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SPIRITUALITY, CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE EMANCIPATION OF LIFE. MICHEL HENRY'S SPIRITUALIST AND CATHOLIC INTERPRETATION OF KARL MARX¹

ABSTRACT

Michel Henry is quite a unique figure in the phenomenological movement, as well as in philosophy more generally. In his work, apparently contradictory and heterogeneous motifs were integrated – in my opinion – into a harmonious, organic and synthetic unity. We can find in his philosophy firstly four leading and orientating traditions that articulated the main framework of his thought: phenomenology, Catholicism, philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*), and the philosophy of Marx, the latter of which he sharply juxtaposed to the entire tradition of Marxism. In this regard, perhaps the two most important philosophical authors for him were Edmund Husserl and Karl Marx, the latter of which was considered by Henry to be the most crucial philosopher in the entire history of Western philosophy, and the most original and authentic phenomenologist (even in comparison to the founding father of the phenomenological movement, namely Husserl). Michel Henry believed that modern global society was in such a *crisis* from which only Marx's philosophy could provide a way out, in a theoretical regard as well as in a normative, practical respect. Henry was of the opinion that without drastically overcoming capitalism, Western civilization – as well as humankind globally – would collapse in intellectual, spiritual and also *physical* regard. *Barbarism*, which was vigorously criticized by Henry as a fundamental and intrinsic feature of capitalism, reifies everything and renders things under the viewpoints of utility and profitability, including phenomena like *subjectivity* and *consciousness*. We must emancipate human and non-human, conscious and non-conscious, life by radically surpassing capitalism. With this gesture, we can reach a genuinely authentic society, which also relies on an emancipated form of consciousness and *spirituality*. In this paper, we attempt to show how Henry reformulates the Marxian idea of emancipation, based on the aforementioned four traditions.

KEYWORDS

Michel Henry, Marx, immanent life, emancipation, consciousness as auto-affection, ecological crisis, critique of capitalism, spirituality

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Introduction. Henry: A Philosophy of Immanent Life and Spirituality

Michel Henry's lifework is one of the most unique and peculiar achievements of the 20th and 21st centuries. In his thought, rather heterogeneous and distant traditions were integrated in a harmonious, organic, and coherent synthesis, such as Catholicism, phenomenology, philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*), and the philosophy of Marx. Throughout his entire life he remained strongly committed to the Catholic faith, the phenomenological method, and the ideas of Karl Marx, which he emphatically distinguished from the entire later Marxist tradition, which he believed was a distortion of Marx's original thoughts. In Henry's philosophy, perhaps the two strongest, most emphatic components were Catholicism and Marx, and both impregnated and infused the other. Henry was deeply convinced that the greatest problem of contemporary society – which stemmed from certain fundamentally flawed features of Modernity – was the capitalist mode of production, which inhibited the birth of a truly spiritual and authentic society (and with it an authentic and genuine form of Catholicism), and threatened the entire world with intellectual, spiritual, and also physical destruction. In his opinion, Marx showed the way to an emancipated and authentic form of society and *life*, and thus a way – perhaps the only way – to our future *survival* in every sense of the word.

The point of departure for Henry's entire vision of ultimate reality and emancipated society was the *phenomenon of life*. His original philosophical and methodological stance was phenomenological, and he truly wanted to follow the slogan of phenomenology announced by Husserl, in his *Logical Investigations*: “back to the things themselves!” (Husserl 2001: 168). For Henry, the “things themselves”, to which the phenomenologist must first of all return, were represented by the phenomenon of life, which was initially not apparent and manifested, and required a certain excavation, which must be found and revealed by the phenomenologist. Life, according to Henry, was not manifest and visible; fundamentally, it was invisible, and could be found deep within the sphere of *immanence* (Henry 2015).² Henry sharply juxtaposed the domains of immanence and transcendence, interiority and exteriority, and identified the truly original dimension of phenomena and phenomenality in the former, in the arch-primordial region of radical immanence.

Starting with interiority and its immanence meant for Henry that, firstly, life was auto-affection: it affected itself and it was exposed to itself before it could be affected by something different: anything which was heterogeneous to it.³

2 Such absolute precedence of invisible, auto-affective, immanent life over everything external, physical, and material—and the former's foundational role in relation to the latter—can be seen, for example, in the following passage: “The invisible comes before every conceivable visible. In its invincible certainty, in the pathos of its suffering flesh or its joy, it owes nothing to the visible. If in him it is a question of Life, God is far more certain than the world. So are we. A phenomenology of flesh is now possible” (2015: 92).

3 To this, see also Davidson 2012: vii. “Life in its genuine sense, then, is revealed through the immediate affective embrace in which one feels oneself to be alive.”

In other words, he believed that auto-affection preceded hetero-affection (or exteriority) and the former founded the latter. The difference of interiority and exteriority referred to the difference of life and world, and, in his interpretation, (the experience of) life was more original than (the experience of) the world. Life feels, enjoys, suffers itself (this is the meaning of auto-affection), before it could reveal anything other than itself, before it could feel, enjoy, suffer the world, or anything extra-mental or life-transcendent. This conception forms the main theoretical basis for his criticism of Descartes and the Husserlian idea of intentionality. The most original evidence for Descartes was “*ego cogito*” (“I think”), which – in Henry’s idea – already placed the subject in the sphere of exteriority. In Henry’s view, the “*vivo*” (“I live”) was a far more radical piece of evidence than that of the *cogito*. His criticism against the Husserlian notion of intentionality had the same theoretical core: that being that intentionality aimed some sort of transcendence, and thus cannot be the original and first form of evidence. It represents hetero-affection and exteriority. The transcendence of intentionality – Henry said – was based on the immanence of life. Contrasted to Descartes, Husserl, and also Heidegger, in Henry’s view, *Marx* articulated the most original and authentic phenomenological conception of radical and auto-affective life.⁴

