Phenomenality or Revelation:
Michel Henry’s Approach to Christianity

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An Optional Rapprochement?

With uncommon humility, Michel Henry offered a new beginning to philosophy, a new and adequate point of departure that changes everything. Over the course of a philosophical career spanning the second half of the twentieth century, he proposed a controversial definition of phenomenality, where “phenomenality” means, or seems to mean, “Revelation” in the full theological sense of the term: the self-revelation of God. This definition of phenomenality strikes some as problematic not merely because it seems to bring phenomenology and theology together in a way that many philosophers and theologians find surprising or undesirable,1 nor merely because it purports to show in all phenomenological rigor that revelation opens a way of access to God under the name of Life (a proposition which would remain uncontroversial if its demonstration were not elaborated in phenomenological terms, as a factum). Henry’s redefinition of phenomenality

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proposes further that humanity itself is at stake, for this same revelation or phenomenality antecedes each vivant, each “living being,” and bestows concrete character upon all finite life. Revelation or phenomenality, in Michel Henry’s sense of the term, arrives before and without reference to the world or its temporal horizon. Moreover, and more radically, the phenomenality of the world itself depends upon the prior work of revelation, and presupposes it constantly.

Like all new beginnings, the work of Michel Henry confronts philosophy with its most proper limits. In a manner akin to Descartes, or Kant, or Heidegger, or even St. Thomas, Henry sought such a new beginning; or rather, he saw it as necessary and required by the results of his own inquiry. Every beginning draws its sense from what comes before it, by starting from and appropriating as its own what precedes it. The more the thought in question counts truly as fundamental, the more lays at stake in it. The smallest reappraisals culminate in the most important breaks and discontinuities, and yet these remain most faithful to what has gone before, and the most continuous. For Henry, a problem of great consequence in the history of philosophy concerns the effort to achieve an adequate determination of humanity. This problem is the theme of each laborious engagement he takes up with his philosophical predecessors. He sees everything at stake in it.

From the outset, Henry takes the “meaning of the being of the ego,” as a first question for philosophy, and Heidegger’s treatment of this question stands as the antithesis of his effort. In The Essence of Manifestation, Henry sought the answer to this question through a “phenomenology of the ego.” In the course of this work, a labor of nearly 12 years, he came to see that this question could not be adequately answered in the terms proposed by previous philosophy, with Kant and Heidegger as exemplary cases of this inadequacy. Both modes of thought, both the “philosophy of consciousness” and the “philosophy of being,” prove incapable of treating the problem of the ego, because both presuppose that “appearance” (die Erscheinung) refers to the “world.” This reference to the world, always implicit in the concept of “appearance,” means that the thing or object to which the appearance refers remains a transcendent content, where its transcendence stands as the condition of its appearance. “Transcendence,” according to Henry, names the distance that intrudes between what appears and how it appears, a distance both phenomenological and ontological, since what appears in its light appears, and is, foreign. To this extent, something other than appearance—“thought,” for

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2 He will later develop this argument by clarifying that appearance not only refers to the world insofar as the world itself is what appears, but also insofar as what appears does so according to the world’s way of appearing, or phenomenality.

3 Thus in a decisive text from the Second Edition of the Critique of Pure Reason concerning the application of the categories to sensible objects in general, Kant writes, “we must order the determinations of inner sense as appearances in time in just the same way as we order those of outer sense in space; hence if we admit about the latter that we cognize objects by their means only insofar as we are externally affected, then we must also concede that through inner sense we intuit ourselves only as we are internally affected by our selves, i.e., as far as inner intuition is concerned we cognize our own subject only as appearance but not in accordance with what it is in itself” (Kant, Kritik der reinen Vernunft, B 156 [Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, 1991], p. 209).
example—must do the work of allowing appearance to appear—of making appearance possible. Philosophy thus arrives at an untenable predicament in which a foreign element supplies the content of what is properly one’s own, the “self” as such. As we will see more clearly in what follows, this powerlessness of the standard concept of phenomenality to treat the problem of the ego underlies and motivates Henry’s entire philosophical itinerary.

The initial steps on this path are so laborious because they demand a more adequate determination of phenomenality, a determination that leads ultimately to a redefinition of the concept. The founding principle of phenomenology, “so much appearance, so much being,” remains for Henry “purely formal” and “indeterminate.” The principle purports to establish a correlation between appearance and being, one that holds so strongly that appearance in itself provides not merely an adequate substitute for being, or merely some reference to being, but directly is as such. The phenomenological task, in his view, is not to establish this correlation by contriving some path that extends from appearance to being, and then following it. Rather, phenomenology must secure for itself an appearing that would appear in itself, by itself, and on its own, a self-appearing, such that what appears, and how it appears, coincide absolutely and without condition. For Henry this notion of pure phenomenality, which he also calls revelation, or manifestation, does not presuppose or conform to any so-called a priori conditions for appearing. The way of access to appearing begins nowhere else but with appearing: “the essence of appearing… consists in the fact of effectively appearing,” in “the pure fact of appearing as such.”

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 259). In a footnote, he confirms, “inner sense is affected by ourselves,” and in § 25, “Now since for the cognition of ourselves, in addition to the act of thinking…a determinate sort of intuition, through which the manifold is given, is also required, my own existence is not indeed appearance (let alone mere illusion), but the determination of my existence can only occur in correspondence with the form of inner sense…and I therefore have no cognition of myself as I am, but only as I appear to myself” (Kant, Kritik der reinen Vernunft, B 158 ff. [260]).


5 Michel Henry here cites Descartes, Principes, I, 8: “Nous sommes, par cela seul nous pensons.” In the previous section (ibid., I, 7), Descartes states that thinking alone, “at the very time when it is thinking,” exists. See Descartes, Principles of Philosophy, in The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, vol. I, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Soothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 195 [Descartes, Principia Philosophiae, in AT VIII, A 7, 7-8]. For Henry, the “the sum is never posited without being legitimated by a prerequisite, and what is most remarkable is that this prerequisite is not being or the meaning of being, but appearing” (see his “Le christianisme: une approche phénoménologique,” in Phénoménologie de la vie, t. IV. Sur l’éthique et la religion [Paris: PUF, 2004], 97). One must notice, although Henry does not cite him here, that Kant will interpret this principle in the opposite direction. “The I think expresses the act of determining my existence” (See Kant, Kritik der reinen Vernunft, B 157 [260]: “Das, Ich denke, drückt den Actus aus, mein Dasein zu bestimmen”).

