God's Presence within Henry's Phenomenology of Life: The Phenomenological Revelation of God in Opposition to Plantinga's Affirmation of God's Existence

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Abstract: The recent debate on the notorious Anselmian proof of God's existence, usually called the "ontological argument", is placed within an analytic approach, since Alvin Plantinga revisited this argument beginning in the sixties and especially during the seventies. At the same time, Michel Henry contested this proof, situating the debate in a completely different area of philosophy. Henry's critique does not concern the question of logical validity or the matter of rational justification of religious belief. Rather, Henry focuses on the way *existence* is conceived. In so doing, his phenomenology of life shows the difference between *affirming* God's existence (in every "possible world") and *accessing* God's presence inside the ego's subjectivity. In this article, I will try to show how Henry's way of proceeding makes *self-life-experience* a legitimate foundation for a belief in God's *presence* (not only the simple intellectual affirmation of His *existence*).

1. Introduction

Since Alvin Plantinga's *God and Other Minds* (1967), *The Nature of Necessity* and *God, Freedom, and Evil* (1974) were published, the debate surrounding the Anselmian proof[1], known as the "ontological argument", has proliferated within Anglophone analytic philosophy.

The contribution Plantinga made to this debate was enormous. He challenged the arguments of A. J. Ayer, J. Wisdom, C. D. Broad and W. P. Alston, who were basically following Kant's critique, from within their own analytic framework.[2] Plantinga analyzes the question to know if and how *existence* can—or not—be a predicate deduced from a concept. Those who reject the argument state that it is not legitimate to "define things into existence".[3]

Plantinga not only showed that all the critiques against the *proof* did not demonstrate either that existence cannot be predicated or that Anselm's argument predicates in the way the critiques say it does[4], but he also proposed a new formulation of the proof that it is logically valid to affirm God's

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1   Anselm of Canterbury (1033/4-1109) proposed a "single argument" (unum argumentum), that has been much commented upon in Modern and Contemporary Philosophy, according to which reason affirms the necessary existence of God. The argument assumes the idea of God as the "being greater than which no other being can be conceived. (*Id quod maius cogitarit nequit*)" According to this notion, it is contradictory to deny God's existence, because we can also conceive a greater being than a non-existent God (Anselm of Canterbury 2001).
2   Cf. (Plantinga 1990, p. 38).
3   (Plantinga 1990, p. 37).
4   (Plantinga 1990, p. 63).

existence. Furthermore, even if he is conscious that all formulations of the ontological argument are not immune to critiques, he concludes that the belief in God's existence does not contradict reason.

In *God and Other Minds*, the Anselmian proof is reduced to the exposition of chapter II of the *Proslogion*, and consequently read "as a *reductio ad absurdum*".[5] The proof is thus interpreted as a logical argument. If someone thinks about God, previously defined as "the being than which none greater can be conceived", while he affirms that God does not exist "in reality", he will fall into a logical contradiction. If "the being than which none greater can be conceived" exists only in "understanding", and not in reality, this being would not be "the greater", because it is possible to conceive the same being existing also in reality.[6]

To improve this argument, Plantinga further explores the concept of "maximal greatness" which "requires existence in every possible world".[7] As Anselm had already explained in reply to Gaunilo[8], Plantinga shows how the argument is *logically consistent* only when applied to the *necessary* being. Such an argument can never be applied to a *contingent* being. Some contingent being, such as Gaunilo's island, can exist only in a specific possible world.

However, it is not legitimate to say that this being must necessarily exist in *every* possible world. On the contrary, the "maximal greatness", because it exists in some possible world (as its presence in understanding attests), must exist in "every possible world", including of course our "actual world".[9]

In *The Nature of Necessity* and *God, Freedom, and Evil* (1974), Plantinga becomes more supportive regarding the ontological argument by proposing a modal reformulation of the proof. The crucial premise of his reformulation is: "There is a possible world in which maximal greatness is instantiated."[10] If we accept this assumption, it will be logically impossible to deny the existence of such a being. In other words, Plantinga shows the enormous difficulty of contesting the logical validity of the following reasoning: if God's existence is logically possible, it is also logically necessary.[11]

