

THE ESSENCE OF MANIFESTATION

# THE ESSENCE OF MANIFESTATION

*by*

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*translated by*

GIRARD ETZKORN



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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This book was born of a refusal, the refusal of the very philosophy from which it has sprung. After the war, when it had become apparent that the classical tradition, and particularly neo-Kantianism, was breathing its last, French thought looked to Germany for its inspiration and renewal. Jean Hyppolite and Kojève reintroduced Hegel and the “existentialists” and phenomenologists drew the attention of a curious public to the fundamental investigations of Husserl and Heidegger. If only by being understood as a phenomenological ontology, this book speaks eloquently enough of the debt it owes to these thinkers of genius. The conceptual material which it uses, particularly in chapters 1 to 44, outlines the Husserlian and Heideggerian horizon of the investigations. However, it is precisely this horizon which is questioned. In spite of its profundity and achievements, I wanted to show that contemporary ontology pushes to the absolute the presuppositions and the limits of the philosophy of consciousness since Descartes and even of all Western philosophy since the Greeks. An ‘External’ critique, viz. the opposing of one thesis to another, would have no sense whatever. Rather, it is interior to these presuppositions whose insufficiency had to be shown that we placed ourselves; the very concepts which were rejected were also the ones which guided the problem initially. Doubtless, the difficulty of this book stems from the slow movement of maturation and elaboration at the end of which these concepts are ‘turned around’ and the same presuppositions give way to others seeking to recognize a new dimension of existence. What I want to say is that, regardless of the degree of adequacy in its theoretical formulation—whether it is a question of intuition or consciousness, of Husserlian intentionality or Hegelian alienation, of Heideggerian transcendence or Schelerian affective perception—the ecstatic becoming-present of Being allows its most intimate essence, i.e. that which makes it life and each of us living beings, to escape it. This book

is dedicated to the clarification of this secret essence of our Being which will prove to be, at the end of the phenomenological process of analysis, nothing other than affectivity, not the simple interplay of our empirical feelings, but their very possibility, their effectiveness and the effectiveness of Being itself.

In order to render an account of this conceptual mutation and the progressive re-employment of evidence, the translator had to use great care and exactitude coupled with an understanding of the entire work. Added to the difficult technical problems posed by the understanding of the text was the thankless task of converting all the references so that the works cited could be accessible to English-speaking readers. At a time when I had the unusual experience of seeing my own thought expressed to me in a new form of objectivity, I would like to express to Professor Girard Etzkorn my deepest gratitude as well as my most profound philosophical admiration for the thoroughness which he showed during this long and arduous task.

Michel HENRY  
Montpellier, January 17, 1972.

## TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The goal which first inspired me to begin this rather long and difficult undertaking was to introduce to English-speaking philosophers a colleague who had something truly creative to say. My attention was first drawn to Michel Henry's work by Professor Georges Van Riet of the University of Louvain who generally treats of worthwhile philosophers and philosophy in his lectures.

In a work so lengthy, it would be unwise to begin even the sketchiest philosophical commentary. Hence I intend to limit this introduction to an explanation of the principles I adopted in making this translation so that they may serve as a guide to the serious reader.

My first principle of translation was to use available English translations of the sources quoted by Michel Henry wherever these translations existed. Where such translations do not exist or are difficult to obtain, I tried to go back to the original language of the sources he quotes. I was not completely successful in sticking to this principle in the case of Meister Eckhart and Franz Kafka both because of the lamentable lack of documentation in the French editions used by Michel Henry and because the English translations are hopelessly scattered. In the instances of the untranslated works of Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Scheler and Heidegger, I tried to check my translations against the original German and in all but a few rare instances, I found that my translation of the French and the French translation of the German were in fact correct.

Besides the problem of adopting uncritically such translations, there is the added difficulty of maintaining continuity. This is particularly true in view of Henry's penchant for taking up a phrase of the philosopher he is quoting and weaving out its consequences to his own purposes. This means that in reading this translation, one will be obliged 'to shift gears', as it were, so as to be aware that Henry is in fact speaking of

the same(?) thing. The unsuspected advantage of this principle, however, is that it forces the reader to try to understand *Michel Henry's meaning* of the terms he uses which cannot be presumed to be the same as the meaning which such terms had in the sources he quotes. This continuity problem is most apparent in the case of Baillie's translation of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* and Blakney's translation of *Meister Eckhart*.

