

**“Spiritual Acoustics”:  
On Being In Common (Kierkegaard, Husserl, Henry)**

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Kierkegaard steadily maintains, against Lessing, that Jesus’s contemporaries had no advantage as regards faith merely because they had personal experience of him.<sup>1</sup> It is a view proposed both by Johannes Climacus and Anti-Climacus, as well as over Kierkegaard’s own signature; it is indirectly communicated and then directly communicated, and so the importance of becoming a true contemporary of Jesus can hardly be underestimated in the authorship, including the later journals.<sup>2</sup> When Michel Henry considers this motif in his *Phénoménologie matérielle* (1990) he says that it is one feature of what Kierkegaard calls “the strange acoustics of the spiritual world” [*l’étrange acoustique du monde spirituel*].<sup>3</sup> These acoustics are not those we learn about in physics: “the laws of being in common are not in fact those belonging to things and the laws of perception,” and this claim gives Henry an opportunity to continue a long standing argument with Husserl. For “here” and “there” in Henry’s account of inter-subjectivity have no relation to the inter-subjectivity that is explored in the fifth of the *Cartesian Meditations*. Indeed, Henry goes on to say, “This spiritual acoustics, which defies the laws of perception, defines our concrete relation to the other”; that is, it gives the “how” of the relation rather than the “what” or “why.”<sup>4</sup>

Henry is surely thinking of Anti-Climacus’s remark in *The Sickness unto Death* (1849) about the psychology of deep and persistent sin. (There are two French translations of the relevant expression: *l’étrangeté acoustique du monde spirituel*, *la bizarrerie des lois qui règlent les distances!* and *l’étrange rapport des distances dans le monde spirituel*.<sup>5</sup>) He had already commented on that powerful

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Kierkegaard’s books will be to the Princeton edition, ed., trans., and notes by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, and the first reference will give their number in the series and the year of publication; and all references to his journals will be to the Princeton edition of *Kierkegaard’s Journals and Notebooks*, ed. Bruce H. Kirmmse et al., except for when the relevant notebook or journal has not yet appeared in that series. In those instances, I will cite the earlier series, *Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk, 7 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976-78).

<sup>2</sup> See Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* (KW, VII, 1985), 69-70, 90-1, 104-6, 225-6, *Without Authority* (KW, XVIII, 1991), 158-9, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (KW, XII, 1991), I, 372-4, *Practice in Christianity* (KW, XX, 1991), 62-6, and “*The Moment*” and *Late Writings* (KW, XXIII, 1998), 287-92.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, trans. Scott Davidson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 115. Henry does not give a source for his quotation.

<sup>4</sup> Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 115.

<sup>5</sup> See Kierkegaard, *Traité du désespoir (La Maladie mortelle)*, trans. Knud Ferlov and Jean J. Gateau (Paris: Gallimard, 1932), 224, and *La maladie à la mort (Guérir du désespoir): un exposé psychologique chrétien pour l’édification et le réveil*, trans. Paul-Henri Tisseau, revue par Else-Marie Jacquet-Tisseau (Paris: Nathan, 2006), 154. Paul-Henri Tisseau’s sole translation appeared sometime in the 1940’s: no specific year is given.

work toward the end of his early treatise *L'essence de la manifestation* (1963), and I will turn to it a little later.<sup>6</sup> To despair sinfully, for Kierkegaard, is to hold that there is no divine forgiveness, and to think stubbornly that one must be a long way from God; yet such despair also amounts to being in a hand-to-hand fight with God. In 1849 Kierkegaard illuminated his point in a discussion of Luke 18: 9-14, the periscope of the tax collector and the Pharisee in the Temple. "What Scripture says about all tax collectors and sinners, that they kept close to Christ, applies to this tax collector also: simply by standing far off, he kept close to him, whereas the Pharisee in his presumptuous forwardness stood far, far off."<sup>7</sup> The life of the spirit is, Kierkegaard says, "so wondrously... acoustically constructed" and "the ratios of distance" are "so wondrously... established."<sup>8</sup> Now this religious topology, grounded in concerns about prayer and psychology, is itself a long way from the phenomenology of inter-subjectivity that Henry has in mind when he looks to Kierkegaard for support, and it might well be that he is thinking or half-thinking of another moment in the authorship when reference is made to acoustical illusions. Is there any?

There are two, one in the *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), given in the character of Johannes Climacus, and another in a journal entry published posthumously in *The Point of View* (1859). The former reference to acoustical illusion is the better known: someone hears the testimony that Jesus is God incarnate and is offended; the offense appears to come from reason yet actually issues from the paradox of an incarnate God. The latter occurs in the context of pantheism, which is an "acoustical illusion that confuses the *vox populi* [voice of the people] and the *vox dei* [voice of God]."<sup>9</sup> One can hear of a union of God and human beings, which is pagan and pantheist, and which is what one finds in Hans Lassen Martensen's somewhat Hegelian dogmatic theology, or one can hear of a union of God and a single man, which is Christianity.<sup>10</sup> If we take these two instances of "acoustical illusion" together, we can begin to see a habit of thought in Kierkegaard that can perhaps be expanded and help us to read him a little better. For example, we can see him responding to Feuerbach's thesis in *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) that "Man was already in God, was already God himself, before God became man, i.e.,

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<sup>6</sup> See Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, trans. Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 676-84.

<sup>7</sup> Kierkegaard, "Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays," *Without Authority*, 131. Also see Kierkegaard, "On the Occasion of a Confession," *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (KW, X, 1993), esp. 28.

<sup>8</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening* (KW, XIX, 1983), 114.

<sup>9</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Point of View* (KW, XXII, 1998), 123. In a related passage in *Practice in Christianity*, Anti-Climacus speaks of the same situation as an "optical illusion," 81-2. Also see Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 118, and *Journals and Notebooks*, 5, NB 7: 35-7.

<sup>10</sup> For Martensen, Christ is "not one individual among the many but is the absolute individual," which almost sounds Kierkegaardian, yet he adds that Christ "not only reveals the principle of the human race but is this very principle," which is precisely what Kierkegaard objects to in the Hegelian thought of the individual as one with his or her race and his or her times. See Martensen, "The Autonomy of Human Self-Consciousness in Modern Dogmatic Theology," in *Between Hegel and Kierkegaard: Hans L. Martensen's Philosophy of Religion*, trans. Curtis L. Thompson and David J. Kangas, intro. Curtis L. Thompson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 113.

showed himself as man.”<sup>11</sup> Not so, the Dane says: that is a pagan illusion.<sup>12</sup> The truth of the matter is that God assumed human flesh, became an individual man, not that human beings project our consciousness into the heavens and call it God. We will also find Kierkegaard talking often, especially in his final, fierce maturity, of Christendom as an optical illusion.

Already, then, we are feeling some peculiar vibrations that pass from Kierkegaard to Henry, or perhaps from Henry to Kierkegaard; for as will become apparent soon enough both philosophers are deeply concerned with our relations with dead spirits. When Kierkegaard writes of acoustical illusion or spiritual acoustics, he is thinking of echoes rather than reverberations.<sup>13</sup> Yet there may well be instances where he prolongs a motif and changes its timbre, as it were, by virtue of his proximity to another thinker, whether one to whom he is sympathetic (Lessing), one to whom he stands as a critic (Bishop Mynster), or one with whom he longs to be close (Christ). Certainly readers of Kierkegaard are well used to hearing different tones, timbres, pitches, and so on, in the voices of the pseudonyms.<sup>14</sup> We might also wonder if Kierkegaard, when echoing in Henry’s prose, is the same author who wrote in Copenhagen or is an acoustic illusion generated in Montpellier, or if it would be more accurate to say that Henry himself increases Kierkegaard’s spiritual reverberation in developing material phenomenology.<sup>15</sup> To be sure, there are also vibrations that bounce off Husserl. We are left in no doubt that, as far as Henry is concerned, Husserl is the unwitting victim of an acoustical illusion: the heart of phenomenology seems to be intentionality but in reality it is affect. Once we realize that, we are told, we will also finally be able to dismiss solipsism, affirm community, and produce a satisfying phenomenology of inter-subjectivity. One part of that problem is our relation with Jesus Christ, which is of profound importance, in different ways, to Kierkegaard and Henry.