The distinctive fecundity of this approach to the question of phenomenality arises in constant opposition to another mode of phenomenality, which Henry calls the appearing of the world. According to the world’s phenomenality, characterized by transcendence and “phenomenological distance,” what appears differs from the appearing in which it appears. Henry calls these two opposed modes of phenomenality “world,” and “life,” and the principle of their difference, the “duality” or “duplicity” of appearing. As his philosophy develops, he extends this principle to other domains of thought, in order to test how far it proves capable of resolving perennial and intractable philosophical problems, including human embodiment, the problem of action, the definition of the soul, aesthetics, or culture, and finally Christianity itself. Yet this last confrontation brings Henry’s phenomenology up against its own limits, and forces it to reestablish its own beginning, by confronting it with problems it alone is incapable of resolving. It is here that the rapprochement with theology takes on its distinctive meaning, since theology in a different way finds itself confronted with the “same problems.”7

The specific form of congruence between phenomenology and theology constitutes one of the original contributions of Henry’s work, and also perhaps the most difficult to understand, yet no direct treatment of it has been given. The purpose of this essay is to clarify and interpret the “essential congruence”8 that Henry claims to find between the “phenomenology of life” and “Christianity,” and to show the path by which he arrives at this conclusion. In order to place his argument in its context, and to show how deeply rooted it is in the fundamental set of problems that shape modern philosophy, I begin with the conceptual and historical role that “appearance” has played in philosophy prior to Henry, before considering more precisely his own treatment of this concept. I will argue that the unity between phenomenality and revelation cannot be “understood,” cannot “appear,” in the way a logical unity does, in the irresistible evidence of a conclusion that must follow a valid and sound argument. It does not take form through any strict determination as such, as an act of comparing and contrasting two sets of objective properties, the methods of philosophy compared to those of theology, for example. Instead, Henry locates the unity of phenomenology and Christianity in an original and antecedent revelation from which both begin—Life’s own. The question of whether such a formulation of this unity is itself philosophical or theological can then be referred to another question: How far do philosophy and theology recognize themselves in it—which is to say, find each in the other their own proper point of departure?

Appearance and World

In recent phenomenology, the concept of “givenness” (Gegebenheit, donation) and its related concept “appearance” (Erscheinung, apparaitre), have been subject to

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8 Ibid.
renewed debate. The philosophical use of these concepts has been a subject of contention not simply because they play a significant role in the founding texts of phenomenology, nor merely because their meaning in those texts remains genuinely ambiguous. It is possible to conclude that these basic concepts have been wrongly interpreted through the subsequent development of phenomenology, leading either to pseudo-problems or other misappropriations. It is also possible to conclude that these concepts, and perhaps even phenomenology itself, have been contaminated from the beginning. On this view, if the concept of appearance can be salvaged at all, a re-description is necessary. One does not need to take a position in these debates to notice their ancient pedigree within philosophy. The meaning of “appearance” in the definition of the real, and the use of this concept in philosophy, as a way of access to the real, has taken many intonations, which well antecede the advent of phenomenology. So before one can decide whether and how phenomenology or philosophy might approach revelation through the concept of appearance, one must first clarify what “appearance,” means or can mean.

The concept of appearance plays a significant role in the development of modern thought, from the onset of empirical philosophy through the rational criticisms of empiricism in the work of Leibniz and Wolff. By the time it occupies a central role within Kant’s Transcendental Aesthetic, its meaning has shifted and narrowed, from designating a general manifestation of anything at all, to a strictly-defined concept. In its narrow sense, the term “appearance” in Kant refers to an “undetermined object of an empirical intuition.” As an object, this appearance is the correlate of the affection of finite intuition. In this narrower and stricter sense, insofar as such an object is undetermined, any affection by such an object is, as Heidegger says, “stripped of thinking (determining).” To this extent, an appearance, as it functions in Kant, is in need of thinking in order to acquire its specificity and determinate character, as matter requires form, in more ancient language. Perhaps for this reason, Kant also employs the term “appearances” in a wider sense, as a name for that which thinking makes apparent. Nevertheless, appearance always falls on the side of sensibility; thought can never produce or posit an appearance. An appearance must first be given, and can be given only by

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10 “...and because it can lead to claims that ‘substantialize,’ ‘absolutize,’ or ‘autonomize’ appearance, and make it into a principle of truth in and for itself—independently, apparently, of any ontological reference” (Benoist, “Les vestiges du donné,” 100, 86).


12 Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 22 [31-32].

13 See for example, Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 89, B 121 ff, B XXVII; cited in Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 22 [32].
affecting sensibility, whether that affection takes form through the so-called inner sense or through outer sense.

This notion of “appearance” for Kant always stands in necessary connection to finite intuition, which supplies it with its temporal and spatial determinations. Before it can acquire these necessary conditions, an appearance must first be given, of course. But by delimiting the conditions of appearance according to an empirical principle of spatial and temporal individuation, philosophy can then anticipate the possibility of any experience simply by reference to these supposedly necessary conditions. One can determine the conditions of possible experience in advance, a priori. Appearance thus acquires a strange status verging on mere formality, as though it comes in only after the fact to confirm what philosophy determines for it in advance; and this strange distortion in meaning occurs at the very moment its concrete and necessary character has been affirmed: “that which is not appearance cannot be an object of experience.”

Another important characteristic of “appearance” arises in another sense in Kant, insofar as he separates appearance strongly from the “thing-in-itself,” to which it supposedly refers. This well-known distinction is indispensable for his entire critical philosophy. The human being has no access to the world other than through sensibility. And the sensibility that gives me the world also gives me myself, and in the same way; but sensibility gives only appearances; only things as they appear to us, not as they are in themselves. Overlapping this distinction, and as a consequence of it, a more problematic distinction arises. A gap is interposed between an appearance and that of which it is supposed to be an appearance, which “in itself” remains inaccessible. If the distance between appearance and thing-in-itself raises a question about the “adequacy” of the appearance as such, it is a question to which Kant thinks we cannot know the answer. “In the world of sense,” he says, “however deeply we inquire into objects, we have to do with nothing but appearance.” Nevertheless, Kant must maintain that appearance has some real connection to the object, and Kant must maintain this connection in order to preserve the objective status of appearance. In the Opus Postumum, he goes so far as to claim that these (appearance and thing-in-itself) are “the same object,” merely represented in two different ways. One can notice the tension that arises between the weight assigned to appearance as the sole means of access to the real, and the inadequacy of this access, which must appeal first to reason, to the categories of thought, in order to acquire specific determinacy, and then to the thing-in-itself, in order to acquire its reference to the world.