In this context – regarding his relationship to Husserl and his conception of consciousness – it is important to emphasize that he emphatically criticized Husserl’s notion of intentionality as a form of externality, as a phenomenology that places exteriority, namely, the *intentional object* in the centre (Henry 2008). In contrast to this, Henry highlighted pre-intentional, affective life; a form and level of subjectivity, which – Henry believed – preceded and grounded every objectivity, even the objectivity of intentionality. In this way, pre-intentional, auto-affective, immanent life, which was a flow of hyletic (sensuous-sensational) impressions was for Henry the eminent form and deepest, most original level of *consciousness*. *Consciousness*, Henry stated, before it could relate to anything external, anything different than itself, is related to itself, in a pre-intentional, purely immanent way. In this prime-original form, it is a hyletic, sensuous flow, which lives through itself prior to anything extra-mental or extra-conscious (see also Tengelyi 2009). This view will be highly significant in Henry’s interpretation of Marx, who – Henry believed – had such a conception of subjectivity and immanent experience of creative

4 Conceiving Marx explicitly as a phenomenologist is a recurring theme in Henry’s lengthy monograph, running from its beginning to its conclusion. One example among many is the following passage: “By presenting living individuals as the presupposition of history, Marx explicitly situates the principle of all economic, social, political, and cultural phenomena that ‘occur in the world’ and that we call ‘history’ in individual phenomenological life and in the necessity proper to it—in what this life is and in its essence, in life that wants to live and that, in order to live, must satisfy its needs, and that, in order to satisfy them, must work. Individual phenomenological life, all these lives or, to speak as Marx does, ‘living individuals’” (1983: 92).

activity, whose hidden core was this notion of pre-intentional, auto-affective consciousness, and conscious life.

Henry was of the opinion that the careful and attentive reader could find in the heart of Marx's entire work of life that the "essence" of humans (and all sensitive beings) was immanent, auto-affective, and embodied life, which was through self-enjoyment, self-suffering, and self-exposure, before it could be affected by the world and any form of exteriority. In the case of humans, this immanent, self-affective life was the fundamental capability of spontaneous, creative, joyful activity which experienced first of all itself, this process of active self-realization, before it could experience the result of this creative process. One of the most destructive features of *capitalism* is to *distort* this original immanent life, and to place everything into the exteriority of commodity fetishism and the relations of the capitalist mode of production, where everything has a price, which forms the essence of things – even humans' capacity to create. According to Henry, we must *dismantle capitalism* and start to establish a *socialist* society, following the ideas of Marx, in order to save mankind and the planet, and realize such a form of cohabitation which could truly ensure ideal conditions for the optimal functioning of immanent auto-affective life (2009, 2012a, 2014, 2018).

Henry is of the opinion that capitalism corrupts the essence of life itself. It destroys everything that is truly animate and spiritual. In this context, it is important to know that in Henry's view the essence of life is not its external, physical, biological aspect, but the internal, immanent side, that of consciousness, spirituality. Henry believes that capitalism destroys all such essential features in nature, in sensitive beings, and in humans in particular. Capitalism even spoils and corrupts the essence of Christianity, and Catholicism more specifically. It is Henry's opinion that Christianity could connect us to absolute life, from which capitalism separates us in an almost irrevocable way (2003). Emancipation is also about emancipating the true essence of Catholicism, and more generally Christianity and spirituality. In Henry's interpretation, both Marx and Christianity relate to expressing the essence of spirituality, and both are about conceiving a genuinely authentic human life. Henry believes that Christianity, just like the philosophy of Marx, has an intrinsically emancipatory aspect.

These motifs form the main framework of this present study, which will be articulated in four further sections. 2. A Radical Phenomenology of Embodied and Immanent Life, 3. Main Elements of Michel Henry's interpretation of Marx, 4. Capitalism as Modern Barbarism, 5. Conclusion: Socialism as a Way Out of Capitalism. A Society of Authenticity and True Spirituality.

A Radical Phenomenology of Embodied and Immanent Life

Henry presented the core and innermost essence of his philosophy as a *radical phenomenology of life* (see Kühn 1992, 2012, 2016). He wanted to explore life in its sheer and most original self-manifestation, as this phenomenon could be unfolded as the deepest foundation for every other phenomenon, as invisible

life grounding all forms of visible life and exteriority. Philosophically and methodologically, his general point of departure is Husserlian phenomenology: he wanted to radicalize Husserl's – and also Heidegger's – philosophy. In philosophy, he wanted to reveal the ultimate origins in a theoretically and methodologically legitimate way. In this regard, his next fundamental point of orientation was Christianity, and Catholic Christianity in particular. In Henry's interpretation, Christianity is the cultural condensation of the experience of *absolute life* (2003, 2012b, 2015). Phenomenology – especially as radicalized by Henry – merely articulates and expresses in a theoretically more rigorous and exact form what is inherent in Christianity.

For Henry, there were a significant number of cultural and theoretical formations in history that helped to formulate his own conception of life, which was meant to be a radical phenomenology of life. In phenomenology, Husserl, Heidegger, Scheler and Merleau-Ponty were particularly important for him, but before and aside from phenomenology, authors like Maine de Biran, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Marx, Freud,⁵ and before the 19th and 20th centuries, Christianity in general, and more specifically Meister Eckhart. Henry distinguished emphatically his notion of life from prevailing and mainstream conceptions in Modernity and in his own age, instead highlighting his search for a non-deterministic, non-mechanical, anti-naturalist notion of life free of reification and reductionism. Henry joined critiques of Modernity – the ones we can find in, among others, Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer – arguing that with the victory of the Modern naturalistic scientific attitude and rise of Western capitalism, *something had gone fundamentally wrong*. He agreed with these thinkers, who were speaking of a special sort of forgetfulness (*Vergessenheit*) in the history of Western philosophy, and in Modernity in particular. In a similar manner, as Husserl was speaking about a forgetfulness regarding the life-world, Heidegger spoke about the forgetfulness of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*) (Heidegger 1993), and in Gadamer, one can find indications as to the forgetfulness of language,⁶ Henry was speaking about a forgetfulness about the essence of life, which dominated Modernity up to his own time.