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When Kierkegaard uses metaphors drawn from acoustics, he knows exactly what he is doing. As part of his studies at Copenhagen University he sat for the *examen philosophicum*, the second part of which required him to be tested in physics. He

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<sup>11</sup> See Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Prometheus Books, 1989), 50.

<sup>12</sup> See Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 217. Also see Jonathan Malesic, “Illusion and Offense in *Philosophical Fragments*: Kierkegaard’s Inversion of Feuerbach’s Critique of Christianity,” *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 62 (2007): 43-55.

<sup>13</sup> It needs to be kept in mind that on occasion Kierkegaard speaks of illusion in a positive way, as an ideal. See, for example, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age: A Literary Review* (*KW*, XIV, 1978), 67.

<sup>14</sup> See on this issue, Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993), esp. 100-7.

<sup>15</sup> There is a growing body of work concerned to investigate Henry’s uses of Kierkegaard. See, in particular, Nicole Hatem, “Le secret partagé: Kierkegaard-Michel Henry,” *Michel Henry. Pensée de la vie et culture contemporaine*, ed. Jean-François Lavigne (Paris: Beauchesne, 2006), 195-210; Jeffrey Hanson, “Michel Henry’s Problematic Reading of *The Sickness unto Death*,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 38 (2007) 3: 248-60, and “Michel Henry and Søren Kierkegaard on Paradox and the Phenomenality of Christ,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17 (2009) 3: 435-54.

earned an enviable grade, *laudabilis præ ceteris*, and kept a lively interest in the natural sciences, admiring them when they stayed within their legitimate limits and did not venture comprehensive explanations of being human. In the voice of Johannes Climacus we hear warnings against a wholesale trust in science.<sup>16</sup> Every so often one can be surprised when reading Kierkegaard to find more knowledge of physics than one would have thought was there: the treatment of cause and effect in the *Philosophical Fragments*, for example.<sup>17</sup>

Hans Christian Ørsted, whose experiments in acoustics were of considerable interest in Golden Age Copenhagen, taught Kierkegaard physics, and earned the admiration of his student. The regard was not consistently mutual, for the older man, when rector of the University, thought the younger scholar's dissertation on irony to be verbose and affected.<sup>18</sup> Later, Kierkegaard found that he could not bring himself to subscribe to Ørsted's romantic philosophy, with its intimate connection of science and religion. Earlier, he had interested himself in the man's physical features. In his journal for 1835 he writes that Ørsted's face has "always resembled a Chladni-figure that nature had touched in the right way," Ernst Chladni being the father of acoustics.<sup>19</sup> Chladni figures are complex patterns caused by vibrations in rigid surfaces, and are often very beautiful. In 1837 Kierkegaard returned to this acoustical figure when he remarked that, "the dance is the musical Chladni-figure, music made visible," and he did so again in his dissertation of 1841 and yet again as Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness unto Death* (1849) when the imagined person who follows the Socratic idea of sin, who grasps what is right and acts upon that assessment becomes "a Chladni figure for his understanding."<sup>20</sup> Such a person would be in harmony with himself, as Kierkegaard thought was the case with Ørsted.

"Spiritual acoustics": the expression knots together several threads that run through the authorship, in both the pseudonymous writings and those signed with the author's proper name:

- 1) First, acoustic illusion occurs in religious topology, in the sinner's relationship with God, which as Johannes Climacus tells us as early as *Either/Or* (1843), is always perplexed because "In relation to God we are always in the wrong."<sup>21</sup> It is so even for a martyr.<sup>22</sup> To expose this illusion, according to Anti-Climacus, is to recognize that a Christian's overwhelming effort in life must be to become an authentic contemporary of Jesus Christ, and not

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, I, 348.

<sup>17</sup> See Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, "Interlude."

<sup>18</sup> See Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 197. Ørsted was also known to Hans Christian Anderson, on whom he had an influence. See John L. Greenway, "'Reason in Imagination is Beauty': Ørsted's Acoustics and Anderson's *The Bell*," *Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries: The Culture of Golden Age Denmark*, ed. Jon Stewart (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 262-71.

<sup>19</sup> Kierkegaard, *Journals and Notebooks*, I, AA: 12 (1835). See Chladni, *Entdeckungen über die Theories des Klanges* (Leipzig: Weidmanns Erben und Reich, 1787), plates I-XI.

<sup>20</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates: Together with Notes of Schelling's Berlin Lectures* (KW, II, 1989), 26, 250. Also see *Journals and Notebooks*, I, DD: 69-70 (1837), and *The Sickness unto Death*, 93.

<sup>21</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* (KW, III and IV, 1987), II, 339. Also see *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (KW, XV, 1993), 268, 277, 283.

<sup>22</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 271.

merely remain consonant with those whose lives happen to overlap with his or her own. Sometimes one hears a worldly saying echoed in a distorted way, and Kierkegaard does not thematize it as an acoustic illusion, as when he tells us, in a phenomenological key *avant la lettre*, that “In the spiritual sense, the road is how it is walked.”<sup>23</sup> In Christian space, Anti-Climacus insists, to take one small step away from God is to remove oneself infinitely far from him.<sup>24</sup> The opposite is also true. As Kierkegaard tells his journal in 1854, “*The more the phenomenon, the appearance, expresses that here God cannot possibly be present, the closer he is.*”<sup>25</sup>

- 2) Second, we are alerted to acoustic illusion when considering rhetorical strategies, sometimes comic or ironic ones, practiced in the authorship, and this in at least three ways. (a) When we approach Christianity in a philosophical attitude the complaints we hear from our reason about belief in Christ are really effects that come from a hidden cause, hearing the Word of God. (b) Johannes Climacus points to what seems to be an objective appraisal of Christianity and then indicates that it is an illusion: the Christian faith is subjective, “the existential.”<sup>26</sup> (c) Also, it appears as though the authorship starts from the simple and proceeds to the complex, from aesthetics to religion, but in reality it commences with the complex and proceeds to the simple, all the while staying within religion. So Kierkegaard commences his writing career with indirect communication and only in the second authorship, in a condition of simplicity, is able to speak directly.<sup>27</sup>
- 3) Third, the problem of mistaking Christendom for Christianity, the burden of Kierkegaard’s entire authorship, especially the second authorship, is a matter of acoustic (or optical) illusion, one steadily practiced by Bishop Mynster throughout his life and made to reverberate by the commendation of his successor to be, Martensen, when he declares the old Bishop to have been a witness to the truth.<sup>28</sup> When we hear the words “witness to the truth” from Martensen we are truly hearing a disfigured echo, since the expression is integral to Kierkegaard’s criticisms of the bishop. Of Mynster, Kierkegaard writes in his journal after the bishop’s death “now all that remains is that he has preached Christianity firmly into an illusion.”<sup>29</sup>

Like Henry, I will follow the first of these three threads, insofar as it can be disentangled from the others. Henry takes the project of becoming contemporary with

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<sup>23</sup> See *ibid.*, 292.