In this article, I do not want to discuss the logical consistency of Plantinga's analysis, which seems to me to be very strong. I only want to identify the domain wherein this argument is posited. Plantinga operates at an epistemological level: the nature of his reformulation is logical rationality. He wants to argue in favor of the thesis according to which the belief in God's existence is legitimate as "properly basic."[12] His *goal*—if I might posit it in those terms—is to defend the rationality of the believer. He is aware of the incapacity of the argument to convert others: "it is doubtful, I think, that any person was ever brought to a belief in God by this argument".[13]

Plantinga recognizes also that there are no definitive arguments to prove or to contradict the basic premise of his argument. Nevertheless, it is not against reason to assume that the existence of the greatest being is possible, because such a being exists in the understanding without contradiction. Thus, the belief in God's existence is (logically) valid. In so doing, Plantinga only claims the "rational acceptability" of Theism, and not the establishment of its unquestionable truth.[14]

While Plantinga defends the ontological argument within analytical philosophy, in the same sphere in which its opponents operate, Michel Henry makes an original critique against the ontological

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[5]   (Plantinga 1990, p. 28).
[6]   (Plantinga 1990, pp. 29–30).
[7]   (Plantinga and Tooley 2008, p. 166).
[8]   Cf. (Anselme de Cantorbéry 2008, pp. 298–318).
[9]   This is the reason why we can state the argument by the following: "if it is logically possible that God exists, then it is logically necessary that God exists" (Plantinga and Tooley 2008, p. 84).
[10]   (Plantinga 1977, p. 111). Plantinga's reformulation of the Anselmian proof is located in two key-works: first, in *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Plantinga 1977, pp. 108–15); second, in *The Nature of Necessity* wherein the argument is presented in a more sophisticated way, following the techniques of modal logic (Plantinga 1974, pp. 213–17). I do not intend here to explain the argument in detail. I will rather focus my analysis in the main concepts with which Plantinga's works, in order to show its opposition to Henry's phenomenology.
[11]   Cf. (Plantinga 1990, pp. 73–76).
[12]   Cf. (Plantinga 2000, p. 259).
[13]   (Plantinga 1990, p. 26).
[14]   Cf. (Plantinga 1977, p. 112).

argument by reframing the debate. In fact, it is important to compare both authors because the analytic interpretation of the *argumentum* reduces it to the sphere criticized by Henry. The French phenomenologist does not reject the Anselmian proof because he considers it logically inconsistent. He instead notices that the argument *affirms* God's existence only at a purely intellectual level. Furthermore, the "proof" allows someone *to affirm* God's existence, while it considers the impossibility of *grasping* God's reality.[15]

In this sense, even if Plantinga logically defeats the arguments of critics such as Alston, it seems that such a proposal confirms precisely what Henry criticizes about the ontological argument: we can affirm rationally that God exists, but we cannot grasp and conceive what precisely is the divine reality. The French phenomenologist might say against Plantinga that, after all, his analytic argument remains ontologically monistic (i.e., it considers that there is only one way things came into existence, by exteriorizing themselves to become a visible phenomenon).

Plantinga's analysis accentuates the forgetfulness (*oubli*), denounced by Henry, of the *self-life-experience* (*épreuve*) (i.e., the affectivity within God can be, not only *affirmed*, but especially *self-felt* in the *impressions of the flesh*).

2. Henry's Original Critique against the Anselmian Proof

2.1. The Ontological Argument as an Expression of Ontological Monism

It is interesting to notice that Michel Henry's phenomenological critique of the Anselmian proof was made in Europe during the same period as Alvin Plantinga's argumentation within the Anglo-Saxon analytical field. Henry criticizes the ontological argument in his doctoral thesis, *L'essence de la manifestation*, published in 1963, four years before Plantinga's *God and Other Minds*. Furthermore, in 1990, while Plantinga was proposing a new edition of his book, Henry gave a lecture in Rome in which he rejected the Anselmian proof.[16] Besides that, both authors published comments on this proof throughout the seventies, the eighties, and the nineties.

Starting from the first thesis of Henry, we can find his original critique against the ontological argument (even though it lacks the more detailed analysis as we find in his later works) in paragraphs §8 and §10 of *L'essence de la manifestation*[17]: these are the unique explicit mentions of "the ontological argument" present in this masterwork. Paragraphs §8 and §10 are in *Section I* of his thesis, in which Henry denounces the problem of "ontological monism".