In Modernity, Henry claims, the experience “to live” and “being alive” became forgotten. A radical phenomenology of life must first reopen the way to these experiences. The original phenomenon of life must be unfurled, and after that this primordial sphere of *transcendentality* must be kept open by the phenomenologist (Henry 1973). “Transcendentality” for Henry refers to the original, ultimate invisible dimension of life as affectivity, as *self-feeling* and *self-revelation*. In Henry's opinion, life, before it could relate to everything else than itself, is related to itself. For example, *pain* – at least in Henry's interpretation

5 Here we should add that while Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Freud were deeply important thinkers for Henry, when he was elaborating his own philosophy of life, he differed strongly from the former authors that they were altogether *determinist*, and *freedom* was an essential feature of life in Henry's idea.

6 See Olay 2007.

– first of all suffers itself, it does not relate to anything else than itself. Likewise, joy is self-enjoyment, primarily it is related to the very experience of enjoyment, and not something else. In such subjective experiences, like joy, suffering, or the sheer experience of breathing or swallowing a dip of cold wine (Henry 2015) life reveals its innermost essence in its original self-relatedness. In other words, in Henry’s notion, life is auto-affection, self-pathos; something that primordially affects itself and which is a self-related pathos.

In the first section, we referred to Henry’s opposition to the Husserlian notion of intentionality, with which he contrasted his “material phenomenology” (2008), and “radical phenomenology of life”, which conceived of the innermost, ultimately genuine, most original form of consciousness and subjectivity as pre-intentional, auto-affective consciousness. This pre-intentional experience precedes, grounds and makes possible intentionality in the strict and adequate sense. It is first related to itself, it feels and experiences itself, and it could be related to a strictly intentional and exterior object, and to the world, through this way. This pre-intentional experience (which is also self-experience at the same time) prepares the way for the emergence of world-experience, and is also the most original form of life as such.

Life first feels, enjoys, and suffers itself in an auto-affective way, and, based on this self-affecting character, it can relate to the world, to the realm of externality. Life is first of all – methodologically regarded – individual, the life of a specific living being. In this respect, life reveals itself as essentially embodied,⁷ but through its embodied, incarnated aspect it also discloses its inherent connectedness to other subjects, and in a certain way to all other living creatures, and to *life itself in general*. In other words, life – even as an individual, at first sight *apparently* separated life – is essentially *intersubjective* too. It feels itself as embodied and intersubjective at the same time. Life discloses the universal togetherness of all livings. Henry, of course, is not naïve. He is fully aware of the fact that this universal community of all livings is through and through divided by unreconcilable conflicts and antagonisms. A predator must catch its prey, or it will starve to death., The prey must escape, because it dies if it is caught by the predator. There is no reconciliation in conflicts like that. Or we could think of the romantic rivalry of two men for the same woman (presupposing the aim of a monogamic relationship). The victory of one party over the other means joy for the first and pain and suffering for the other. Frequently, the joy of one subject means suffering, even death for the other. Nevertheless, Henry believed that there is *a depth dimension of life* which is common to all living creatures and shared by them, despite every mutual suffering, despite

⁷ It is important to emphasize that embodiment is not firstly physical corporeity, the biophysical body, which – according to Henry – is a founded phenomenon just like the world in its exteriority. The body is – first of all, and first and foremost – the *felt and pathic body*.

In this manner, Henry claims, for example in his book, *Incarnation*, that “*the worldly body is possible only once we have presupposed a flesh already revealed to itself as living flesh in the pathos-filled self-revelation of life*” (2015: 136).

every harm that was caused out of necessity, intentionally or unintentionally by one being to another. In Henry's view, in spite of every hostility and contention that separates and divides the realm of the living, life nevertheless has an aspect that still connects every living, even conflicting and competing parties, such as a predator and its prey. This deep dimension of life is more apparent for the theoretical glance in the case of humans, and especially regarding the conscious and *spiritualistic* aspects of human life.

Christianity is crucial for Henry to explore and unfold this above-mentioned general and universally bounding depth dimension of life. According to Henry, it was through Christianity that this depth dimension became manifest and completely *accessible*. Christianity, Henry claims, reveals the fact that every living being belongs in the same community of universal, *absolute life*. Individual life and the self cannot be conceived of as their own foundations: they are rooted in this absolute life, and founded by it (2003, see also Lavigne 2009). Henry thinks that "man is the Son of God, Son of absolute Life" (2003: 263) inasmuch that absolute life reveals itself in humans in the possibly more intensive and apparent way, and it is through man that absolute life can be manifested in an unmistakable manner. *Christ* is an archetypical living in Henry, He is the "Arch-Son", "the First Living" (2003: 66). Christ, for Henry, is a unique and exclusively exemplary manifestation of absolute life, even the life of God, as the Arch-Son of God himself, also as a living being who is the living love, who represents in person and flesh and bone the reality of the universal togetherness of the livings in one community through the feeling and acting of love. Through the self-consciousness and free will of humans, and through the Incarnation of Christ as the Arch-Son of God, of Absolute Life it became possible that humans (also as Children of God, more pregnant manifestations of absolute life) can form a truly authentic and *spiritual* community in life. Christianity for Henry represents the eminent and primordial form of spirituality, which refers to a genuine and authentic way of human life, as a life in the Absolute, as living the life of Christ and God. In Christian life, Henry thinks, one can truly live, feel, enjoy, suffer etc. absolute life itself, as an immanent, transcendental, and auto-affective life.