My second principle of translation was to try to be as clear as possible and to remove all unnecessary ambiguity even at the expense of stylistic and grammatical beauty. This was not made easy by Henry's habit of using relative pronouns to excess. Hence, I frequently replaced such relative pronouns with their corresponding nouns especially since the English relative pronouns were most often useless anyway. In this connection, I would like to express my profound thanks to Dr. Marcelle Monseau, professor emeritus of French from Quincy College, for giving several hours each week over a period of several months to help settle doubts stemming from difficult passages. I am also grateful to the author himself for two days of his time in Montpellier during the last week of May in 1971 when he helped to explain phrases and passages with which I had had some difficulty. Michel Henry and his wife Anne also went over the entire translation before sending it on the printers. If any mistakes remain, the insightful reader will have to make his own corrections. In these case of long and involved constructions, however, I suggest that complaints be directed to the author. In a number of rare instances the author himself suggested that superfluous or redundant phrases which appear in the French be eliminated from the English translation.

My third principle consisted in adopting the author's policy of identifying sources such that in a 'chain of quotes' the source is identified eventually at the end of the series and never before. Anything appearing in brackets [ ] is my addition, note or remark.

Finally, in translating a number of rather technical terms, I generally adopted the English word which more closely resembled its French counterpart. *Béatitude* and *bonheur* were rendered as 'happiness' or 'beatitude' somewhat indiscriminately. *Etre* and *étant* were consistently translated as 'Being' and 'being' except in direct quotations, and while this thoroughgoing consistency might seem ludicrous, it does give the reader the advantage of knowing what the original French term was. This does not mean that Henry adopts Heidegger's meaning and terminology *en masse*. In fact, at times Henry speaks of *un être* and of *entité* without apparently seeing any need for consistency or profound explan-

ations. For the French *détermination* and its variants, I always used the English cognates even though at times the French means 'specification', 'more specific', 'less generic' etc. I was consistent in translating the Heideggerian *existentzial* and *existentziell* as 'existential' and 'existentiell' because I believe that Henry follows Heidegger's meaning rather closely in this regard. For the French term *manifestation* and its variants, I used the English counterpart [the same can be said for the French *apparaître* and *se révéler* and their variants] both because the English reader can more easily identify the French term and because it does not commit Michel Henry to some previous historical meaning of such terms as appearance, disclosure, manifestation, revelation or unconcealedness etc. The word 'peculiar' in my translation never means 'odd' or 'strange' but 'proper to'. The English word 'problematic' as I use it is generally a translation of the French *problématique* which signifies a broad area under investigation and includes the researcher, the theme, the scope and even the results of the problem thus far acquired. I chose the rather neutral 'sensorial' rather than 'sensual' or some other alternative in rendering the French *sensoriel(le)*, in the passages where Henry comments on Scheler. I am only sorry that I was unable to wait for Manfred Frings' translation of *Der Formalismus in der Ethik* in this regard. The French *sentiment* is always translated as 'feeling'. However, in the case of the French *se sentir*, I used 'to sense' or 'to feel' according to the context. Generally speaking, I have little patience with linguistic or philosophical purists and I believe that Michel Henry's meaning will not only survive translation, but in many instances has been made even clearer.

In this day of anthologies and philosophical 'stars' whose light has shined on another age and from whose longdried sweat editors and publishers still seek to profit, it is refreshing to find a creative thinker who has both breadth of vision and a passion to get at the roots of things today. Not only has Michel Henry dared to make a panoramic survey and an insightful critique of 20th century existentialism and phenomenology, he has attempted a philosophical synthesis which deserves to give today's philosophical world something to think about. In this respect, I would like to thank Prof. Herman Van Breda, director of the *Phaenomenologica* series, and Martinus Nijhoff publishers for undertaking something of true value.

In closing I would like to express my profound thanks to my wife, Linda, for all the help in typing, proof-reading and suggestions regarding style and clarity to say nothing of her encouragement when the task

got long and tedious. I am also most grateful for the friendship of Michel and Anne Henry which was truly the *Essence of Manifestation* to me when I visited them in Montpellier and again in Switzerland in 1971.

This translation was begun in January of 1968 and finished in January of 1972.

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