Before turning to consider what shifts then occur in the phenomenological approach to the concept of appearance, which in some way aim to deal with the

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14 Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 246, B 303 [345].
16 Kant, *Opus Postumum*, C 551; also cited in Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 23 [32].
The aforementioned inadequacy, it is worthwhile to note the role that Kant’s conception plays in his definition of “revealed” or “historical,” religion, for which he reserves the generally theological term *Offenbarung*. His practical philosophy and his conception of religion run together, insofar as both articulate a concept of pure rational religion in terms of a disposition toward the moral law. To this extent, although Kant conceives of “historical” or “revealed” religion as a necessary starting point for faith, he considers any dependence on an “historical appearance,” as ultimately a mistaken source for right moral action, “a foreign influence to which we remain passive.” In his view, a pure rational idea of the moral law is functionally equivalent to the true content of religion. For this reason, Kant wishes to separate categorically the idea of an historical and empirical appearance from a notion of a “prototype” [*Urbild*] of the moral idea of reason: “faith in this very same prototype according to its appearance (faith in the God-man) is not, as empirical (historical) faith, one and the same principle of a good life conduct (which must be totally rational).” Understood correctly, the only difference between religion and practical reason, whose principle is one and the same, according to Kant, is whether the principle is represented as proceeding from God, or as proceeding from the human being. “In the end,” he maintains, “religion will gradually be freed of all empirical grounds of determination.” However, in a surprising shift, Kant then renames this new notion of a pure rational religion “a revelation (though not an empirical one) permanently taking place within all human beings.” Such a revelation would not be a revelation of what God is in himself, which for Kant remains “unsuited to a revelation humanly comprehensible.” Nevertheless, without commenting further on it here, one can

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17 On this point, Kant follows Spinoza in seeing the essential content of religion to consist in a notion of “obedience,” but rather than separating this idea of morality from reason, as Spinoza does, Kant conceives it precisely as the rational idea of religion. See Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), 168 ff: “The domain of reason, as we have said, is truth and wisdom, the domain of theology is piety and obedience.” And, *ibid.*: “by theology I here mean, in precise terms, revelation insofar as it manifests Scripture’s objective as we have stated it, that is, the way of achieving obedience, or the dogmas of true piety and faith.”

18 *Kant, Religion within the Boundaries of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6: 118, 148. Kant’s 1793 work should be read in conjunction with Fichte’s 1792 *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), which seeks to deduce a pure concept of revelation from the categories of reason, and to demonstrate the criteria for ascertaining its divinity. See *ibid.*, esp. § 14, “The possibility of receiving a given appearance as divine revelation,” 118-30 (Emphasis added).

19 *Kant, Religion within the Boundaries of Pure Reason*, 6: 119, 149 (Kant’s emphasis).


22 *Ibid.*, 6: 142, 167. Although I do not deal directly with his argument here, Hegel takes up the question of revelation in his own way, further working out the logic begun with Kant. Hegel makes use of the concept of “Erscheinung” in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in his *Logic*, as well as his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. One can see clearly that Hegel is interested in conceiving revelation in the Christian sense as a phenomenon in the empirical sense of the term. But in a departure from Kant, Hegel broadens the meaning of appearance to include not only the object of a sensible intuition, but the concept in itself. The revelation of God is the manifestation of the concept
notice that Kant seeks to establish another concept of “revelation,” one freed from a notion of empirical individuation or history, but one which is nevertheless proper to subjectivity and to a distinctive but unspecified temporality. The relation to this alternative “revelation” quite concretely determines the human being that wills it freely.

Before turning to Henry, we must notice that it is within the context of the resurgence in Kantian philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century that a new conception of “appearance” emerges in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. He opens a new way of approaching the rational determination of appearance, not in terms of a categorial elaboration of the conditions for possible experience, but with a description of the categories in their direct connection to the appearances given in concrete experience. In contrast to Kantian or Neo-Kantian thought, Husserl elaborates a notion of appearance that can be caught in the act, as it were, by stepping back from the natural course of perception of the world, and turning instead toward those acts of perception themselves. This phenomenological reduction purports to make possible a re-presentation of original givenness, and thereby a new way of access to appearance. “When the lived experience which, at any particular time, comes into reflective regard it becomes given as actually being lived, as existing now.”

In an historical appearance. Although less important for Husserl’s initial writings, and for philosophy in Germany in the early part of the 20th century, Hegel plays an important role in the reception of phenomenology in France, through the work of Jean Wahl and Jean-Paul Sartre, notably.

In the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl delineates three senses of the term “appearance.” These distinctions can be found in Section 5 of the Appendix on “External and Internal Perception.” Appearance can have the sense of a “concrete intuitive experience (the intuitive presented or represented character of a given object for us).” Appearance can also have the sense of “the intuited (appearing) object, taken as it appears, here and now, e.g. this lamp as it counts for some percept we have just performed.” Finally, and in a misleading way, appearance can mean “the real (reelen) constituents of appearances in sense one [above], i.e., those of the concrete acts of appearing or intuiting, ‘appearances’” (Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. John N. Findlay, ed. Dermot Moran [London/New York: Routledge 2001], 342). Husserl elaborates on this third sense of appearance in detail. For him, “appearance” is nearly synonymous with “intuition.” The act of intuition seems to mean “appearing,” such as when Husserl writes of “the intuited (appearing) object” or “concrete acts of appearing or intuiting.” A latent tension arises here, insofar as the transitive verb “intuiting” and the participle “intuited” are both rendered by the intransitive “appearing.” The tension consists in the disparity between what appears and how it appears. These indications occur in a context in which Husserl distinguishes three different senses of appearing. The second sense, which for Husserl is the proper phenomenological sense of “appearing,” is the only sense in which appearing is not synonymous with intuiting, but instead requires an additional act: “taking as” or “counting for.” This slippage in the meaning of appearing can seem problematic, insofar as one of the principle discoveries of the *Logical Investigations* was its way of rendering the categories themselves apparent in acts of intuition, a discovery that would seem in jeopardy if these categories cannot count for appearances, but only “taking as” or “counting for” such appearances. In each case, an appearance gains its phenomenal character through the intentional act. As for Kant, an appearance is an object of empirical intuition; but in a departure from Kant’s primary usage, “appearance” in Husserl’s sense of the term captures not merely the given object, but the entire structure of the intentional act that aims at this object.

originally in the normal course of perception no longer stands outside or transcendent to consciousness, according to Husserl, but now becomes a mode of givenness really inherent in each mental act. Husserl claims that appearance is “immanent” in this particular form of reflective act, which he calls “the perception of something immanent… with respect to what it… makes given originarily.” In an echo of Hegel but with a distinct inflection, “consciousness” itself “appears” or is given: “My consciousness of whatever sort, is originarily and absolutely given not only with respect to its essence, but also with respect to its existence.”

By broadening the concept of appearance, or at least that of givenness, and by showing a new way of treating it, Husserl purports to open to philosophy a distinct approach to the real life of the ego. “Appearance” now also means the appearance of the ego as such, or at least the ego in its concrete, temporal connection to the world: “The stream of lived experiences which is mine, of the one who is thinking… as soon as I look at the flowing life in its actual present and, while doing so, apprehend myself as the pure subject of this life… I say unqualifiedly and necessarily that I am, this life is, I am living: cogito.” This shift in perspective away from a generally Kantian framework is important because it underlies what is at stake in phenomenology.