The 'ontological argument' (...) consists in reading the phenomenal condition of Being. This phenomenal condition is precisely the existence of Being, it is, as Being outside its Being, the very Being of Being.[18]

This citation is taken from the paragraph §10, which is about the "phenomenological distance" and the "alienation" that are presupposed (by the philosophy of consciousness) to be *transcendental* to every phenomena. What Henry criticizes in the ontological argument is not reduced to logical validity. Henry wants to show that classical philosophy—"of consciousness"—conceives the Being and its phenomenologization in only one possible way. That is why this kind of philosophy is considered to be "ontological monism": because there is only one possible way things appear to be seen or conceptualized.[19]

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15 "Loin de frayer l'accès à Dieu, la preuve d'Anselme l'interdit." (Henry 2004, p. 73).
16 Cf. (Henry 2010, p. 45). This lecture in Rome was the basis of the article "Acheminement vers la question de Dieu: preuve de l'être ou l'épreuve de la vie" (Henry 2004, pp. 67–80; article originally published in Archivio di Filosofia, diretto da Marco M. Olivetti, anno LVIII, 1990, No. 1-3, pp. 521–32).
17 Cf. (Henry 2014, L'essence de la manifestation, §8: p. 62, §10: p. 82). This is developed in Henry's analysis of "phenomenological distance" and the transcendental "alienation" to every phenomenon.
18 (Henry 1973, §10: p. 67).
19 (Henry 1973, §15: pp. 125–26).

Within ontological monism, the phenomenologization of a thing means its *ex-sistence* as *exteriorization*. In other words, a thing can be only a phenomenon as far as it is put "outside" from itself to be *seen* and *posited* in a *world*. Such a world is the horizon of visibility to a cognitive subject. His conscience conceives—*sees*—the thing, achieving not its *real being*, but only its *phenomenon*. That is why the philosophy of consciousness falls into the Kantian impossibility of grasping the noumenon (*Ding an sich selbst*) as different to the phenomenon (*Ding für mich*).[20]

Henry notices that such a philosophy posits the *existence* of a thing as being different from its inner and real *essence*. There is a "phenomenal condition" (*exteriorization* from its inner and real essence) which is imposed on the *existence* as a phenomenon. This "phenomenal condition" is furthermore inherent to any *representation*. *To represent* a thing in the human mind means exteriorization and differentiation of this thing from itself to come phenomenologized.[21]

In short, the ontological argument conceives *existence* in the sense imposed by the "phenomenological condition" of the "philosophy of consciousness":

(1) On the one hand, God's real and inner essence is independent from the (human) subject in the sense that it is *exterior* from him;

(2) On the other hand, God's existence is conceived as a *pro-jection* (*ex-teriorization*) of God's being in a phenomenon that could be achieved by a subject's conscience.[22]

In other words, while it is impossible for the human conscience to grasp the real essence of the divine (1), God must exteriorize himself to be a phenomenon conceived by the human subject (2).

All in all, the ontological argument is intelligible within the philosophy of consciousness, in which only the "mode of presence"[23] proper to *representation* is conceived. This kind of presence—of a phenomenologized thing—is also a "form of existence"[24] and it is further the *only* "form of existence" to which the human subject has access. Henry considers that the Anselmian proof, by passing from existence *in intellectu* to the existence *in re*, deals only with the phenomenality of exteriority.[25]

Even if it is logically necessary to affirm God's existence, the human subject can never grasp God's essence. Even if the theistic belief is reasonably legitimate, God's existence does not mean the *presence* of his own reality to the subject.

Henry thus shows the problem of conceiving God as "the greater" (*le plus grand*)[26]. Taking *"the greater"* to the limit means it is the *unthinkable*, the *inconceivable* being. The definition of God in negative terms, as "the being than which *none* greater can be conceived", implies the impossibility of finding a conclusive and positive concept of God.

In so doing, the ontological argument affirms the necessity of God's existence, but simultaneously establishes a complete separation between God's nature and the human subject. In Henry's own terminology, the Anselmian proof *affirms* God's existence by impeding any possibility to *access* God's reality-presence.[27]

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[20] This "ontological difference" or "phenomenological distance" is, in Kant's philosophy, the condition of possibility of any kind of experience (Henry 1973, §7: p. 38, §11: pp. 90–91).

[21] (Henry 1973, §11: pp. 79–80).