This brings us to our next important question: what does all of this have to do with the philosophy of Marx, who has been generally regarded as a materialist, atheistic thinker, and relentless critic of religion? Where can one find in a philologically, theoretically, philosophically legitimate way spirituality, immanence, and auto-affection in the writings of Marx? Indeed, not only did Henry believe these were shown and revealed in this work, but he also regarded Marx as the greatest theoretician in philosophy to explore, exhibit, and represent these thoughts and ideas, in a phenomenologically prime-original and penetrating manner. The main task of the next section will be to attempt to show the intelligibility of this claim in Henry's interpretative writings on Marx.

Main Elements of Michel Henry's Interpretation of Marx

The chief point of departure and perpetual point of orientation for Henry's interpretation of Marx was a strong, emphatic juxtaposition of the philosophy of Marx and the entire tradition of Marxism, beginning with the late Engels, up to Henry's time. In this regard, the main antagonist of Henry's classical, two-volume long monograph originally published in 1976 (2009) was Louis Althusser, whose conception of Marx is considered irrevocably flawed by Henry. Marx, Henry says in this context, is the most misunderstood philosopher in world history. "No philosopher has had more influence than Marx, and none has been more misunderstood" wrote Henry in his classical opus on Marx (2009: 7). In Henry's opinion the Marxist tradition after Marx reduced his genuinely philosophical attitude to something essentially non-philosophical, to a naïvely positivistic, naturalistic, scientific, deterministic worldview, with a political actionism lacking any deeper content or message – a view which, in Henry's notion, culminated in Althusser, who presented an anti-moralistic, anti-humanistic, rigidly scientific mature Marx.

One crucial element of Henry's debate with Althusser is that the former vigorously denies the so-called "rupture thesis" of the latter (see e.g., Althusser et al. 2015), according to which there is a drastic rupture in Marx's work of life that divides the period of the young idealist Marx from the era of the older, mature, scientific Marx. In contrast, according to Henry, there is a deep and essential continuity in the works of Marx which connects the author of the *Economic and Philosophic (or Paris) Manuscripts of 1844* to the author of the last manuscripts written to the unpublished versions of the *Capital*. It is Henry's opinion that in Marx's conception of *practical*, sensible, bodily, intersubjective (social) life, which he perpetually related to humans and human life, the attentive, careful reader could in fact find more or less explicitly the idea of the pathic, auto-affective, immanent life and its inherent self-revelation, self-manifestation. When we are practical, when we act and work, we – according to Henry's Marx-interpretation – experience the immanent, subjective, auto-affective and self-manifested character of life; through action and labour we gain access to the deepest, prime-original dimension of life itself, of which we were talking in the previous section.

This conception, Henry claims, necessarily implies a harsh, consequential, and profound criticism of *capitalism*, which renders everything into categories of commodity relations and forces all things into notions of externality. Capitalism, according to Marx – Henry believes – *suffocates* and *represses* real life, it distorts every form of true immanence and auto-affection, and hence leads to *barbarism* (2012a, see also O'Sullivan 2006). Although only at the level of a rudimentary, uncrystallized feeling, and in a sporadic manner, we can also find in Marx the idea that *this tendency* for reification and exteriority, which characterizes the essence of capitalism and leads to the universal reign of profitability, was rooted in Modernity – in his criticism of the naïve, mechanistic,

and deeply passivist naturalism of the materialists of the Modern Age.⁸ Henry thinks that this latter-mentioned idea must be highlighted more emphatically than it was by Marx, but we can nevertheless already find this notion from him too. Capitalism has merely brought the seeds inherent to the essence of Modernity into complete fruition. This does not mean that Marx's or Henry's conceptions were anti-modernist - neither opposed the project of Modernity entirely - they merely said that we must instantiate certain profound and crucial changes in this project, and consequently we also must alter our worldview, our general stance to life and the world in a fundamental way if we are to avoid letting the world fall into barbarism, and ultimately global catastrophe and collapse, through capitalism.

In Henry's idea the notion of an immanent, auto-affective, subjective, and essentially practical and intersubjective life could be evidently identified in Marx's anthropology and conception of human individuals.⁹ This anthropology depicts the human being as being given for herself her ultimate and utmost interiority, who - first of all - has something to do with herself in pure immanence, before everything else - everything exterior. Who feels herself acting, enjoying, and suffering things, and before experiencing the external things given in experience, she experiences the experiences of action, enjoyment, and suffering themselves; and who experiences any exteriority and non-subjective thing and entity based on this immanence, and after it, consequently, has something to do with the world and the physical entities in it *in a secondary way*. In Henry's opinion, this is the meaning of the Marxian view that human being appears first of all as a subjective, practical, sensible creature, who is given as a product of her sensible activity, and who also articulates the world around her as a product of this sensible, practical activity; and who creates the norms and measures of her own existence and enjoyment from her inner essence before she could have been rendered under any external category or measure.¹⁰ *Violence and repression* against this individuum begin precisely when a system of norms and measures are posed against her, and she is forced to adjust to such an external system; if she is forced to live and act according to norms and rules of externality, and not norms and rules that stem from her - although embodied, practical, and intersubjective - conscious immanence.

8 See e.g., the 9th and 10th thesis on Feuerbach: "The highest point reached by contemplative materialism, that is, materialism which does not comprehend sensuousness as practical activity, is the contemplation of single individuals and of civil society." "The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society, or social humanity" (Marx 2010: 5).

9 Henry 2009: 770. "In the history of Western thought Marx belongs amongst the few philosophers, (...) who conceived subjectivity not as a capacity to represent the world, so, something which is ultimately objectivity itself, but as essence, which cannot be reduced to the world, but exists in itself, which is its own life, and which is like life".

10 See e.g., the first Feuerbach thesis: "The chief defect of all previous materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that things [*Gegenstand*], reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the *object*, or of *contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively" (Marx 2010: 3).