<sup>24</sup> See Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 18-9. Anti-Climacus seems to echo Scriptural passages such as Matt. 19: 30 and 20: 16.

<sup>25</sup> See Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, XI, A 51.

<sup>26</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 286.

<sup>27</sup> See *ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>28</sup> See Kierkegaard, “*The Moment*” and *Late Writings*, 359. Martensen distinguishes persistently between “witness” and “martyr” in his autobiography. See the relevant passage as quoted by Thompson in *Between Hegel and Kierkegaard*, 56.

<sup>29</sup> See Kierkegaard, “*The Moment*” and *Late Writings*, 435. Also see 34, 70, 448, 472, 522, 599. Also relevant is *The Point of View*, 41-4. One finds other examples of this reversal of cause and effect. See, for example, *Without Authority*, 35, 79.

Christ as a special instance of something much broader, being in common with other people, living and dead. I will attend, in the first instance, to what Kierkegaard says, and only thereafter consider it in the frame of Henry's commentary.

Johannes Climacus proposes in effect an existential appropriation of Aquinas's extensional doctrine of the transcendentals. If I agree with Climacus, I am not to regard the true as objectively convertible with the good and the beautiful; instead, I am to incorporate them into my life so that they are all contemporary.<sup>30</sup> I do not devalue poetry (beauty) once I become aware of ethics (good) or philosophy (truth) but should strive to see them as one. So the transcendentals are convertible not because they are properties of being but because they can be lived fully and harmoniously in *my* being.<sup>31</sup> Before affirming this position in the *Postscript*, however, Climacus has already ventured a more existentially demanding valuation of contemporaneity [*Samtidigheden*] in the *Fragments*. To be historical synchronous with Jesus of Nazareth—the god, as Climacus has it: a translation of the biblical ὁ θεός when the expression is used as a title—merely affords one the opportunity for empirical knowledge of Jesus, yet to be an authentic contemporary is to see Christ in faith, to pass from history to eternity by way of “the moment.”<sup>32</sup> This act of faith is made “*although it is folly to the understanding and an offense to the human heart,*” as Paul says (1 Cor. 1: 23).<sup>33</sup> Climacus cites Paul but not Peter: “Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3: 15, RSV). In reading Climacus we are hearing more than is ventured in the Augsburg Confession (1530) and might be forgiven for thinking we are hearing someone impressed by the Luther of *The Disputation Concerning the Passage: “The Word Was Made Flesh”* (1539), with its violent insistence on Christianity's reliance on revelation rather than reason (especially Aristotle's sense of reason).<sup>34</sup> The second thesis of the disputation runs: “In theology it is true that the Word was made flesh; in philosophy the statement is simply impossible and absurd.”<sup>35</sup> One can maintain that thesis and also say *credo ut intelligam*, but the understanding obtained will have little or no philosophical resonance.

Significantly, Anti-Climacus agrees with the one who comes beneath him in the scale of things. The past is actualized, we are told in *Practice in Christianity* (1850), when in a momentary act of faith a single individual makes it necessary for his or her life.<sup>36</sup> Only the single individual counts for Anti-Climacus, and indeed for Kierkegaard; there are no associations of sacrifice, not even the apostles, for human beings are united in finitude and distinguished individually only in each person's relation to the infinite.<sup>37</sup> The authentic contemporary of Christ believes in his Savior's claims to divinity and follows him utterly in his degradation and suf-

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<sup>30</sup> See Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, I, 348.

<sup>31</sup> Kierkegaard appears to depart from this position from time to time. See, for example, *Without Authority*, 197.

<sup>32</sup> See Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 69-70.

<sup>33</sup> See *ibid.*, 102.

<sup>34</sup> See Martin Luther, “The Disputation Concerning the Passage, ‘The Word Was Made Flesh’” (1539), trans. Martin E. Lehmann, *Luther's Works*, 38: *Word and Sacrament*, IV, ed. Martin E. Lehmann, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 239-77.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>36</sup> See Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 63-4.

<sup>37</sup> See Kierkegaard, *Journal*, 1854 (A 10). Kierkegaard appears not to have a lively sense of the election of Christians as a whole to the beatific vision.

fering, living in the world in “torment and misery.”<sup>38</sup> It requires that person, Anti-Climacus says, to be “the abased one... suffering every possible evil, every mockery and insult, and finally to be punished as a criminal.”<sup>39</sup> Such is the meaning of *imitatio Christi* for Anti-Climacus. Two things are tightly bound together here: a proposal about contemporaneity with Christ, and an interpretation of *imitatio Christi*. In order not to get confused, let us separate them. I will consider the second first.

*Omnis Christi actio nostra est instructio*, the old saying goes, and its phrasing is important. We cannot imitate what renders Christ absolutely singular, that he is fully human and fully divine, and we cannot imitate him in being born without original sin, having a death that atones for the sin of the human race, and so on. Certainly we can emulate all the human dispositions and deeds of Christ to which the Gospels bear witness; we can place the Father at the center of life, and do our part to bring on the Kingdom, and in doing so we will perform individual versions of being Christian, being like Jesus and unlike him (yet still Christian) at the same time. For Anti-Climacus, such *imitatio* must have the same consequences for us as it had for Jesus, so much so that the words “Christian” and “martyr” in effect mean the same thing, witness to the truth. Yet one must be cautious in this marking of *actio*, especially if one is a Lutheran of any sort, since adherence to *imitatio* might incline believers to acquire merit through works rather than hold fast to justification by faith alone. Mishearing *imitatio* could be fatal to one’s salvation. Luther, influenced by Bernard of Clairvaux, saw the need to pass from *imitatio operis* to *imitatio mentis*, for the aim of the Christian life is to emulate Christ’s humility, not the works of the early saints, to seek what Luther came to call *conformitas Christi*.<sup>40</sup>

Plainly, if one were to echo Christ’s actions, narrowly conceived, there could not be a Christian society of any sort, neither a tradition nor a church; and one might momentarily think that what is commended is closer to the beliefs of the Circumcellions than to Christians.<sup>41</sup> But neither Anti-Climacus nor Kierkegaard is proposing a comprehensive, positive theory of Christians in relation to the State; they are rhetorically opposing the Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* affirmed theologically by Heiberg and Martensen and, pastorally, by Bishop Mynster.<sup>42</sup> Not that Kierkegaard affirms a spiritual separatism, as one finds in monasticism and in strains of Pietism; for him, in his deepening understanding of *imitatio*, one must suffer invisibly in the world, be “unrecognizable” (with others whose suffering for Christ is equally hidden) under the terms of Religiousness A as well as B, as Johannes Climacus would

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<sup>38</sup> See Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 107, 171, 63.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>40</sup> On this issue see Dietmar Lage, *Martin Luther’s Christology and Ethics* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1990), esp. ch. 3 and 4. Kierkegaard writes of conforming one’s mind to one’s teacher in *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 220.

<sup>41</sup> For Kierkegaard’s dismayed view of the establishment of the church at Pentecost, see “An Alarming Note,” in his *Journal* for 1854. It was Martensen’s view, as given in the *Berlingske Tidende*, that Kierkegaard’s position led him to a version of Christianity without church and tradition. The passage is given by Louis Dupré, in his *Kierkegaard as Theologian: The Dialectic of Christian Existence* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 193.