[22] In the present paper, the masculine pronoun is used to mention God. It is important to notice that this choice is due to the fact that the authors we are dealing with, such as Anselm, Plantinga and Henry, operate within Christian tradition. However, the paper will use some times the neutral pronoun in order to show that both Plantinga's argumentation as Henry's view can be applied to a God different from the Trinity of Christian theology.

[23] (Henry 1973, §11: p. 80).

[24] "Consciousness therefore is not some other form of existence than that which arises in the internal splitting apart of Being; rather it is this very existence, this sole and unique form of all possible manifestation." (Henry 1973, §11: p. 77).

[25] Cf. (Henry 2004, pp. 72–73).

[26] Cf. (Henry 2010, pp. 44–45).

[27] Cf. (Henry 2004, pp. 67–68, 73). The same critique that we find in *L'essence de la manifestation* is also stated in a more clear way in the first volume of Henry's Trilogy, with an explicit mention of Anselm's name and Anselm's *Proslogion*. In *C'est moi la vérité*, Michel Henry opposes the "infinitely great Being" of Anselm as against the "Christian God" (Henry 1996, p. 72), judging that the Medieval Doctor was the first to open the way to a process of "denaturation" of God within occidental

2.2. Henry's Critique of Anselm in the Context of the Phenomenology of Life

At this point, we can understand the play on words Henry makes in French between *preuve de l'être* (*the proof of being*) and *épreuve de la vie* (*life experience*). Henry rejects vehemently the ontological argument, interpreted as a "proof of being", insofar as he accesses God through "life experience".[28]

In so doing, Henry's critique regarding the ontological argument touches the heart of Henry's phenomenology of life. Interpreted as the ontological argument, the Anselmian proof consists in reasoning within a philosophical field where only a form of existence can be achieved by the human subject. This form of existence is any phenomenon to which corresponds a representation. There is thus only a single kind of phenomenon that is allowed: the phenomenonalization of a thing whose reality remains always outside the representation achieved by the human mind.

For Henry, this philosophical approach has three main problems.

(1)　First, the human subject grasps reality from the "outside", remaining always "distant" and "disconnected" from reality itself.

(2)　Second, only one kind of phenomenonalization (that is to say, manifestation of reality) is conceived: reality must exteriorize itself (which corresponds to "alienation of being") to become a phenomenon grasped by the human mind.[29]

(3)　Third, in this philosophical paradigm, the human subject is defined according to the manifestation of another being. As Henry notices, the philosophy of consciousness does not develop a "positive ontology of subjectivity".[30] In other words, the human subject is conceived as being at the service of the ontology of an exterior reality, because in his mind, in his conscience, the manifestation of exterior reality can be realized.

According to Henry, there is a different form of existence that is *forgotten* by this classical philosophical approach. Before every phenomenonalization of an exterior thing in the human mind, first, the subject feels himself; he feels his own reality; there is a primarily subjective ontology. Philosophy must start by conceiving the *self-feeling of self* which lives it as the self-experience of self, as the Being-affected by self, and as such this constitutes, in the effectiveness of its phenomenological realization, what it is, namely, a feeling.[31]

In this sense, there is a phenomenon even more original than the phenomenologization of external things. This primordial phenomenon is situated inside the subjectivity itself, and its reality consists, not in pure rationality, but instead in *affectivity*: first, there is a Pathos; an *auto-affection* of the ego (human subject).[32]

The rejection of the ontological argument is thus due to the oblivion of this internal reality of the self as an affective being. God's existence is affirmed to be necessary according to logical principles proper to a conscience that achieves only phenomena of exterior things. In so doing, the affective reality of the self remains forgotten and inconceivable (at least, in philosophical terms).

According to Henry, the reality of God is revealed within the *life*, the *self-experience* of the living subject we are. We will see later how God can be revealed through *auto-affection*. For now, I only state that Henry's opposition is due to the fact that the Anselmian proof affirms God's existence but does not guarantee the possibility of grasping God's reality in self-life-experience.[33]

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　　philosophy. According to Michel Henry, Anselm's concept of God conceives only the phenomenality of representation, and applies it to God. This approach does not consider the access to God's manifestation through the affectivity of the self (Henry 1996, pp. 194–95).

[28]　(Henry 2004, p. 79).

[29]　Cf. (Henry 2003, pp. 62–63).

[30]　Following Maine de Biran, Michel Henry tries to substitute a "transcendental phenomenology of classical and empirical psychology" by a real "ontology of subjectivity" (Henry 1975, p. 16).