Through this method, Husserl purports to capture not merely some sequence of objects of experience, but to demonstrate objectivity as such. Husserl initially gives the name “categorial intuition” to this kind of perception. The connection between the categories and objects given in intuition does not depend upon pure intuition or the doctrine of conditions of possible experience, as for Kant, nor do categories become in Husserl a kind of sensory data. The objectivity in question does not arise from sensibility but from the very structure of intentional consciousness, made evident through the so-called reduction. Although its status as an “appearance” may be in question, this objectivity is nevertheless not only given, but self-given, or as Heidegger puts it, “objectivity which gives itself.”

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26 Ibid., 101 [85].
27 Although it stems from a discovery of a particular structure of intentionality, which Husserl learned from Brentano, Husserl’s phenomenology is irreducible to either empirical or rational psychology. See, e.g., Franz Brentano, Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint, ed. Oskar Kraus and Linda L. McAlister, trans. Antos C. Rancurello et al. (London/New York: Routledge, 1995); see also Charles Renouvier, Traité de psychologie rationelle d’après les principes du criticisme (Paris: Colin, 1912).
28 Husserl, Ideas I, vol. II, V, § 8, 100 [85].
29 See Husserl, Logical Investigations, 93: “If the peculiar character of intentional experiences is contested, if one does not want (will) to admit what for us is most certain (was uns als das Allersicherste gilt), that being-an-object consists phenomenologically in certain acts in which something appears, or is thought as our object, it will not be intelligible how being-an-object can itself be objective to us” (Translation modified).
We thus arrive at a conception of phenomenality proper to Husserl, and with it, at Heidegger’s point of departure for a critical reappraisal of this position. In Husserl’s sense of the term, as he will later define it, “phenomenality” refers to the “correlation… between appearance and what appears as such.” This correlation is apprehended in categorial intuition. To the extent that phenomenology succeeds in re-presenting the originally given, it does so by uncovering the structure of givenness. For Heidegger, however, the directedness of intentionality is not in fact original, but implies a more fundamental and antecedent involvement in the world. To this kind of involvement, as a kind of “teleology that is immanent to intentionality,” Heidegger gives the name “care.”

Our purpose here is not to outline each step on the path Heidegger follows in his departure from Husserl, which has been widely commented upon, but rather to highlight the direction of this path, and perhaps the questions that motivate it. These questions are not always explicitly indicated in Heidegger’s texts. Nevertheless, one finds throughout his writings indications that, for him, the ultimate problem pertains to the connection between temporality and the categories, a connection that he himself seems hardly able to find words to articulate, but which he nevertheless intimates clearly. Two examples can serve to illustrate this direction. It is important as a point of contrast to the situation as we find it in Henry.

In a 1924 lecture on “the concept of time” to the Marburg Theological Society, Heidegger states, in passing: “The treatise… makes no claim to provide a universally valid, systematic determination of time, a determination which would have to inquire back beyond time into its connection with the other categories.” Here we find that a universally valid “determination of time” would somehow arise though a clarification of its connection to the categories; and this connection, whatever it may be, would both prove universal, and prove to be a determination of time (an answer to the question, “what is time?”). The idea for such a determination echoes Husserl, who in his 1905 lectures on time-consciousness showed the fecundity of phenomenology by treating time itself not only as a form of intuition, but as an object of intuition. Heidegger will tell us later that such a

demonstrable through sense perception. But they are demonstrable by way of an essentially similar type of fulfilment, namely, originary self-giving in corresponding dator acts...through non-sensory perception—through categorial intuition” (ibid., 60 [80]).


33Heidegger, Der Begriff der Zeit, in GA LXIV, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Mein: Klostermann, 2004), 2.

question provided the underlying impetus for *Being and Time* as well as for *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. In the “Preface to the Fourth Edition” of the latter work, a preface written in 1973, Heidegger writes of his former preparation for his lectures on Kant in 1927, “my attention was drawn to the chapter on Schematism, and I glimpsed therein a connection between the problem of Categories, that is, the problem of Being in traditional metaphysics, and the phenomenon of time.”

As we see in the text of the *Kantbook*, one specific connection between the categories and temporality is that each of the categories is translated into a temporal relation in the so-called “schematism.” The categories, and reason itself, are rooted in time. In other words, for Heidegger, the categories of reason can be re-described as temporal relations. “Causality,” for example, equivalent to the necessary connection of before and after; “substance,” the “persistence of the real in time,” and so forth. One might say that these relations “qualify” or “form” all appearance. On this basis, Heidegger can then demonstrate reason’s finite and inescapably historical character. But the problem of the relation between temporality and appearance is a genuine difficulty, one that Heidegger’s treatment of this problem does not adequately resolve. Which comes first, time or appearing? Which determines the other? This problem is important, in turn, if one seeks to arrive at a concept of appearance that would be unconditioned, a self-revelation or self-givenness in the strong sense; in such a conception, not even time can provide the conditions under which appearance appears. Heidegger, of course, has no ambition to think the unconditioned; but his argument does culminate in the controversial thesis that the transcendental imagination is the common root of sensibility and the understanding. Without commenting further on that argument here, one can simply note that it was controversial in part because it made the imagination itself the origin of the transcendence of the world, in a kind of seismic colonization of the sciences by the humanities, one that has made a harmonious relation between them difficult to reconceive.

Against this background, we may now ask: if philosophy has subsumed the concept of revelation under the “category” of appearance, then what meaning has philosophy thereby conferred upon revelation? How far does this reduction of revelation to appearance, itself an effort to determine a mode of appearance proper to God, lead rather to the disappearance of God from philosophy? If it does, then on what terms does this disappearance become intelligible, and even foreseeable in retrospect? What rule must the phenomenon obey in order to become a phenomenon? What does it mean for an appearance to be given, to show itself, to reveal itself? In other words, in what does the phenomenality of the phenomenon consist? These questions show what is at stake when philosophy determines the meaning of appearance, or as the case may be, accepts implicitly an uncritical determination of this meaning. Only once these questions receive adequate answers is it possible to then ascertain whether “showing itself” means or can mean

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35 Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, xvii [XIV].
36 See *ibid.*, § 22, 104-7; Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 143, B 183.
the same thing for philosophy as it does for theology. Only then can we decide whether “phenomenality” can be coextensive with “revelation” in the strong sense of the term.

For Michel Henry, the occasion for a new definition of phenomenality stems from a fundamental ambiguity in the meaning of “appearance.” The ambiguity consists in the unclear use of the nominative or participial senses of the term, “appearance” or “appearing.” By focusing attention on appearing as such, Henry shifts the basic problem of phenomenology and accentuates the need for its resolution. The basic problem of phenomenology now consists in achieving an adequate concept of self-appearing, or self-manifestation. If Husserl conceives of phenomenology as the elaboration of the correlations that obtain between conscious acts of determination and the objects of these acts, and if Heidegger seeks to bring to light the finite conditions for the immanent teleology of these acts, Michel Henry cannot be understood as seeking to formulate any new way of determining any concrete appearance that would rival these. Rather, Henry must be understood as seeking to determine what constitutes the effectiveness of any such determination.