<sup>42</sup> For Kierkegaard’s private view that a Christian State is un-Christian, even anti-Christian, see *Papers*, X, 12, A 373, and for the origin of the point I am making, see Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Critique of Reason and Society* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), 22, 105.

add.<sup>43</sup> Of course, we can readily distinguish “Christian” and “martyr” by making the criterion of Christian witness to be complete obedience to the will of the Father, *imitatio mentis*, in which case one might be wholly obedient to God and die “with the cross on,” as is the case with a life lived consistent with baptism, if not actually on a cross.<sup>44</sup> One must be prepared for a martyrdom like Christ’s, but it is not required that it happen, or at least not as was all too common in the early Church.

To understand how “martyr” is being redefined by Kierkegaard, we must slide back a year, away from Anti-Climacus to H. H., author of “*Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?*” (1849). We do not have this right as human beings, we are told; yet Christ has it because he is the truth, and moreover “he came to the world with that *intention*,” that is, to die a sacrificial death.<sup>45</sup> Only when people who utterly reject the faith seek to persecute a believer can one accede to martyrdom, H. H. says, and then the martyr can forgive his or her persecutors. Otherwise, in Christendom, one must express one’s obedience to God in another fashion and doubtless find that another style of martyrdom comes into focus. Notice that H. H. stresses that Christ *intended*, in eternity, to offer himself as a sacrificial victim on the cross. He may have John 10: 18 in mind (“I lay it [my life] down of my own accord”). Without a doubt, Johannine Christology allows us to speak of Christ’s divine will, and this divine will surely premeditated an atoning sacrifice; yet we also need to take note of Jesus’s human will. Not that the human will would have been in conflict with the divine will, but Jesus’s human will might not have formed any explicit intention to be crucified in order to expiate the sin of the world, or at least might not have formed that intention until a definite moment of the ministry, perhaps even as late as Gethsemane. It would have been sufficient for the human Jesus to be completely obedient to the will of the Father. There is no reason why more should be expected of a Christian, who has just the one will.

In the same long essay H. H. notes, with a comic element that paradoxically springs from earnestness, that if there is no martyrdom today it is the fault of the potential martyr and not the world.<sup>46</sup> For the potential witness to the truth today does not have “the energy to give the age passion, in this case the passion of indignation, to put him to death.”<sup>47</sup> Six years later, in 1855, Kierkegaard goes as far as to assert (and not with his tongue in his cheek) that rural pastors in Denmark are cannibals, eating the early martyrs of the Church.<sup>48</sup> It is no surprise, then, that Kierkegaard privately comes to the defense of both Anti-Climacus and H. H., different as they are in style and stance, arguing that the mode of martyrdom has changed. Nowadays there is “bloodless martyrdom,” he tells his journal in 1850, which can be caused through “spiritual overexertion,” and he is evidently thinking of his own situation after the *Corsair* affair (1845-46) and his subsequent attack upon the State

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<sup>43</sup> See Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1, 557. For the “unrecognizables,” see *Two Ages*, 107-10.

<sup>44</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 221.

<sup>45</sup> Kierkegaard, “Does a Human Being Have the Right...?” *Without Authority*, 65.

<sup>46</sup> For Kierkegaard’s explanation of how the comic arises from the earnest, see *Stages on Life’s Way* (*KW*, XI, 1988), 366.

<sup>47</sup> Kierkegaard, “Does a Human Being Have the Right...?” 79.

<sup>48</sup> See Kierkegaard, “That the Pastors are Cannibals, and in the Most Abominable Way,” *The Moment* and *Late Writings*, 323.



Church.<sup>49</sup> Unlike those Christians who suffered in the early persecutions, Kierkegaard figures himself as a “long-distance” martyr, someone whose task is to embarrass the comfortable mentality of the crowd and to suffer for it in a protracted way, even if only through public ridicule.<sup>50</sup>

One principal cause of this ridicule was Peter Klastrup’s caricatures of Kierkegaard in *The Corsair*, in which Kierkegaard’s body was cruelly bent out of shape. So intense and persistent was the mockery on the streets after these caricatures became well known that Kierkegaard’s body was, in a sense, detached from him and tortured: it was, he felt, an almost invisible, bloodless martyrdom, one that prevented him from walking the town and even into the country.<sup>51</sup> His reaction to this situation is complex, yet one moment of it needs to be noted. He says in 1849, “as soon as the world beckons to me in the direction of persecution, I promptly follow the beckoning—there I would dare not give way.”<sup>52</sup> We think of H. H. writing several years later of Christ’s intention to be sacrificed, and we realize that admitted in his journal is something more than obedience to the will of God if persecution must be faced, for here Kierkegaard does not follow God where he points but the world where it beckons. For a Christian to follow the world would presume that God speaks clearly in and through the world. This seeking of persecution goes against the grain of Christian teaching, against the examples set in the very early Church, and against the very words of Jesus.<sup>53</sup>

For Anti-Climacus, one can be contemporary twice over, in one’s own age and also with Christ’s “life upon earth” which, he adds in a paradoxical flourish, is “outside history.”<sup>54</sup> In putting things in this way, Anti-Climacus, much like Johannes Climacus, wishes to distance himself from the higher and the lower criticisms, from everything associated with and consequent upon David Friedrich Strauss’s *Das Leben Jesu* (1835).<sup>55</sup> Genuine Christianity is not open to skeptical investigation by dint of its testimony being eighteen hundred years in the past. Nor is the Gospel on a par as a text with, say, Homer. One must appropriate the life of Christ, but it is less than obvious what this might amount to. It is not a way of encouraging a life of prayer, although to be sure Kierkegaard affirms the need for prayer, and of listening to God more than petitioning him. Rather, it is a matter of the earthly and unearthly life of Christ, of which prayer was one feature. Even if one can identify the life of Christ, understood as a sequence of events, from the Gospels, which is very doubtful, it is hard at first to see what it would mean to be contemporary with it. One can meditate upon certain events in that life, from birth and childhood to suffering and death, as happens when praying the rosary, or, in a more limited way,

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<sup>49</sup> Kierkegaard, *Journals and Notebooks*, 7, NB 20: 46.

<sup>50</sup> See *ibid.*, 8, NB 21: 69, 6, NB 12: 141, NB 12: 157. It would be unconscionable not to mention that in our own time Christians have been martyred in the bloodiest ways in Libya and Syria.

<sup>51</sup> On Kierkegaard’s body being divided in this manner, see Poole, *Kierkegaard*, esp. ch. 6. Poole quotes Meier Goldschmidt’s recollection that Kierkegaard felt himself to be a martyr at *The Corsair*’s hands, 191.

<sup>52</sup> Kierkegaard, *Journals and Notebooks*, 5, NB 10: 91.

<sup>53</sup> See *Acts* 8: 1, 9: 25, 9: 30, 14: 6, 17: 10, and 17: 14. Jesus speaks against seeking persecution in *Matt.* 10: 23.

<sup>54</sup> See Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 64.

<sup>55</sup> George Pattison offers a nuanced account of the effects of David Friedrich Strauss on Kierkegaard in his *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century: The Paradox and the “Point of Contact”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), ch. 3.

by meditating on the passion of Christ by praying the Stations of the Cross. And one can solemnly profess vows of celibacy, poverty and obedience. All these practices allow one to internalize dispositions of Jesus and events in his life to a greater or lesser degree, but they are all far from Kierkegaard's spirituality.