[31]　(Henry 1973, §52: p. 464).

[32]　Cf. (O'Sullivan 2006, pp. 30–31).

[33]　The forgetfulness of affectivity consists precisely in the contradiction into which Descartes falls by excluding the auto-affection of the ego. In fact, on the one hand, in the *Second Meditation*, Descartes discovers the reality of the soul,

3. How the Debate within Analytic Philosophy Corroborates Henry's Critique

Alvin Plantinga's argumentation surrounding the Anselmian proof continues to be called in the philosophical field "ontological monism", in Henry's own terms. First, the American philosopher suggests arguments in the Cartesian paradigm of "*clear and distinct ideas*", namely a syllogistic entailment of propositions whose conclusion is logically valid in a pure rationality. *Affectivity*, especially the *auto-affection* of the self, takes no place in the affirmation of God's necessary existence.[34]

Furthermore, even if different "modes of existence" are considered in Plantinga's argumentation, an affective internal mode of being remains forgotten. In fact, the debate between Plantinga and Alston considers (only) three different "modes of existence": "existence in the understanding", "existence in reality" and "fictional existence".[35]

This distinction is established by Alston to show the incoherence of the Anselmian proof, in the sense that he considers it invalid to assign some proposition to a different mode of existence than that from which the proposition is made. Therefore, no statement about a being presupposed to have existence in the understanding (the mode of existence of the greater being thought by Anselm) entails that it really exists.[36]

Alston asserts that *existence* in the "real world" cannot be deduced from the fact that something exists only in human consciousness. In so doing, *existence* in the *real world* is conceived as being exterior to and independent from the human subject. Besides that, the conception of the three modes of existence described above reduces *existence* to an intellectual abstraction (human mind) or to the external actual world (empirical reality). In both cases, we are in the realm of *representation*, within which there is a transcendental *distance* between the subject and the realities conceived in his mind (whether they correspond to fiction or empirical reality).

Plantinga points out Alston's contradiction, by showing that there are legitimate presuppositions that presuppose "dual existence": "both in reality and in the understanding." Anselm's proof claims this "status".[37] Without entering into the details of the logical argumentation, Plantinga restricts his analysis to the notions of "conceptual realm" (the "existence in the understanding") and "real existence" (the reality itself). After that, he analyses how a proposition—a being in mind—can have a "real correlate" (in reality) and applies it to the Anselmian proof.[38]

Plantinga assumes the "phenomenal condition" of the "ontological monism" denounced by Henry, according to which there is a transcendental distance between the subject and the reality, and between reality itself and its phenomenon.

Furthermore, in his consideration of the *proof*, Plantinga uses the semantic, very common within modal logic, of "possible worlds". This procedure allows him to clarify the difference between a *necessary being* (that exists in *every* possible world) and a contingent being (whose existence is only guaranteed in *some* possible worlds).[39]

In so doing, Plantinga reformulates the ontological argument in a kind of *priority* regarding the *actual world*, but not regarding the *external mode of being* (*in the visibility of every possible world*). God's existence remains conceived as being exterior both to Himself and to the subject.

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the auto-affection, as the primarily phenomenon to which we have access. But, on the other hand, at the end of this *Meditation*, Descartes concludes that there is no appearance of affectivity. Furthermore, the *Third Meditation* (within which God's existence is affirmed) accentuates the oblivion of the affectivity realm (Henry 1985, pp. 58–59).

[34] Michel Henry appreciates the Descartes of the *Seconde Méditation*. That is to say, the Descartes who discovered the first cetain reality of the *cogito*, who his a affective subject. However, the Descartes of the "the clear and dinctis ideas" is, according to Henry, in contradiction with is discourvering. This one is the Descartes appreciated by Husserl (Henry 2003, pp. 57–72). It seems to me, that Plantinga is also more close to the second Descartes.

[35] Cf. (Plantinga 1990, p. 47).

[36] (Plantinga 1990, p. 50).

[37] (Plantinga 1990, p. 54).

[38] (Plantinga 1990, p. 61).

[39] (Plantinga 1977, pp. 104–12).