The Duplicity of Appearing

We have seen how the concept of “appearance” has been defined at several important moments in Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger. In each case, appearance has been subjected to certain conditions. These conditions crop up even and most strikingly at those points when “what appears” is said to “give itself” or to “show itself,” and even, to “reveal itself.” Broadly speaking, in Kant, these conditions are the forms of pure intuition, and finally the universal form of time; in Husserl, appearance receives its determination, first from the form of time, as an empirical appearance, and then according to the structure of intentionality; in Heidegger, though he steps away from empirical appearance with a view to what “announces itself” or “shows itself” in it, phenomenality obeys the fundamental law of original Ek-stasis. Phenomenality, for Heidegger, begins with “world.” The world in this sense is not “what appears” to a subjective consciousness, transcendental or otherwise. The world is that which determines, before the fact, before any ego or subject, what it means for something to “be there,” which the privileged phenomenon of anxiety discloses. Each of these figures has delimited the conditions under which, or through which, or according to which a phenomenon appears. And in a sense this is fitting, since the very term phenomenology, as Heidegger tells us, suggests that the phenomenon, or appearance, obeys a reason, that its conditions are reason’s own conditions.

Before considering Michel Henry’s severe criticisms of this sequence of thought, we can notice already that “phenomenality” in any of these senses does

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37 The German Erscheinung also contains the ambiguity, as does the French apparence, which Michel Henry, in order to clarify its meaning, renders apparaître. See Henry, “Quatre principes de la phénoménologie,” 78-104.
38 Heidegger, Being and Time, § 7.
not and cannot mean “revelation” in the theological sense. The concept of revelation, which these texts also employ, contains an implicit meaning, namely that what does the revealing, so to speak, comes from the side of revelation. Insofar as revelation always means self-revelation, its specification as self-revelation is redundant. This redundancy is indisputable in the theological signification of the term, but also perhaps in the philosophical. If phenomenality can mean only what it means for Kant, Husserl, or Heidegger, this “phenomenality” cannot also mean “revelation,” in either its philosophical or theological senses, for two reasons: First, this phenomenality in each case refers to the world, which never appears on its own or of its own initiative; second, in each of these figures, appearance obeys conditions that disqualify it from “counting as” revelation in the strict sense. “Counting as” must here receive quotation marks, because even this notion implies a set of criteria for selection, and these criteria, rather than revelation itself, would then determine its status as revelation. Any rapprochement between revelation and phenomenality thus seems out of the question.

If Michel Henry succeeds in bringing phenomenality together with revelation (for him, at least at the outset of his work, these terms verge on synonymy) he does so through a distinctive conception of phenomenality. This phenomenality, which he calls “life,” is in his view fundamental in the strong sense, in that it operates prior to the “phenomenality” known by the philosophical tradition, before any “world,” before ontology, and in the end, before phenomenology itself. What sense can such phenomenality have, and how does it stand in relation to phenomenality in its classical meaning? Phenomenality or revelation in Henry’s view has nothing in common with “appearance” in the standard sense, other than to be presupposed by it. “It is only from appearing, and in as much as appearing appears, that anything else is capable of being.” “Only if appearing appears first in itself and as such can something, whatever it may be, appear in turn, show itself to us.” There can “be” things, real things imbued with real meaning, the world in all its wondrous diversity, only in life. The phenomenology of life must therefore be understood in the subjective sense of the genitive. The phenomenology of life does not first determine some object among others, one that it designates with certain objective properties, such as moving, or even self-moving, which it then calls “life.” It means rather that life’s phenomenality in its concrete effectiveness must determine phenomenology’s own phenomenality, its own way of showing.

Henry’s path toward a conception of “life” as self-manifestation or self-revelation is critical and negative. The self-giving character of life appears in the absence of all effort at determination. In this sense, one must see that Henry does not determine the phenomenon in an abstract or theoretical way. When he writes of a “pure” phenomenality, this in no way means any kind of theoretical purity. It

39 It is striking, and it should not be ignored, how much a problem of this sort figures into the debates in Catholic and Protestant theology (Ratzinger, Rahner, Barth, Pannenberg and Schillebeeckx, etc.) over the meaning of revelation in the 1950s, leading up to the Second Vatican Council.
41 Henry, “Phénoménologie de la vie,” in Phénoménologie de la vie, t. I, 60.
means almost the opposite: without prior theoretical determinations, of its own
accord. The first half of Henry’s early work, The Essence of Manifestation, is
negative in this sense. It aims to sever from phenomenality all prior conditions
other than its own, whether of intuition, thought, consciousness, being, or any
horizon of presence, up to and including the very form of time. But precisely in
and through this absence of determination, appearing shows its positive character,
as auto-affection, as transcendental affectivity, and finally as transcendental life.
In its way of revealing itself, affectivity is the materiality, or better, the very
material, of phenomenality.

In The Essence of Manifestation, which takes up the question of the “being
of the ego,” Henry determines the meaning of this being as ipseity, where “ipseity”
means just “self-revelation.” Ipseity, from the Latin root ipse, means the simple
fact of being oneself. But in the work of Henry, the term has a specifically
phenomenological sense. Ipseity has nothing to do with an empirical determination
or principle of individuation, according to which “being oneself” would gain its
unity through the logical principle of identity, or its factual character, its givenness,
through an empirical principle of spatio-temporal individuation. On the contrary,
ipseity arises in and as the affection of oneself, where selfhood is not a matter of
some substantial self that is affected by who knows what, but rather being-affected
constitutes at once the form and the content of selfhood. Thus, in The Essence of
Manifestation, for example, Henry defines affectivity as “the universal form of all
experience in general and as the form of this form.”

These may seem like strictly philosophical or conceptual determinations,
and therefore abstract—and philosophically speaking, they are—but their content
is anything but philosophical. Pain, for example, reveals itself in pain and only in
that way, and joy shows itself only in joy. What shows itself in it is what it is, its
own content, “showing itself in the appearance it makes of itself, and exhausting
itself in this appearance... in the positivity of its bare and irrefutable
phenomenological being, which cannot be questioned in any way.” Life shows
itself only in and through life. Its phenomenological structure is the immediate as
such, absolute immanence. Its phenomenological effectiveness is its own doing,
and what it reveals is itself.

"To the extent that affectivity reveals as affectivity, in itself and as such, and
to the extent that the mode of phenomenological presentation of the
revelation that it determines proposes itself as essentially affective, that
which it shows, the content of the revelation that finds in it its essence, is
affectivity itself... the effectiveness of this revelation, its own
phenomenality, its substance, and finally the appearing that it determines
and in which it realizes itself: to be its own content."