According to Marx – at least in Henry’s interpretation – the special life-activity of the individual of an – either human or non-human – species is a subjective process, through which the individual in question affects itself first, before the world could affect it. In the case of an *animal*, this auto-affective life-process is a striving after individual and generic (sexual) reproduction, which the animal experiences as self-enjoyment or self-pathos, self-suffering, in which the creature has no distance at all to itself (Marx 1975a: 276-277). “The animal is immediately one with its life activity”, Marx says (1975a: 276).¹¹ Humans first experience life also in immanence, but humans also have a *distance* from themselves in this immanence. Humans are free, creative, spontaneous beings who have self-consciousness, who can imagine the aim and object of their action prior to this action, and who self-consciously experience this very action as action when doing it (1975a: 276-277) – or, in other words, they live it through as an imminent form of auto-affection. This conception, Henry states, remained unchanged throughout the entire career of Marx, through the pages of *Grundrisse* (1986), until the last manuscripts written to the *Capital*. Regarding this latter, we should highlight first and foremost the special importance Henry attaches to Marx’s distinction between abstract and concrete labour in the *Capital* (e.g., Marx 1996: 68-69). *Abstract labour* is the merely quantitative aspect of a particular labour process: it indicates the sheer exchangeability of different commodities of the same value and refers exactly to the formalist, purely quantitative regards that became prevalent during Modernity. In contrast, in *concrete labour* is manifested and exhibited the specific process of production, alongside its immanent, auto-affective aspect, that is to say, alongside the *subjective experience of labour- and production-process*.

Henry, following Marx, claims that capitalism is dominated by the reign of abstract labour and commodity relations (Henry 2009: 612-649). This is deeply affecting, namely by distorting and alienating auto-affective, immanent life from itself, a life which cries out for emancipation. According to Henry, we must break this reign of abstract labour and commodity relations in order to achieve true emancipation: a true and genuine society of emancipated, auto-affective life, which lives for spontaneous, joyful creation, an originally humane, free, and thus truly *spiritual* activity and way of life.¹²

11 In my opinion, one could not only find anthropology, but also an entire *zoology* in Marx.

12 In Marx: “In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilised man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving

At this point, one could rightfully raise the question of how this apparently moralistic and humanistic reading of Marx differs from other humanistic interpretations that we can find in – for example – Karl Korsch, Georg Lukács, and Antonio Gramsci? Henry's main problem with these authors is that they fundamentally read Marx through the lenses of Hegel, who is an important author and point of orientation for the above-mentioned theoreticians. Hegel, however, is a great opponent and antagonist for Henry (see e.g., Henry 1973). Hegel, in Henry's interpretation, is the philosopher of exteriority. *The superior order of the idea*, which governs Hegel's trains of thought and reigns in his system, represents for Henry an order and reign of exteriority. Marx, in contrast, at least according to Henry, explains life from within, from its most original interiority and immanence; and the earlier mentioned authors, Henry thinks, missed this crucial point.

A society emancipated from the purely formalistic and quantitative viewpoint of commodity relations could finally be an adequate place for joyful, creative human activity, one dedicated to the enjoyment of qualitative culture, and the production of qualitative cultural products (in science, arts, and philosophy), one which could finally actually exhibit and manifest the essence of immanent life. In this way, it could be *a truly spiritualistic society*, where the genuine, authentic, and intersubjective manifestation of human essence would be a manifestation of real *human spirit*, which is nothing else than the auto-affective and self-enjoying activity of qualitative cultural production and reception.

We have to touch upon one final question. What can Henry say about Marx's recurrent criticism of religion?¹³ According to Henry, it should be related to religion in an unemancipated, anti-spiritual society ruled by the forces of reification and objectification. Religion should remain in a certain form in an emancipated community, in an emancipated form, as a manifestation of the real spirituality and immanence characteristic of the very essence of life itself.

Capitalism as Modern Barbarism

Henry joins thinkers of the 20th century who claimed and believed that the project of Modernity turned out to be one that was a self-destructive project, and which released apparently unstoppable forces that now threaten the very

this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working day is its basic prerequisite." (1998: 807).

13 Marx: "For Germany, the criticism of religion is in the main complete, and criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism". "To abolish religion as the illusory happiness of the people is to demand their real happiness. The demand to give up illusions about the existing state of affairs is the demand to give up a state of affairs which needs illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of tears, the halo of which is religion" (Marx 1975b: 175-176).

existence of humanity, and indeed in some interpretations even life on Earth itself. Included in these thinkers, but not restricted to, are authors like Adorno, Heidegger, Horkheimer, Husserl, Jaspers, and Marcuse. Henry himself belongs to such a philosophical trend whose representatives diagnosed a deep-lying crisis in Western humanity, and particularly in Modernity, and sought a cure to such a disease or problem. Henry – alongside other, also Marxist authors (like Rosa Luxemburg) – identified the present state of society as a form of *barbarism*, which became dangerous to life itself, human as well as non-human.

Henry's diagnosis concerning the causes of crisis and the present-day's barbarism is very similar to Husserl's (Husserl 1970). In Husserl's interpretation, through Modernity, the depth dimension of reality became forgotten, that of the life-world, and ultimately the conscious transcendental subjectivity constituting the latter, and this prime-original dimension was *exchanged* for a derivative sphere, namely, a formalized, mathematized and merely quantitative aspect of nature, which it conceived as the "thing in itself" or as true reality. For Henry, this prime-original sphere is immanent, auto-affective life; in the case of humans, conscious transcendental subjectivity, just like for Husserl. Modern, mathematizing natural science, which rose with Francis Bacon, Descartes, and Galilei, conceived a formal, idealized construction as the original form of reality and nature, and forgot about the fact that this construction is in reality a product of (transcendental, constituting, and subjective) consciousness. Representatives of this modern, naturalistic, and naturalizing attitude interpret consciousness – instead of taking it as a source of origins – as a natural phenomenon alongside other natural phenomena; thus, philosophers and theoreticians of Modernity reified consciousness, which – in Henry's interpretation – had certain disastrous consequences.

