendered, is isomorphic though not identical to the human mind as an *imago dei*. For Henry, “the divine Life’s relation to itself is identical [formally] to the ego’s relation to itself,” since “within its relation to itself, within its very Ipseity . . . the ego is invisible in the same way as the [divine] Life that generates this Ipseity” (*ibid.*, 148; see also 154-57). Just as the self-manifestation of the faculties of vision and consciousness propose a revelation that reveals as it reveals, so, too, does the self-manifestation of the divine essence. These terms propose not only a relation, but an analogy, and an isomorphism, between (1) the theme of vision and its invisible origin, and (2) the relation between the divine essence, hidden eternally, and the manifestation thereof. For this reason, it was important to establish the distinction between *theologia rationalis* from *theologia revelata* established above (§ 4): Henry has earned a right not to the *Gotteslehre* of the former (which he eschews), but only to the *Seelenlehre* of the latter (which he endorses).

quid juris of his phenomenological philosophy of religion. By so doing, Henry effected—*L'essence*, published in 1963, was finished already in 1957—the ‘theological turn’ of French phenomenology. This turn occupies still, fifty years after its original effectuation, the vital center and thematic focus of contemporary phenomenology and philosophy of religion. Unfortunately, the questions of the origin, and justifiability, of this turn have been forgotten. For this reason, I have attempted to trace herein the unfolding of modern philosophy of religion from Kant to Henry, in order to clarify the specificity of his refiguration. I have done so by showing the problematic character of Kant’s founding of transcendental philosophy of religion, and by introducing Henry’s phenomenological reassertion of the (theological) “program” that Kant had attacked. I suggested that Kant’s hope for a “satisfaction” in a static image of systematicity provides the inaugural moment in this brief history, and the principle for the development or unfolding thereof. I also suggested that in *L'essence de la manifestation*, Henry’s phenomenology begins from a critique of the structure of consciousness as articulated by Kant, and that, in this context, Henry advances both a critique of Kant, and a novel account of the nature and limits of cognition. In the latter, the image of the imageless is given to the contemporary philosophical imagination, but is given *from*, and *in the name of*, medieval and neo-Platonic theological sources and tradition: Henry’s ‘refiguration’ of divinity involves a ‘repetition’ of this tradition.

I have argued in this essay that both Henry’s ‘turn from’ Kant’s theory of knowledge (his doctrine of inner sense) and his ‘turn to’ a specific form of (neo-Platonic) theology, can be established with legitimate right, *quid juris*. For this reason, the future of the phenomenological philosophy of religion does not lie in the specific form of Janicaud’s famous question of the *mere possibility* of such a turn.¹³ Such a protest against the very possibility of Henry’s recapitulation of pre-Kantian theology fails to comprehend the principles and process of its arising. This possibility has long since been demonstrated. The future of phenomenological philosophy of religion lies instead in the negotiation of the exceptional, anti-Enlightenment gesture of Henry’s refiguration, and in the distribution of its charge. While the question of the possibility of Henry’s turn is thus decided, we have left the question of its significance or status undecided in this essay. In this light, one might worry that, when Henry identifies his philosophy with a particular theology—when its images become his own, and an obscure *Grund* becomes the *Verbum*—his phenomenology shifts in its character and incentives from a (phenomenological) philosophy of religion to a (phenomenological) theology. In such an important but perhaps imperceptible shift, we would see the abdication of role of the philosopher of religion, and the assumption of a theological task and role.

One might ask, then, whether Henry’s refiguration leaves open the decidability of this relation between visible and invisible, or whether he instead takes a possible theological figuration thereof as the only actual, or even necessary, figuration thereof. If Kant has asked us not to remember, and to identify the

¹³ For Janicaud’s well-known “*constat*,” see his “Rendre à nouveau raison?,” in *La philosophie en Europe* (Paris, Gallimard, 1993).

metaphysics and theology prior to the *Critique of Pure Reason* as the locus of our dissatisfaction, Henry asks us instead to remember a medieval theology *as if it were our own*—in fact, not only to remember but to see ourselves in its image. Henry would establish the that-which-cannot-show-itself not only as a necessary lack but as an actual possession—not a possession of the philosophical imagination, in a variety of forms, but as the possession of a theological tradition, in a determinate form. We may need to be reminded of what we lack. Under the *guise* of a philosophy of religion, then, does Henry advance a phenomenological theology, one committed serially to the supersession of philosophy, of rival religious traditions, and indeed rival theological formulations (e.g., *theologia rationalis*) of a specifically Christian revelation? Does Henry in effect not continue, but collapse, the philosophy of religion; does the latter disappear into a particular theological tradition and program, its particular conceptual and religious world? Such questions, which can be decided only through the exegesis of Henry's late phenomeno-theological trilogy, must, and cannot be, deferred: in spite of its importance and influence as the founding source of the 'theological turn' of French phenomenology, the significance of Michel Henry's refiguration of divinity has only begun to be negotiated.