42 Henry, L’essence de la manifestation, § 57.
43 Ibid., 694.
44 Ibid., 693.
Henry puts this in other terms earlier in the text, when he also says that, “the source of revelation, the power which produces it, is neither beyond revelation nor its effectiveness, but rather constitutes its effectiveness and hence reveals it…. Life testifies to itself, it itself gives testimony about what it is. The self-witnessing of life, the testimony which it makes concerning itself is its essence, its revelation.”

We can thus see why the conditions that philosophy and phenomenology have imposed upon appearing, or suppose they find alongside it, must be rejected. It is not their theoretical status, or even their status as conceptual or rational determinations of thought, that Henry finds problematic, but rather their phenomenological structure. “Exteriority,” “transcendence,” “the outside,” each of these are for Henry names for the phenomenality of the world, where no revelation, no self, and no life can arise, because this mode of phenomenality reveals what it does always and only outside itself, indifferent to it, and independent of it. But phenomenology and philosophy generally prove powerless in another way as well. Not only can philosophy not determine the conditions of affectivity, it cannot add or subtract from such affectivity by conferring on it a “meaning.” Thus, for example, “no meaning given to the Being of suffering can change anything in its regard or in any way diminish the weight of its presence or parody its ‘truth’.”

Henry’s conception of phenomenality thus stands in antithetical relation to phenomenality in its classical sense, which he defines strictly as the phenomenality of the world. The antithesis that arises between these two modes of phenomenality has a specific character that must be understood before we can achieve any adequate assessment of its implications for philosophy or theology. For Henry, the world has no independent phenomenality outside life. Where would it appear? The “world” in the sense in which it is opposed to life, is a world considered not merely as an independent reality, but as reality itself. In Henry’s view, this conception of the world begins at least with Galileo, and constitutes the point of departure for modern science. The “Galilean reduction” begins with the exclusion of specifically human qualities from its definition of the real, the exclusion of everything that depends upon human sensibility for its reality. Starting from this premise, and from this definition of reality, one cannot construct “the human” after the fact, with that from which it has been excluded at the outset. This is the first meaning of the antithesis between the phenomenality of life and the phenomenality of the world, the first sense of their “reciprocal exclusion.”

46 Ibid., 695.
47 See Galileo Galilei, The Assayer, in Selected Writings, trans. William R. Shea and Mark Davie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 119: “So it seems to me that taste, odour, colour, and so on are nothing more than pure names, as far as the objects in which we think they reside are concerned. Rather, they exist only in the mind that perceives them, so that if living creatures were removed, all these qualities would be wiped away and no longer exist.”
48 Henry, “Le christianisme: une approche phénoménologique,” 101: “The Galilean reduction, which eliminated sensible qualities from nature and, at the same time, sensibility, and the life implied or involved [impliqué] in every sensation.”
But this antithesis then becomes a phenomenological principle, which Henry calls the “duplicity of appearing.” He does not seek to replace one mode of phenomenality with another, but to show their duplicity in a phenomenological reassessment of all domains of thought and culture. To this extent, the duplicity of appearing in the end also opens the way for a new phenomenological approach to Christianity. The solidarity Henry finds between the phenomenology of life and Christianity consists in part in what he sees as the fundamental opposition between Christianity and the modern world, its common refusal of the Galilean reduction. If the access to God is only through life, and if life shows itself only in affectivity, then the exclusion of this mode of revelation, the exclusion of the human, as such, can lead only to the disappearance of God, as such, and also to the unintelligibility of life’s revelation. To this extent, and for this reason, the advent of phenomenology, insofar as it implies a return of the human to the field of phenomenality, also implies a return of the question of God.

**From Phenomenology to Christianity**

How must we now understand the theological import and status of Henry’s claims concerning “revelation”? This question seems best approached by following his own path, in order to grasp how the connections between phenomenology and theology (and between phenomenology and Christianity) arise in his work. What form do these connections take?

In his early writings, the answer to this question is less obvious. On the one hand, “revelation” in *The Essence of Manifestation* is not assigned a straightforwardly theological signification, at least not in the sense that historical or systematic theology might confer upon the term, though their problems concerning revelation may seem structurally analogous. In this work, Henry does not in any sense employ the methods or presuppositions of theology, understood as the systematic elaboration of a body of doctrines, dogmas or scripture. On the other hand, God does appear in this work, and does so from the beginning, under the figure of absolute life. Citations of scripture also appear, as do references to texts that contemporary scholarship has consigned to the history of theology (Augustine, Bernard, or Eckhart, for example). One might argue that, at least prior to the 1990s, Henry does not seem to acknowledge a rigid distinction between philosophy and theology, not because he adopts the methods and presuppositions of theology, but because he does not see the truth of theological doctrines or insights as fundamentally at odds with what phenomenology can and does discover of its own accord. But the connection between them is not yet systematic or explicitly defined.

Turning from the form to the content of his early work, how specifically does the identity of God and life arise? Henry sees a fundamental unity between the revelation of oneself and God’s revelation of himself, such that the latter happens under the modality of the former. In Henry’s early work, the question of God arises within the context of the question of the human. Meister Eckhart is the primary figure in whom he finds confirmation for his phenomenological account
of a unity between human and divine life: “God engenders himself as myself.”

But if the unity between the human essence and God is so strong, so “essential,” then what defends this philosophy from the charge of simple pantheism? These charges seem entirely misguided, because as Henry affirms always and everywhere only one absolute life, and ultimately also one living proper to life. Moreover, for Henry, the human as such gains concrete determination only in the absence of all possession, in a poverty that is not provisional but absolute. How far these claims constitute what one might call a “natural theology” is less clear in The Essence of Manifestation. The work presupposes neither the world nor the human being nor nature as such, but seeks to determine what it calls absolute ego, or “originary naturing.” Without offering a final answer to these questions here, it seems at least clear that the usual categories in which such criticisms arise, and at the limit, the “categories” themselves, do not offer help for interpretation. Outside the ipseity that for Henry constitutes the concrete matter of real and living unity, the categories as such apply only to a world that is unreal in principle. For this reason an external or objective comparison of phenomenology and theology proves of limited use and, in the end, irrelevant.

A further observation can be made concerning the use of the term “revelation.” Although it is not widely known, Henry changed the title of his masterwork from The Essence of Revelation, which had been the original heading of the summary prepared for his dissertation jury, to The Essence of Manifestation, the title of the work published in 1963. In the published work, the term “revelation” does not appear in any of the section headings until § 30, where it receives its “ontological determination… as immanence.” “Revelation” constitutes the theme from this point on, through the remainder of the work. Setting aside the fact that Henry later equates explicitly the terms “manifestation,” “revelation,” “phenomenality,” and “appearing” in this work, in his later usage, “revelation” seems to take on a meaning more fundamental than these other designations. To this limited extent, the terms “manifestation” or “phenomenality” refer to specific historical determinations, in Hegel or Heidegger, for example, and they depend upon the suppositions of monism. On the other hand, Henry retains the language of phenomenality to the end, and in this sense he also remains inscribed within the phenomenological tradition. But the final arche of phenomenality, and thus also its telos, is “Revelation.”