Mathematization and naturalization (thus reification) go hand in hand in the Modern reductionist attitude. Naturalization conceives everything as being part of nature or being a natural entity. Mathematization (also formalization and idealization) highlights the formal, quantitative features of things as their exclusively relevant and important attributes. This attitude ultimately serves the viewpoints and measures of utility, and likewise rising profitability. Concerns of control, domination, and utility began to dominate Modern science and society. That which cannot be controlled (and originally, also formalized, mathematized, naturalized), and was unprofitable became irrelevant and unessential. Modern rationality and sciences became insensitive to qualitative features of reality (this was an implication of the concealment of the prime-original sphere of reality), and sought to gain dominance and control over nature and humans, and the individual human soul in particular. This led to an either implicit or explicit tendency to eradicate everything genuinely qualitative, subjective, and spiritual in human nature and society.

The conception of idealized and – at the same time – materialistically reduced nature became an ideology and technology (meaning: *technē*) for Modernity and Modern society. The qualitative, subjective, immanent, and genuinely conscious became *obstacles* for this ideology and *technē*, which encumber or

even hinder the smooth control and domination of nature, and the production of profit and efficiency. What is truly relevant and interesting for this ideology is the *how*, not the *what*; the question of *how* things work, *how* they could be dominated, how we can exploit them and make them more profitable. *Ontology* became irrelevant, or even meaningless. It was only speculation. Meaningfulness was constituted through measurability and predictability. In Henry's opinion, this was the most eminent form of Modern barbarism, which essentially concerned the most effective and profitable domination of humans and nature by eliminating everything qualitative and non-reducible from its horizon, and attempting to make everything predictable and controllable.

This stance, according to Henry, necessarily results in an *impoverishment of culture*. Henry is of the opinion that culture, in a certain way, expresses the very essence of life – in the case of humans, self-conscious life. Culture is the main way to live up to one's potentials, to maximize life's potentialities, and to help auto-affective, immanent subjective human life to manifest itself in its most immense, powerful, and ever self-increasing form. Just like Marx (see e.g., Eagleton 2018: 123), Henry also believed in the emancipatory power of culture and cultural activity. By increasingly draining its emancipatory capacity and power, capitalism drastically weakens, domesticates, and disarms the arts and culture in general. It simply adjusts art and culture to the conditions of universal barbarism, ensuring that they should never mean a real threat to the current system of production, domination, and repression. Capitalism simplifies, reduces arts – like everything else – and in this way it also reduces the *life* in it to the lowest possible level. Art and culture in capitalism are *lifeless*.

Capitalism reduces and decreases the true potentials of life, conceives everything according to quantitative regards, and approaches all entities and phenomena from the perspective of utility and profitability, which ultimately defies the essence of life. Even *consciousness* – interpreted as a natural appearance – is considered from the viewpoint of manipulation and domination, inasmuch as it could be controlled and adjusted to the ideal conditions of production. In this way, capitalism and the Modern reductionist form of scientism could even be regarded as a form of *death-cult*, meaning that they deny the innermost essence of life, with its unmechanizable, non-reducible, intrinsically qualitative character that resists every attempt to be grasped by external, formalist categories, escapes every attempt to force it into rigid formulas and frameworks, and which cannot be controlled. Decreases in the level of art and culture – Henry claims – are a necessary and inevitable consequence of the capitalist mode of cultural production and consumer society. This turns art, as a manifestation of the essence of conscious human life, into its opposite, its very own enemy. *True art that stems from the essence of life is emancipatory and anti-capitalist.*

Make no mistake, Henry does not prefer the so-called “actually existing socialist” and communist regimes of Eastern Europe and Asia over capitalist societies. Quite the contrary. He rejected and criticized both (2014). Henry claimed that both of them were and are dominated by merely quantitative viewpoints, and a utilitarian and essentially pragmatist approach to rule and control over

everybody and everything. The actually existing socialist and communist regimes make no exceptions. While capitalism, in the form of consumer societies, rests upon a latent and implicit sort of violence and repression, and seeks control through manipulation, currently existing socialist regimes choose the way of explicit violence and repression. But in Henry's opinion, none of these systems are better than the other one. Both of them attempt to control humans and nature, invade, conquer, and subjugate life and consciousness. Both of them are sheer expressions of *Modern barbarism*.

It is important to emphasize, however, that Henry did not represent an anti-scientific attitude. He did not condemn science as such, and was not an anti-rationalist philosopher. He followed Husserl (1970) in this regard too. Not every form of rationalism and science is wrong. Only in and through Modernity certain fateful and disastrous tendencies commenced that *derailed* the originally positive motifs of rational and reflective philosophy and theoretical thought, and led to a one-sided, reductive attitude which is blind to the depth dimension of reality and its qualitative, irreducible moments and features.

In this regard, his attitude was similar to authors of the Frankfurt School, like Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), and Marcuse (2006) – who also criticized harshly the negative, reductionist, one-sided, simplicist tendencies in Modern rationalism, that resulted in capitalism, which exploited both human and non-human nature. Horkheimer and Adorno, however, in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and also Marcuse in *One-dimensional Man* were rather pessimistic about the future possibilities of humanity, and the chances of avoiding ultimate disaster. Horkheimer and Adorno especially emphasized that we have no guarantees at all of avoiding the final catastrophe and falling permanently into barbarism. Henry, on the other hand, was always very affirmative that if we really attempted to follow and realize the Marxian idea of socialism as a social system that ensures the best conditions for the spontaneous, unhindered, and optimal activity of creative, auto-affective human life, then we would finally find a way out of Modern barbarism.

In the next, final section we would like to examine the details of Henry's conception of socialism after Marx, and the way Henry imagined the realisation of a genuine and authentic form of socialism, one that would thus fight barbarism effectively.