Perhaps one could become contemporary with the *life* of Christ, understood as his spirit manifested in and through his actions, which could be detached from empirical historical events. More, one could—rightly—figure that life, the whole span of it and not just the instant of Mary's conception of Jesus, as the incarnation of God. So one could be contemporary with Christ by making that spirit proper to oneself, by making it the principle of one's thoughts and moral choices, and not just contemplating it as an image or a concept.<sup>56</sup> For what is important about Christianity for Johannes Climacus and Anti-Climacus alike is not that its doctrines are representations of the truth, as speculative dogmatic theology would suggest, but that Christ is himself the truth, and that one must (as Anti-Climacus says) reduplicate that truth in one's own life, and so become, as it were, a Chladni figure.<sup>57</sup> *Imitatio* and contemporaneity are one in that Christ shows the way to himself. Even if one accepts all of this, there are questions that, niggling as they seem in the face of so much grandeur and passion, need to be answered before the commendation can be put into practice. The first is whether there is a spirit that one can associate with Jesus and only with him. One candidate would be compassion (yet that is also the distinguishing characteristic of the Buddha). Another would be self-sacrifice (yet in Hinduism we find Krishna assuming some of the karma of the Pandavas in a self-sacrificial manner, though not, to be sure, in the sense of taking on the "sins of the world"). Needless to say, there are others that cannot readily be excluded, including righteous anger and a certain disregard for rules and regulations. It seems difficult to fold these into a unity above and beyond the specific events that we know of Jesus's life. That there is such a unity is a theological claim: Christ, as Second Person of the Trinity, is life and is also simple. Not that this resolves issues, since human beings are complex and must be so as long as we are finite. Within what limits can a complex being imitate one that is simple?

There is a further objection that needs to be entertained, especially for those more aware of historical criticism than Kierkegaard could have been. As soon as one says that Christ is "the truth" or "the life," one is not quite contemporary with Jesus of Nazareth, Mary's son. One has brought oneself nearer to Paul's Christ or John's Christ or to the Christ of the Apostle's Creed (and therefore edged closer to Grundtvig than Kierkegaard would like), and in any case one has introduced a gap between the suffering, lowly Jesus who taught the Kingdom and the glorious Savior who one believes to be the Son of God, consubstantial with the Father, and whose death has redemptive power.<sup>58</sup> Only if one projects Nicene-Constantinopolitan Christology back into history by way of orthodox belief can the

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<sup>56</sup> On this point see Kierkegaard's hopes for the essay I have been considering, "Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?," *Journals and Papers*, 6, NB 11: 33. Also see his far earlier sense, told to his journal, that one must incorporate Christ as Other within oneself, *Journal and Notebooks*, 2, KK: 2, 306-7.

<sup>57</sup> For Johannes Climacus's view, see Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, I, 203.

<sup>58</sup> See N. S. F. Grundtvig's repost to Kierkegaard (without mentioning him by name) in "Elementary Christian Teachings," *A Grundtvig Anthology: Selections from the Writings of N. F. S. Grundtvig, 1783-1872*, eds. Edward Broadbridge and Niels Lyhne Jensen, (Cambridge: J. Clarke, 1984), 135.

gap be closed; and from the perspective of theologians today that is presumably what Kierkegaard does. He thinks he hears a voice in first-century Jerusalem but in fact hears one in fourth-century Constantinople.

There is another way of thinking about this situation, one that is perhaps more illuminating, which I will express in phenomenological terms. Kierkegaard rejects all profiles of Christ, such as offer themselves to the historical critic, precisely because the transcendence of Christ, in the phenomenological sense of the common noun, can compromise Christ's transcendence in the theological sense of the word. Christ must be immanent in the individual believer's self; only then will one be contemporary with him. So Kierkegaard affirms the need for himself, and all Christians, to perform a reduction on the Christ who appears in the Gospels. He is to be led back to the interiority of each individual consciousness where doubt can have no place. Reduction, here, occurs when there is a definite situation in life in which Christ, God incarnate, becomes thinkable and lovable; and that is presumably when we identify with him as suffering servant. I will return to this leaguering of reduction and contemporaneity a little later, but now I wish to consider yet another objection to Kierkegaard's treatment of Christ.

It is surprising that Kierkegaard or one of his pseudonymous authors does not affirm the one main way, theologically speaking, by which many Christians, including those people of his own confession, seek to make themselves contemporary with Christ, namely through fitting reception of the sacrament of the altar. A Catholic believes that the Eucharistic sacrifice is identical with Christ's sacrifice on the cross: time is liturgically annulled and one becomes his spiritual contemporary. Also, he or she believes that in receiving the sacrament when correctly disposed he or she receives the whole Christ; a priest consecrates the Eucharistic elements and presents a sacrifice to the Father and, by concomitance, the sacrament offered to the faithful is the real presence of the living Christ as substance. One takes in Christ sacramentally but not naturally, and yet one has Christ entire, *res et sacramentum*, while also receiving spiritual effects, *res tantum*, in the present. Things are somewhat different for a Lutheran, even a Lutheran in dialectical struggle with Luther, such as was the case with Kierkegaard in the late 1840s. Luther rejects transubstantiation but does not dismiss the real presence.<sup>59</sup> He bequeaths the idea of a sacramental union of the body and blood of Christ in, with and under the forms of bread and wine; and the real presence of Christ is to be found in that union, he thinks, and is even to be adored there.<sup>60</sup> In a robust sense, for Lutherans as much as for Catholics, the sacramental Christ is contemporary with the believer, taken into his or her flesh while the believer receives Grace and is absorbed into Christ.

Kierkegaard embraces this belief, at least in general terms, and lays emphasis on seemly preparation for Communion for the reception of Christ to take place, which includes confession and a rigorous denial of all merit through good

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<sup>59</sup> See Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, 1520," trans. A. T. W. Steinhäuser, rev. Frederick C. Ahrens and Abdel Ross Wentz, *Luther's Works*, 36: *Word and Sacrament II*, ed. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, and H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 32-5.

<sup>60</sup> See Luther, "The Adoration of the Sacrament (1523)," trans. Abdel Ross Wentz, *Luther's Works*, 36: *Word and Sacrament II*, esp. 290-305.

works.<sup>61</sup> He ends the second of his “*Two Discourses at Friday Communion*” (1851) by reminding his audience that Lutherans do not adopt the views of Zwingli or any other of the more radical Reformers. On the altar Christ “gives *himself* to you,” we are told, “the Lord’s supper is called communion with him. It is not only in memory of him, it is not only as a pledge that you have communion with him, but it is the communion, this communion that you are to strive to preserve in your daily life by more and more living yourself out of yourself and living yourself into him, in his love, which hides a multitude of sins.”<sup>62</sup> The striving that is stressed here is consequent on the reception of the sacrament when one has prepared for it with devout bearing. It is a matter of disciplining oneself to become contemporary with Christ in Communion, of becoming contemporary with him when, on hearing “This is my body” one hears the voice of Christ, and of continuing to be contemporary with Christ in and through words and actions after receiving the sacrament.<sup>63</sup> Eucharist *is* Christ, for Kierkegaard, not a representation of him.<sup>64</sup> If it is so also for Anti-Climacus, he does not emphasize the claim.