Nevertheless, one must explain not only how all of these terms later find synonymy, but also why Henry decides, and can decide, in the end, to change the title of his first magnum opus to The Essence of Manifestation. It is clear that revelation is for Henry the essence of phenomenality or manifestation. A first conclusion is thus that “revelation” does not acquire its meaning in terms of these other designations and their philosophical presuppositions; rather, they acquire

49 Meister Eckhart, Traité et sermons (Paris: Aubier, 1942), Sermo 6, 147 ff.
50 According to Barth, “Natural theology is the doctrine of a union of man with God existing outside God’s revelation in Jesus Christ” (Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961], II, I, 168).
51 Henry, L’Essence de la manifestation, 27.
their meaning from it. Revelation is the essence of phenomenality, but phenomenality is not the essence of revelation except ambiguously, since phenomenality, according to Henry, arises in two fundamentally opposed modalities, only one of which counts as self-revelation in the phenomenological sense of the word. A second conclusion follows, which seems to contradict the first: If revelation shows itself to be the essence of phenomenality, then a path must lead from the latter, correctly understood, to the former, from phenomenality to revelation. But this path is possible (the second conclusion is possible), only because revelation (the first conclusion) constitutes in itself its effectiveness. “The givenness of phenomena is possible only under the condition of a givenness of givenness itself, a self-givenness. This self-givenness is life.”

With this basic structural connection in mind, we can see more clearly the underlying impetus for Henry’s more explicit treatment of Christianity and theology in his last three books, *I am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity* (1996), *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh* (2000), and *Words of Christ* (2002). A significant shift occurs over the course of these works. In the first, the phenomenology of life is treated as an interpretive key to explicate Christianity’s own conception of itself, which nevertheless remains external to this phenomenological treatment. At this stage in the development of his argument, the one, phenomenology, serves as an interpretive principle of the other, Christianity. But by the time of *Incarnation*, Michel Henry has clarified that Christianity relies upon a revelation that antecedes it, much in the way that revelation antecedes phenomenology. The unity of phenomenality and revelation at this point is complete, not as a rapprochement that would be the work either of phenomenology or of Christianity, but as that which precedes them and which both alike presuppose.

A text from 1997, “Christianity: A Phenomenological Approach?” leaves ambiguous which is the interpretive principle of the other. Nevertheless, in this text we see the early indications of a shift. “The possibility of a relation to life,” Henry argues, “concerns phenomenology’s own relation to itself.” However, he continues, “It is not phenomenology that will give access to life. On the contrary, it is life revealing itself to itself that gives us access to it in this self-revelation…. In the beginning, and as this very beginning, God reveals himself… a phenomenology of life and Christianity are congruent to the point that, since the reality at stake in them is the same, their problems also are the same.” In the context of a discussion of *Incarnation*, Henry later will say that, with respect to their refusal to define humanity in terms of matter, Christianity and the phenomenology of life “appear… in perfect accord.” It is now the character of this accord, the form of their agreement, that Henry seems to know is at stake. In the earlier article, “Christianity: A Phenomenological Approach,” he characterizes a difference between one and the other as ways of considering two

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53 Ibid., 102-3.
54 Henry, “Réponse à Emmanuel Falque,” in *Phénoménologie et christianisme chez Michel Henry*, 172.
“aspects” of the same phenomenon, the relationship between life and living. Where the one deals with this relationship starting from life, the other considers this relationship starting from the living it engenders. Here the distinction between philosophy and theology is the distinction between two different approaches to the same question. The one starts from the point of view of dogmatic theology, from life and its series of “absolutes.” The other begins from the point of view of “living,” engendered in and through “life.” Here, Henry offers a phenomenological conception of dogma itself. The “passivity of thought with regard to a dogmatic content refers to a much more fundamental passivity: to the passivity of living with regard to life.” And here we also find a “question common to Christianity and to a phenomenology of life, the question of the relation of life to living, understood as interior to the process of life’s phenomenalization and, in the end, as identical to it.” At this point, through this notion of the “dual aspect” of life’s phenomenality, Henry as arrived at “the essential congruence of a phenomenology of life and Christianity.”

This congruence then takes on a new character in Incarnation, where we find that the relation between phenomenology and Christianity becomes a secondary and after-the-fact distinction. Here, Henry does not treat the relation of life and living as two different aspects of the same problem, as he had earlier. Rather, this relation in its entirety now antecedes both phenomenology and theology. At issue, for Henry, is the relation between finite and infinite life, between a life that cannot bring itself into its condition as living, and a life that can—and the immanence of the latter in the former. The task for a phenomenology of incarnation is to explain the relation between this finite and infinite life, how the latter comes before the former, such that this “coming before” arises within finite life, and makes it possible. “The properties of our finite flesh,” Henry says, “are explained by those of the infinite life of God.” The text of Incarnation refers to a path “beyond theology and phenomenology,” but the sense of this “beyond,” is rather that of a “before.” It is not an issue of overcoming the distinction between phenomenology and theology, nor is it a matter of confusing one methodology with another. Rather, it is a matter of a possibility of recognition, of each in the other, its own origin on its own terms. To recognize is not to be, however, and is even impossible on the presumption that it is.

A final moment in this trajectory arrives in Henry’s last work, Words of Christ. Here he proceeds to offer a kind of phenomenological analysis of the words of Christ, with a view to differentiating specifically those words the Christ speaks about himself, about who he is, in order to see how far their legitimacy might be tested. Their concrete, spoken character is of high importance here, and Henry’s emphasis is also placed on the possibility of hearing them. The principle or method of this approach is phenomenological, and the suppositions are those of a phenomenology of life. And yet the text does not “let” these words be what they

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56 Ibid., 104.
57 Ibid., 111.
58 Henry, “Réponse à Emmanuel Falque,” 173.
offer themselves to be. It purports to show them showing themselves demonstrating their own legitimacy. At this moment, the respective domains of phenomenology and “theology” retain, in some still unspecified way, a total distinction. Nevertheless, the one, the phenomenology of life, shows the other, but only as revealing itself—the revealing is the work of the other, of the Christ. The rapprochement between phenomenality and revelation here reaches an apex and takes on a new character. The words of Michel Henry slip into the words of Christ, or rather vice-versa, so that it is possible to ask; who is speaking? In reading this text, one finds oneself confronted with, and at the limit, constituted by, these words. Life’s revelation attains its most potent articulation in them.