Conclusion: Socialism as a Way Out of Capitalism. A Society of Authenticity and True Spirituality

As we have seen, it is Henry's belief that capitalism as the fully escalated form of Modern barbarism, enslaved and entrapped life, consciousness, and spirituality; subsumed everything to the viewpoints of utility and profitability, and attempted to eradicate, or at least disarm and domesticate, everything that might be a danger to profitability and the bottom line. We saw how Henry thought that capitalism as Modern barbarism withered all forms of life, decreased culture to the lowest possible, mechanistic level as mere consumerism

and entertainment, trapped consciousness through manipulation or open violence, and eradicated all true spirituality; and that Henry consequently believed that capitalism in the long run would destroy humanity and life in its present and essential form. The survival of humanity and earthly life – not to mention their prime-original forms, namely conscious, auto-affective immanence – depends on whether we will be able to dismantle capitalism. Henry thinks that Marx's thoughts provide us with a blueprint to transform capitalism and build a better society, following the guideline of creative, self-conscious, immanent, and auto-affective life.

Socialism would be a social system that transcends both capitalist and communist forms of barbarism. In this regard, it is important to note that Henry emphatically juxtaposes socialism to communism (2018), and believes that in Marx himself the careful reader could find a direct support for such a juxtaposition (2018: 86). Henry, as we saw, regards both capitalism and communism as repressive regimes, while socialism, in his interpretation, would be the ultimate form of emancipation and freedom. Socialism, Henry thinks, must be the end of every repression, alienation, reification, and subjugation. It should be a democratic society that rests upon the principle of representation of people. The philosophy of Marx, Henry says, is “the metaphysical foundation of the theory of democracy” (Henry 2009: 46). It does not allow anything which would restrict, delimit, or alienate the freedom – as the fundamental capacity of creative power – of the community.¹⁴

The way to socialism – and out of barbarism – would be a *gradual transformation* of current society, which relies upon a theory that constantly reflects upon the Modern barbarism as a whole, as well as the most important factors that inhibit truly free, authentic, genuine, subjective, and unreified human activity and life, and tries to fight these factors and break down the institutions from which stem reification and barbarism, through a collective, social, and intersubjective political praxis. Henry in this regard firmly believes in the political potency of Marx's ideas – he is humble enough to refer perpetually to the Marxian notion of socialism, and not place his philosophy and interpretation in the centre; but, as can be reconstructed from the context of his writings, he clearly assumes that his philosophy, interpretation, and approach could be the most effective way to realize socialism. Evidently, he presumes that people must form a clear idea regarding the importance of an immanent, subjective, auto-affective life, and the destructive effect of capitalism upon it.

14 In socialism, according to Henry, the human contribution to production is reduced to zero. Production becomes completely automatized, and human beings are able to devote their lives to meaningful, creative, and artistic activity. As Henry wrote in his major monograph on Marx: “The transition from capitalism to socialism is nothing other than that from a production process in which living labor has the greatest share to a process in which this share continually diminishes, tending ultimately toward zero. [...] In concrete terms, this involves an entirely automatic system of production, in which the products, in spite of their quantity and their quality, have no value” (Henry 1983: 287). In the last sentence, “value” clearly refers to exchange value.

People must first see clearly how destructive, devastating, and barbaric this ideology is, and what they actually lose in every moment when capitalism and Modern, one-sided rationalism rule and dominate their lives, and it is in their best interest to dismantle this society and way of production and transform it into something better.

Capitalism is a stubborn, incredibly strong and extensive form of barbarism, which is now deeply rooted in human culture and society, and which has diamond-solid foundations. One cannot get rid of this system overnight: a rapid revolution most likely would not be able to eradicate this system. Many people actually believe that they are the real beneficiaries of this system, especially members of the higher social classes. As far as it can be reconstructed from Henry's related writings (2009, 2012, 2018), Henry is well aware of the fact that people must first realize what capitalism actually does, what is true, genuine, and authentic human life, and why the latter is incompatible and irreconcilable with capitalism. Then, in a second step, people should identify the biggest structural and institutional problems of current society, and, through social collaboration and cooperation, in an essentially democratic manner, members of the community ought to change the correlated structural features and institutions of society for others, which presumably would ensure greater chances and more optimal conditions for a creative and authentic way of human life.

Henry emphasizes that despite the fact that Marx was never very systematic about the precise structure and architecture of the future, post-capitalist society, one can find indications, hints, references, even more or less explicit and elaborate trains of thought concerning the main features of such a humanistic and emancipated social formation throughout his entire theoretical career – from *Economic and Philosophic (or Paris) Manuscripts of 1844* (and in writings from even earlier years), *German Ideology*, *Communist Manifesto*, *Grundrisse*, *Capital*, or the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Sometimes, these Marxian considerations and reflections appear to be quite utopistic (see e.g., Bence, Márkus, and Kis 2022), but in Henry's opinion, these utopistic – or apparently utopistic – motifs never really exclude the realizability of Marx's corresponding ideas on socialism. Quite on the contrary, they raise a *constant and compulsory ethical obligation* to persistently and perpetually strive after the practical and actual realization of these principles, bit by bit, and instantiate every such action and institutional change that could bring us closer to the ideal of an emancipated society. In Henry's interpretation, this is an obligation and moral responsibility rooted in the essence and structure of real, concrete, conscious, immanent life, and which calls upon us to realize a society ideal for such a life, whose conditions are rooted in the essence of human beings and their immanent and intersubjective life-processes. Our current society only enables an impoverished, alienated, reified, and thus inauthentic life. It is a barbaric social formation that confronts the individual capable of reflecting adequately on the present social and economic conditions – and on Marx's thoughts – *with the unescapable normative necessity of striving after the elimination and overcoming of the conditions of barbarism as long as they exist.*

We cannot stop until we create a society which enables a *collective, authentic, and – in Henry’s view – spiritual coexistence*.