As Anti-Climacus would be expected to know, the saying of Christ that most disturbed his disciples is this one: “As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever” (John 6: 57-58, RSV). On seeing his disciples’ reaction to these words, Jesus asks, “Do you take offense at this? [αὐτοῖς τοῦτο ὑμᾶς σκανδαλίζει]” (John 6: 61, RSV). They should, Anti-Climacus thinks. For him, however, the incorporation of this stumbling block “in the context of Holy Communion” no longer contains “the possibility of offense”; it has presumably become no more than empty ritual.<sup>65</sup> He rails against those in Christendom who have succumbed to a “fantastic figure of Christ”—Jesus as miracle worker, someone who does not even look lowly and suffering, as he surely did—and relate to this figure only “at the distance of imagination”; his solution is “by having faith,” and he affirms the need to be contemporary with Christ, but nowhere thereafter stresses that this contemporaneity already occurs in a privileged mode in the Eucharist or proposes that nominal Christians refresh their devotion to the sacrament, and especially redouble their preparation for receiving it.<sup>66</sup> Anti-Climacus may be for Kierkegaard more of a Christian than Climacus or even Kierkegaard himself, but he is perhaps less of a Lutheran (and more of a Pietist) than Kierkegaard (although he had a fair dose of Pietism in his religious character).<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> See Kierkegaard, *Journal*, A 579 (1839), A 70 (1854) and especially A 50 (1849). Almost all Kierkegaard’s remarks on Communion are offered in his own name; the sole exception is the set of comments made by Anti-Climacus, which I consider here.

<sup>62</sup> Kierkegaard, “Two Discourses at Friday Communion,” *Without Authority*, 187, 188.

<sup>63</sup> Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses* (KW, XVII, 1997), 271. Also see 261 and 273-4.

<sup>64</sup> See Kierkegaard, “Two Discourses at Friday Communion,” 187. It should be noted that, on his deathbed, Kierkegaard declined to receive Communion, but only because it was to be dispensed by a priest.

<sup>65</sup> Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 99.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-2.

<sup>67</sup> See *ibid.*, 281. Yet it must be kept in mind that we never hear Anti-Climacus give an edifying discourse in the context of communion. Also see Christopher B. Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), esp. ch. 3.

“At the Communion table,” Kierkegaard says, “it is you who are in the debt of sin, you who are separated from God by sin, you who are so infinitely far away.”<sup>68</sup> It is the place where it is most important to understand spiritual acoustics.

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The Kierkegaard who resonates with Henry is a philosopher of subjectivity, of deep inwardness, who sees Christianity as invisible life, shared among unrecognizables, and sets it against the visible world, who regards the Christian life as each individual being called out of the world, who sets at premium value the life of Christ—that is, Christ as life—and who has a taste for reversals. Kierkegaard thus becomes, on Henry’s reading, a “radical phenomenologist” who brackets the world in order to find pure phenomenological substance.<sup>69</sup> Like all interpretations, Henry’s reading of Kierkegaard is a topological exercise; it brings the distant close, makes the author as much a spiritual contemporary as is possible; yet unlike most interpretations, Henry’s makes a forebear of the one he reads. Part of his project is assimilating Kierkegaard’s discourse on contemporaneity with Christ to the quest for a phenomenology of inter-subjectivity and to find support for what he takes to be his improvement upon Husserl’s solution to the immense problem of being in common, especially as given in the fifth of the *Cartesian Meditations*.<sup>70</sup> On Henry’s assessment, when thinking about inter-subjectivity what Husserl hears as intentionality is an acoustic illusion for the real explanation, which is auto-affectivity. I will take a moment to examine how Henry makes his case in general before looking at the specific role that the appeal to Kierkegaard plays in it.

The case against Husserl is made in classical fashion by identifying and challenging his assumptions about the phenomenology of inter-subjectivity. There are three such grounds, we are led to believe: “that the other does and must necessarily enter into my experience,” “that the other enters into [the] primordial Outside into which intentionality casts itself,” and that there is a “universalization of the second [assumption], the presupposition of intentional givenness.”<sup>71</sup> Henry admits that these assumptions are consistent with phenomenology, which, as Husserl says, is concerned with concreteness, with *how* phenomena appear in purified experience. (“*Gegenstände im Wie*,” is Husserl’s memorable expression, penned sometime over the period 1905-10.<sup>72</sup>) It is worthwhile to reflect on these supposed as-

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<sup>68</sup> Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 299.

<sup>69</sup> See Henry, *Incarnation*, 190. It should be kept in mind, however, that Henry’s and Kierkegaard’s notions of “world” do not quite converge. For Henry, the world is the space of representation.

<sup>70</sup> See Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), §§ 42-62. Henry does not engage with the immense *Nachlass* that is devoted to inter-subjectivity. See *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität*, 3 vols, ed. Iso Kern (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973). Henry’s interest in inter-subjectivity, including Husserl’s attempt at a solution in the *Fifth Cartesian Meditation*, can be traced to his course at Aix-en-Provence (1953-1954), “La communication des consciences et les relations avec autrui,” the notes of which can be found in *Revue Internationale Michel Henry* 2 (2011): 139-76.

<sup>71</sup> Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 101, 103.

<sup>72</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, trans. John Barnett Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 121. Henry cites this short sentence on several occasions. He would of course demur over the expression “purified experience,” since for him any reduction interrupts the flow of transcendental life.

sumptions, since they are essential to the case that Henry proposes to make against Husserl and for his own position. For he wishes to establish that the other person is given to me invisibly, by way of affect (and thus in the flesh, *Leib*), and not visibly by way of the body (*Körper*), and this will be a part of his attempt to devise a new phenomenology, one held to be anterior to Husserl's, of which Henry hears hints in Kierkegaard's discussion of despair. It is worth noting that Henry does not rigorously question Husserl's distinction between *Leib* and *Körper*, even though he distances himself from the claim that *Leib* is constituted. He cannot propose a thoroughgoing criticism of the distinction since he needs to figure *Leib* as the vehicle of  $\text{ϋ}\lambda\eta$ . Yet in accepting a form of the distinction he allows himself to pursue a phenomenology that is material more in name than in fact.<sup>73</sup>

It is certainly true that Husserl maintains that the other person must enter my experience. What is important, however, is that I experience another person quite differently from how I experience an object in the world. That person is an object and also a subject, and I can have no concrete experience of his or her consciousness; it is at best an analogue of something I have myself.<sup>74</sup> Also true is that the other person enters my experience by way of intentionality, although the issue is more complex than Henry allows: "we must discover," Husserl writes, "in what intentionalities, *syntheses*, *motivations*, the sense 'other ego' becomes fashioned in me."<sup>75</sup> So there are several sorts of intentionality in play—perception, no doubt, but also perhaps anticipation, desire, imagination, and empathy, among others without  $\text{ϋ}\lambda\eta$ —as well as active and passive syntheses and implicit and explicit motivations, some of which will be real while others might be only fantasies. It should also be noted that Husserl's aim is to find "*the sense* of 'other ego,'"<sup>76</sup> and not the other's ego itself.

Oddly enough, when Henry complains that Husserl relies overly on perception, he does not notice that for Husserl affect also relies on it; and so to diminish the role of perception, without rethinking the intentional rapports of affective states, would restrict phenomenological life. To put the issue otherwise: Can Henry point to a sufficiently rich conception of that life without appealing to perception? Before that question can come into focus, let us note what Henry sees as the problem for Husserl. It is simply that, within perception, we do not find genuine alterity. "This is not the other but what is intended as the other; this is not the real other but the other in thought. This is the other-thought, the noema of the other, which is to say the other as noema."<sup>77</sup> Nowhere, though, does Husserl say that the other person is merely an intentional correlate for me; he stresses that he or she is truly alien: "I cannot create others that shall exist for me."<sup>78</sup> In fact, the mark of transcendence as such is another consciousness precisely because it resists my

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<sup>73</sup> I cannot pursue the consequences of Henry's adoption of this distinction in this paper, and merely point to the illuminating discussion of the distinction by Claude Romano in his *There Is: The Event and the Finitude of Appearing*, trans. Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), ch. 5.