The relation between phenomenality and revelation is here not any kind of logical identity or structural similarity. Nor is this relation established through any kind of affinity of properties the one might share with the other. The relation is one of permanent distinction and yet complete rapprochement, but this paradox cannot be understood in logical terms. Rather, the paradox is resolved in life alone, or rather in the words of Christ as they are heard: The discourse of Christ “makes the very Idea of truth vacillate, the idea that we have of ourselves and of everything that is.”

Separated-Being, Exteriority, Metaphysics

The concept of revelation at first seems strictly theological, accessible to reason perhaps, but only because it is first accessible through faith. But does philosophy have any method or means available to it for treating revelation in this sense? When philosophy does treat revelation, whether out of interest or disinterest, does it treat the same revelation that theology claims as its own point of departure? What means lay at our disposal for identifying this sameness or diversity, if not the philosophical category of identity itself? If the categories of reason must render a final adjudication, if all thought acquires coherence only through them, then any relation established between a philosophical truth and a theological one would amount only to a logical unity or, on the contrary, a logical diversity. Any unity between one revelation and another, between a philosophical determination and its theological counterpart, would remain a unity in name only. For the same reason, any difference said to ensue between these two concepts would also be limited to a difference in name only. How then does the category acquire this status, by what means and to what end? In what does such unity or distinction consist? Which discipline bears the privilege of deciding this boundary?

Michel Henry’s approach to the problem of the relation between phenomenality and revelation leads to a fundamental shift in the relation of philosophy to theology, and of both to the historical development of metaphysics. The rapprochement between phenomenality and revelation cannot be interpreted in terms of the presuppositions of the “being in general” of metaphysica generalis, since these conditions of being in general do not determine life’s phenomenality,

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59 Henry, “Archichristologie,” in Phénoménologie de la vie, t. IV, 118.
nor to they make possible such a determination. On the contrary, if taken as a way of access to revelation, as the principle of its intelligibility, these conditions prove to be an obstacle to that very intelligibility.

If the law of non-contradiction governs an un-crossable boundary that partitions philosophy and theology, then one must specify in what sense these two forms or modes of thought are inconsistent. If the inconsistency between philosophy and theology stems from two incongruent points of departure, then the contradiction between the one and the other is final and irrevocable, no matter what subsequent affinities or analogies may be found between them. If the divide runs from the beginning, the separation of philosophy and theology is fundamental and constitutive. On the one side, any truth attained by means of philosophy cannot, in the same sense, be attained by means of theology. On the other side, what revelation shows, it shows without rendering its way of showing intelligible to philosophy, however much philosophy might also glean new insight by supposing a truth it has not itself established.

If, on the contrary, the categories of thought, and if the principle of non-contradiction itself, do not precede this revelation, but follow from it, then perhaps a new way of laying the boundary between philosophy and theology can be found in it. If a rapprochement between phenomenality and revelation bears in an original way on both philosophy and theology, then such a rapprochement cannot arise after the distinction between philosophy and theology has been decided. If a rapprochement is necessary, in the strict sense of the term, this rapprochement must occur before the fact, so to speak, before any “philosophical” or “theological” determination arises. Insofar as this question concerns phenomenology, the meaning of this “before” must be phenomenological. As an initial indication, we might ask whether this “before” is anything other than the first principle of the phenomenological method: the “priority of appearing over being.”  

As we have seen, Henry takes this priority a step further when he insists that, “only if appearing appears first in itself as such, can something, whatever it may be, appear to us.”  

By showing, step by step, how the rapprochement with theology arises in Henry’s work, we can ask how far a phenomenology of pure phenomenality leads, of its own accord and necessarily, to a rapprochement with theology. The dangers of seeking such a rapprochement have been noted. As they pertain specifically to the question of God in Husserl, see the recent study by Emmanuel Housset, who cautions that “it is important not to yield to the temptations of historical rapprochements,” in Husserl et l’idée de Dieu (Paris: Cerf, 2010), 12 ff. While, in an earlier proposal that prepares in some way the overall debate, Jean-François Courtine also warns that, “one must first of all be on guard against any hasty assimilation or rapprochement and be content most often with homologies or analogies” (Jean-François Courtine, “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics of Religion,” in Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate, 125).
undetermined, with a theological understanding of revelation. A rapprochement in this sense not only does not violate the independence of philosophy or theology, it cannot violate this independence.\textsuperscript{63} It can have meaning only if and because this independence has been maintained. In other words, if a rapprochement were possible, this possibility would require and presume the original and persisting independence of philosophy and theology. Nevertheless, each side in the end would “recognize” in the other its own proper questions and, at the limit, the most fitting response to these questions. This recognition would not merely be possible, but necessary. The disjunction between phenomenality or revelation can be inclusive only if it is first exclusive.

Christian theology affirms the irreducibly historical character of revelation. By this, one understands that God has entered history by taking on humanity, “that he… was born… suffered… was crucified, died, and was buried… rose again” according to the dogmatic affirmation of the Christian faith. One way of construing this affirmation is that God, in Christ, is now accessible in the way that anything else in the world is accessible, that “revelation,” in this sense, simply opens a new way of access to God, who has now entered the world of space and time, as a being in the world and with others. To this extent, a knowledge of God is made possible through a knowledge of Christ, and one can attain a knowledge of Christ as one can have knowledge of any other man, and even attain a unity with him, and thus with God, through a kind of imitatio Christi. The salvation of humanity would thus consist in the simple fact of this revelation and in the response of humanity to it, in the handing on of its content, and the practice of its reception.

Nevertheless, these affirmations of the historical fact of revelation, and of its ongoing character, can take on a positivistic shade if the historical content then becomes the explanatory principle of its own possibility, the possibility of the world. If time does not precede life as its a priori condition of possibility, but follows from it as its concrete constitution, if time and the past itself have their reality only from life, then the terms of debate over the meaning of “revelation,” have been reversed in a way that must be understood. “The immanent generation of this carnal living Self, which is man in the proceeding of Life’s self-revelation in its Word, however invisible it may be, also concerns the world, if it confers on it its concrete effective content.” “This concrete and effective content of the world is precisely that of history, of real history, which is human history, the history of ‘living individuals,’ as Marx says… not the empty form of time, but its content.”\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{63} It remains to be shown precisely how far one must agree with Jean-Luc Marion, that the distinction between philosophy and theology is “a distinction which philosophy can perhaps no longer justify with as much assurance today as in the early modern period” (See Marion, “Remarks on the Use of Theology in Phenomenology,” [forthcoming]). One must also acknowledge, with Jean-Yves Lacoste, that “every withdrawal into our transcendental ignorance of God is, in many respects, anachronistic,” and furthermore “archaic,” to the point that “the theoretical problem of atheism is regressive” (Jean-Yves Lacoste, Experience and the Absolute [New York: Fordham University Press, 2004], 108-9).

\textsuperscript{64} Henry “Réponse à Emmanuel Falque,” 182.