This emancipated society, which makes authentic collective life possible, is socialism in the correct sense, which – in turn – presupposes a society of general abundance, which – of course – cannot be possible without a proper technical development. Henry knows that. That is why he is not a simplistic anti-scientist and anti-rationalistic thinker. He – just like Husserl – only criticizes and opposes bald, reductionist, one-sided technicism and rationalism. Henry, in consequence, following Marx, defines true and authentic socialism based on two preconditions: 1) general abundance, 2) labour is not directed primarily to economic production, but as a source of emancipation, it is true joy – a living praxis (*praxis vivante*) of creative activity (2009: 959; 2018: 86-87). Henry – in contrast to the late Heidegger – does not deny the positive significance of science and technology, which would be rather difficult if one truly wants to follow Marx. But Henry also thinks – and in this regard Henry sincerely believes that he follows Marx’s own philosophical intentions – that in an authentic society that successfully fought and defeated barbarism, science and technology would be emphatically subordinated to self-conscious, immanent subjectivity, and its most genuine and original form of expression, namely human culture, and, according to Henry, *artistic culture* first and foremost. If we are truly to try and emancipate our society, we must radically turn scientific ideology from an end in itself into a means to an end, subordinate it to artistic culture, and leave the conditions of universal barbarism behind.

It is an almost *gnostic* project¹⁵ of Henry’s to liberate consciousness and conscious, subjective human life from the prison created by capitalism, and thus enable it to function in an authentic, creative artistic way, which expresses its essence most pregnantly at the social level of collective, social, intersubjective praxis.¹⁶ A society based on such artistic, creative activity, which is also pro-

15 Gnosticism was an archaic view – a heretic version of Christianity – in which it was a crucial motif to liberate the soul under its enslavement and subjugation by the body.

16 By “gnostic project” I mean a sharp, almost unbridgeable division between the physical and the spiritual world, an antagonistic opposition between the two.

This stance, in my opinion, is clearly reflected, for example, in Henry’s statements concerning the irreconcilable opposition between the truth of Christianity and that of the world, as described in his work *I Am the Truth*. See: “It is then decisive to note that *the Truth of Christianity differs in essence from the truth of the world*” (2003: 23); “Here appears the radical difference separating the truth of Christianity from that of the world, as well as from all forms of truth that draw upon the world for their own possibility – the truths of science, of knowledge, of perception” (2003: 24); “*In Life, as its essence, since Life is nothing other than that which reveals itself*—not something that might have an added property of self-revealing, *but the very fact of self-revealing, self-revelation as such*. Everywhere that something like a self-revelation is produced there is Life.” (...) “Therefore we are in the presence of the first fundamental equation of Christianity: God is Life—he is the essence of Life, or if one prefers, the essence of Life is God” (2003: 27).

One could rightly raise the question here: how would a “gnostic project,” or one with “gnostic overtones,” fit into the worldly project of socialism? From Henry’s point of

foundly affected by the social, communal horizon, by the cooperation and collaboration of the emancipated subject, would be a deeply *spiritual* society, because spirituality for Henry means exactly this authentic, creative, emancipated functioning of self-conscious human life in its intersubjective embedment. *Human spirit and spirituality* in its most genuine and authentic form would be the innermost expression of creative, auto-affective, conscious, and immanent life. *Socialism, Henry claims, will be the most fitting society for a genuinely and authentically spiritual community.*

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view, the answer would be: as a project aimed at establishing a social system that provides the best conditions for the flourishing and fulfilment of spiritual, immanent, auto-affective life.

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Benče Peter Marošan

Duhovnost, svest i emancipacija života. Spiritualističko i katoličko tumačenje Karla Marksa kod Mišela Anrija

Apstrakt

Mišel Anri je prilično jedinstvena figura u fenomenološkom pokretu, kao i u filozofiji uopšte. U njegovom delu, naizgled kontradiktorni i heterogeni motivi integrišu se, po mom mišljenju, u harmoničnu, organsku i sintetičku celinu. U njegovoj filozofiji možemo pre svega pronaći četiri vodeće i orijentacione tradicije koje su oblikovale osnovni okvir njegovog mišljenja: fenomenologiju, katolicizam, filozofiju života (*Lebensphilosophie*) i filozofiju Marksa, koju je Anri oštro suprotstavio celoj tradiciji marksizma. U tom pogledu, verovatno dva najvažnija filozofska autora za njega bili su Edmund Huserl i Karl Marks; potonjeg je Anri smatrao najpresudnijim filozofom u čitavoj istoriji zapadne filozofije i najizvornijim i najautentičnijim fenomenologom (čak i u poređenju sa osnivačem fenomenološkog pokreta, naime Huserlom).

Mišel Anri je verovao da se moderna globalna društva nalaze u takvoj krizi iz koje samo Marksova filozofija može pružiti izlaz, kako u teorijskom, tako i u normativnom, praktičnom pogledu. Anri je smatrao da će bez radikalnog prevazilaženja kapitalizma zapadna civilizacija

– kao i čovečanstvo u celini – doživeti kolaps u intelektualnom, duhovnom, ali i fizičkom smislu. Varvarstvo, koje je Anri snažno kritikovao kao fundamentalnu i intrinzičnu odliku kapitalizma, reifikuje sve i podvrgava fenomene perspektivama korisnosti i profitabilnosti, uključujući i fenomene poput subjektivnosti i svesti.

Moramo emancipovati ljudski i neljudski, svesni i nesvesni život radikalnim prevazilaženjem kapitalizma. Tim gestom možemo dosegnuti istinski autentično društvo, koje se oslanja i na emancipirani oblik svesti i duhovnosti. U ovom radu nastojimo da pokažemo kako Anri preoblikuje Marksovu ideju emancipacije na osnovu pomenute četiri tradicije.

Ključne reči: Mišel Anri, Marks, imanentni život, emancipacija, svest kao auto-afekcija, ekološka kriza, kritika kapitalizma, duhovnost.