<sup>74</sup> See Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 115.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 90 (Emphasis added). Henry cites this very sentence, though he attends only to intentionality, which he figures in the singular, i.e., perception. See Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 102.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* (Emphasis added).

<sup>77</sup> Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 102.

<sup>78</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 141.

intentionality, and the transcendence of objects in the world is secondary to it.<sup>79</sup> The third assumption, that all givenness has an intentional structure and therefore bespeaks transcendence for Husserl, is not quite right, either. The *cogito*, for example, gives itself to me immanently and absolutely.

In *The Idea of Phenomenology* (1907) Husserl regards phenomenology as devoted to “absolute *self-givenness*” and notes that “*the absolutely given* and the *genuinely immanent*” are not obviously one and the same: phenomenological reduction is needed to bring anything transcendent to immanence.<sup>80</sup> Henry, however, attends only to that mode of givenness that does not require reduction, and he takes it to be properly basic.

If we discharge what Henry takes to be Husserl’s third assumption, we must seek not what appears but the appearing itself, that is, how something appears, without any circumscription in advance of the “how.” To look at the same issue sideways, for Husserl what shows itself first gives itself, and he fastens onto the visible; while, for Henry, one must seek the fundamental level of givenness in immanence before any consideration is attached to manifestation in the world, a level that would of course be invisible. The task for the Frenchman would be to isolate the pure “how” of givenness, which would occur in a material phenomenology, one devoted to ὄλη and that, as Husserl himself acknowledged, would be one of the two strata of phenomenology, the other being the noetic.<sup>81</sup> For Husserl, ὄλη and νόησις are moments of a phenomenon, although the noetic is prized over the hyletic because it is an intentional rapport with something imagined or real, inner or outer. Accordingly, he emphasizes the noetic side of phenomenology. Can one develop the other side? That is Henry’s question.

Now ὄλη is the raw matter of any act, which is really (*reell*) immanent in it; we feel it when seeing the first snow of the season, when kissing, when about to eat a good dinner, when drinking coffee, and when fantasizing about these things. Henry can speak of a pure “how” because this ὄλη does not call for reduction of a transcendent entity to the state of immanence, a process that can never be complete. The drives and emotions that are secondary components of ὄλη are in consciousness, as a non-intentional component of experience. Henry insists, rightly, that I feel this non-intentional “how,” this pure appearing, and never see it; and since this stratum manifests itself to me in a particular manner, as feeling, it is reasonable to grant it the title of phenomenality. For phenomenality is nothing other than the specific mode in which a phenomenon gives itself to me, although Husserl restricts it to transcendent phenomena being given to transcendental consciousness

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<sup>79</sup> See Husserl, *Erste Philosophie (1923/24)*, 2 vols, II: *Theorie der phänomenologischen Reduktion*, ed. Rodolf Boehm (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959), 495. One might add that the ego of an animal would perhaps be an even better index of the transcendence of the world, since it is less familiar to us than the ego of another human being.

<sup>80</sup> Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. William P. Alston and George Nakhikian, intro. George Nakhikian (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 6-7.

<sup>81</sup> See Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1983), § 85, 207. It should be noted that Husserl’s teaching about ὄλη is developed over the course of his career; it was his later view that ὄλη are self-organizing. See, in particular, *Experience and Judgment*, rev. and ed. Ludwig Landgrebe, trans. James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks, intro. James S. Churchill, afterword by Lothar Eley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), § 16.

by way of reduction.<sup>82</sup> Henry then takes another step, of which is less easy to approve, for he calls this non-intentional stratum of consciousness “life” and eventually, in his Christian trilogy, connects it with the divine, which he calls “Life.” The objection I have in mind is not that this does not account for life as a biological notion, since Henry sharply distinguishes phenomenological from biological life.<sup>83</sup> Rather, the difficulty is twofold. First, there is the issue of considering ὕλη by itself. Can ὕλη really be separated from νόησις, as though sensuous feelings can be independent of what we see or hear? It seems doubtful.<sup>84</sup> Second, could the non-intentional stratum of consciousness plausibly be called phenomenological (or transcendental) life? For Husserl such life is the stream of lived experiences—including but not limited to perception—along with drives and instincts, and it has a teleological structure. One might well agree that non-intentional affect is a moment in phenomenological life, but not grant that it is independent of it, let alone that it has anything like the richness of this life.

Henry will counter that this pure appearing phenomenizes itself by auto-affection, and that this process certainly merits the word “life.” The problem here is how non-intentional ὕλη, with its pleasures, pains, drives and feelings, can render itself into a phenomenon without any νόησις being in play. I can reflect on a feeling of pleasure, and thereby make it into an object of my attention; perhaps I can thereby increase it by revolving it in my mind and contemplating it, or I can decrease it by subjecting it overmuch to demanding critical judgment. But can a feeling pass, simply by auto-affection, from pure appearing to something that appears? Henry’s phrasing—“the self-phenomenalizing of pure phenomenality”—invites this sort of puzzled question, the perplexity coming about because auto-affection is generally associated with a subject and, appearances notwithstanding, with a slight temporal delay (as happens when touching oneself, hearing oneself speak, and so forth).<sup>85</sup> If we look elsewhere, we can find Henry saying the same thing in less cumbersome language: “Life feels and experiences itself immediately such that it coincides with itself at each point of its being.”<sup>86</sup> Yet life (or Life) cannot feel or experience anything; and it is easy to get the impression from Henry’s French—*s’éprouve soi-même*, he often writes, drawing on the expression’s full semantic range—that ὕλη acts as a subject. Nonetheless, the issue is at heart quite simple: how something is given (as feeling) is also what is given (a feeling). There is no temporal lag. Also, however, there is no reason to think of this convergence of “how” and “what” as the whole of phenomenological life, although, to be sure, it is certainly a moment of that life and one that perhaps philosophers have overlooked too often when doing phenomenology. Poets and painters are perhaps better phenomenologists in this regard than philosophers.

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<sup>82</sup> See Husserl, “The Amsterdam Lectures,” *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927-1931)*, trans. and ed. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 218.

<sup>83</sup> See Henry, *I Am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, trans. Susan Emmanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 34.

<sup>84</sup> On this issue, see Aron Gurwitsch, “Phenomenology of Thematics and of the Pure Ego,” *The Collected Works of Aron Gurwitsch (1901-1973)*, II: *Studies in Phenomenology and Psychology*, ed. Fred Kersten (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 283.

<sup>85</sup> Henry uses this expression and versions of it throughout his career. See, for example, Henry, *I Am the Truth*, 27.

<sup>86</sup> Henry, *Seeing the Invisible: On Kandinsky*, trans. Scott Davidson (London: Continuum, 2009), 7.



At any rate, Henry maintains that the non-intentional stratum of consciousness is the sole basis for inter-subjective life. He argues that another person is first given to me invisibly, not visibly, by way of “a feeling of presence or absence, solitude, love, hate, resentment, boredom, forgiveness, exaltation, sorrow, joy, or wonder,” which, taken together, he calls “pathos-with.”<sup>87</sup> Yet these feelings only come with lived experiences of other people, and once an experience is complete the affect dissipates: the intentional rapport with the other person occurs in and through the *ϋλη* and animates it for awhile.<sup>88</sup> I feel an intense love for my beloved when I see her, and it may be that the love is felt even before I perceive her walking down the street or waiting for me in a restaurant; it may come in anticipating her or in recollecting her or in fantasizing about her. Yet all these are intentional relations, and the affect in question is a moment in each of them, one that over a period will be enriched by traces of other such rapports with her and even with others before I met her. (I can say, for instance, “I love you more than I have loved other women.”) When Henry hears “life” as exclusively non-intentional, he is the victim of an acoustic illusion, for phenomenological life of any richness is a synthesis of continuous hyletic and noetic experience, and not all noetic experience is perceptual.

More generally, Henry enlists Kierkegaard (or, strictly, Anti-Climacus) to serve as support for his enstatic phenomenology of inter-subjectivity by appealing to his idea of “spiritual acoustics.” In Henry’s words: “Here (*hic*) and there (*illic*) with respect to my relation to the other in the originally pathetic intersubjectivity in which I am with the other have nothing to do with the *hic* and *illic* spoken about in the *Fifth Cartesian Meditation*.”<sup>89</sup> This view is a development of the position magisterially expounded in *L’essence de la manifestation*. There Henry maintains that for Anti-Climacus despair occurs when the ego refuses its original passivity, its transcendental life, and finds that it cannot do so, that it is kept in life, albeit in a mode that is diminished and anguished. Nonetheless, in despair “there is revealed... the absolute,” which he takes to be affectivity.<sup>90</sup> For Henry, then, Kierkegaard is a precursor of material phenomenology, as Fichte was before him and as Eckhart was even earlier; and on reading his interpretation of *The Sickness unto Death* we might very well say that he does not hear Kierkegaard so much as hear himself echoing in mid-nineteenth century Denmark.<sup>91</sup> We remember that spiritual acoustics, for Anti-Climacus, turn on the humility of the sinner before a holy deity, not on the primacy of affect with respect to intentionality. Yet before leaving Henry as a reader of Kierkegaard, there are two loose threads to cut or tie: Henry’s valuation of one’s inter-subjective relationship with Christ, and their different senses of community with the dead.

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<sup>87</sup> Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 104.

<sup>88</sup> See Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2 vols, trans. J. N. Findlay (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), II, Investigation 5, § 10.

<sup>89</sup> Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 115. The same criticism holds, Henry believes in *The Essence of Manifestation*, for Martin Heidegger’s treatment of *Mitsein*, *Mitdasein*, *Miteinandersein* and *Mitwelt*. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), § 26.

<sup>90</sup> Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 682.

<sup>91</sup> For Henry on Eckhart, see *The Essence of Manifestation*, §§ 39, 49, and on Fichte, §§10, 38 of the same work. Other figures in Henry’s counter-tradition include Maine de Biran, Schopenhauer, Marx Nietzsche, and Freud.

The very reference to spiritual acoustics is prompted by Henry's discussion of the community we share with the dead. This community is not brought about by traces of perception, he thinks, and so it is not pathos-of but pathos-with; indeed, being in common is not something one can perceive, he argues, and the modern prizing of representation, with objectivity as its insistent horizon, has had the effect of eliminating all sense of our being in common with those who have passed. It is worth noting that Henry's case against intentionality, here as elsewhere, turns single-mindedly on perception; no consideration is given to other intentional rapports, some of which we may have with the dead, such as memory, anticipation, hope, hypothesizing, desire, and love, in all of which a dead person will be an intentional, but presumably not real, object with *ύλη*. When I remember my dead father, for example, I reanimate *ύλη* that has become embedded in my consciousness. Kierkegaard is quoted because the spiritual world, as he understands it, is not governed by bodies and representation but by flesh and pathos. In *Works of Love* (1847) Kierkegaard talks of recollecting the dead as a work we should cultivate, and notices how worldly measures diminish radically with death: one grave is not much larger than the next. To love someone who has passed away is to love unselfishly, freely, and faithfully; and it recalls us to how we should love the living. As he says, "it is our duty to love the people we do not see but also those we do see."<sup>92</sup> It is plain that for Kierkegaard pathos is linked to perception, at least when being in common with others who are alive.

Despair as the sickness unto death, for Henry, is sheer pathos, and unlike Heidegger he takes little or no interest in our being unto death, or of the being in common we have with Jesus who shares our horror of death in Gethsemane and who, in experiencing the bitterness of death to the full on Easter Saturday, gives us hope that we too will see the light of Easter Sunday. For Henry, Christ is always and already dead to the world; the resurrection is of the flesh—it is invisible, and its substance is affect—and so he remains in life and is Life.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, for Henry, whose theology is nothing if not Johannine in inspiration, if not always in teaching, Christ is not only the Truth and the Life but also the Way: he is pure appearing, and therefore only secondarily something that appears in the world.<sup>94</sup> (This is the theological pertinence of the self-phenomenalizing of pure phenomenality.) The Gnostic flavor of this Christology is everywhere apparent.<sup>95</sup> Where Kierkegaard performs a reduction of Jesus Christ so that he believes himself to secure Christ as contemporary, immanent within him, Henry plainly would not accept such a move, for reduction disturbs the very flow of life.

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<sup>92</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love: Some Christian Deliberations in the Form of Discourses* (*KW*, XVI, 1995), 358.

<sup>93</sup> See Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, trans. Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1975), 209. Notice should be given of Henry's very brief remarks on the performativity of the consecration, the turning of bread and wine into invisible Life, in the Eucharist. See his *Words of Christ*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner, foreword Jean-Yves Lacoste, intro. Karl Hefty (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012), 124.

<sup>94</sup> See Henry, *I Am the Truth*, 24-5.

<sup>95</sup> The Gnosticism abates considerably over the course of Henry's theological trilogy. By the time of the final volume, it is far less apparent. See *Words of Christ*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner, foreword Jean-Yves Lacoste, intro. Karl Hefty (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2012). Also, it should be noted that Henry appears to favor Binitarianism.

Is there another way of being in common with Christ? There is: it begins in seeing that the very structure of Christianity involves Christ performing a reduction on me. I am addressed, as though in a singular manner, by the words of the Gospel; the role that the world can play for me—as a place of power, contentment, and explanation of being—is bracketed and I am led back to the absolute claim that the Kingdom has had upon me since before I was conceived.<sup>96</sup> I see, more clearly than I could otherwise, that I cannot become a world unto myself and cannot master any world in which I find myself. My subjectivity is given in inter-subjectivity, as Husserl maintains, although in a context that he did not consider.<sup>97</sup> From the perspective of the Kingdom, God is no longer an abstraction but a concrete relation, thinkable and lovable, given repeatedly in a “how,” that is, as Father, Savior, and Comforter. To live in the Kingdom is to live in the love of God, where the genitive is both objective and subjective: one receives the love that God gives, and one responds to other people in one’s daily life in the light of that love. This is the way to become a contemporary of Christ. We are always victims of acoustic illusion when we think we can reduce Christ, look to Scripture and try to make him our contemporary, for it is precisely the other way round. We are led to a way of being anterior to “the world” to be in common with him, not by keeping him within but by being exposed to the mess of human inter-subjective life that is the Kingdom as we experience it and with the eschatological hope that one day we will be truly in common with a King who is also our Father. The inter-subjective relation that I may have with Christ is not like those I have with others; it is of another order entirely.

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<sup>96</sup> I explore this “basilaic reduction” in more detail in the central chapters of my *Kingdoms of God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

<sup>97</sup> See Husserl, *Erste Philosophie II*, 480.