The *priority* Henry searches for, on the contrary, is previous not only to this *actual real world* we are in, but it is also previous to the possibility of seeing or conceiving an exterior being. There is an internal reality to the self that must be considered: the *auto-affection*.[40]

Demonstrating from the analysis of the "maximal greatness" that God cannot be *evil*, Plantinga conceives a concept of God also in positive terms: he specifies God's attributes as "goodness", "omniscience" and "omnipotence."[41] And then he tries to show how these properties seem to imply the necessity of the existence of such a being. In so doing, Plantinga corroborates the problem denounced by Henry: God *exists*, but at an insurmountable *distance*. God is the being with all the *perfection* of all good qualities. Nevertheless, such properties cannot be attributed to us (i.e., the human subject).

Finally, Plantinga's argumentation makes an analogy between "the belief in God" and the "belief in other minds". He considers that both are rationally justified: that is to say, if someone accepts one belief, he has no reason to refuse the other.[42] In so doing, it is clear that God remains conceived as being *exterior* to the human subject.

All in all, the phenomenology of life identifies a phenomenon inside the subjectivity: the *auto-affection of the self*. This primary phenomenon is neither reducible to pure rationality nor to conceptualization. According to Henry, there is a *Logos* proper to inner life, to *self-affectivity*—a *Logos* completely different from the Greek *Logos*.[43] Plantinga's argumentation is restricted to this kind of *Logos*, falling into the forgetfulness of the subjective reality as affectivity.

4. How to Perceive God in the Archi-Affectivity of the Ego?

At this point, it is important to show how God's presence can be *felt* by the human subject. The key-word for understanding it is "passivity".[44]

Henry notices that there is a more original phenomenon forgotten in classical philosophy. It is the phenomenon of *auto-affection of life*: a "pathos-inducing[45] auto-affection"; a "living Present".[46] Before every possible representation of an exterior thing, the subject feels himself, feels his *life*, in his own *flesh*. Henry's phenomenology of life focuses on this main *non-intentional* phenomenon.[47]

As the Cartesian cogito, the subject starts from himself. He has his own reality that is not defined according to the manifestation of any exterior being. The primarily subjective reality is *affectivity*: "*archi-affectivity*". It does not correspond to sensations of external things, but instead to the *impression* of the inner self: the "invisible *pathos*" of the ego.[48] That is what *auto-affection* means.

The first phenomenon is the ego with all his powers in life. The ego feels that he can do something, he can think of something and, first, he feels himself in a *pathos-inducing* movement of *joy* and *suffering*.[49] The first phenomenon, thus, is *auto-affection*: the phenomenon of living-affective being that feels itself, its own reality.

Life can feel its own inner reality only within an Ipseity: that is to say, a single subjectivity, such as the ego, which can be aware of his own feelings. Thus, *Life*, *absolute Life*, must engender an Ipseity, an ego, to achieve its *auto-affection*.[50] Nevertheless, the ego finds himself in life in a *passive way*. He feels that he is already in life, but he did not bring himself and his powers to life. The ego recognizes thus the manifestation of his own life as the first phenomenon. However, he comprehends that such

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[40] Cf. (O'Sullivan 2006, p. 30).
[41] Cf. (Plantinga and Tooley 2008, p. 166).
[42] Cf. (Plantinga 1977, pp. 268–71).
[43] Cf. (Henry 2010, p. 45).
[44] Cf. (O'Sullivan 2006, pp. 55, 108–9).
[45] I am translating the French adjective "pathéthique" Henry used, derived from the Greek word *pathos*, by "pathos-inducing".
[46] Cf. (Henry 2000, §11: pp. 86–93).
[47] (Henry 2000, §9: pp. 81–82).
[48] (Henry 2000, §16: p. 135).
[49] "En sa certitude invincible, dans le pathos de sa chair souffrance ou de sa joie, il ne lui doit rien." (Henry 2000, §15: p. 132).
[50] "Ipséité désigne le fait d'être soi-même, le fait d'être un Soi (. . .) C'est un Soi singulier et réel (. . .) généré par la Vie comme ce en quoi elle s'éprouve et se révèle à elle-même" (Henry 1996, p. 29).

phenomenon was not created by him.[51] Every human subject knows that he did not engender his own life, his own subjectivity: to him, life is the first giving (*donné*); *he came into life*.

In Henry's terminology, this phenomenon corresponds to the "weak sense" of "auto-affection".[52] If the ego feels his own life, he knows that he is not the "Archi-self", the "First living", because his auto-affection does not correspond either to an "auto-engenderment" or an "auto-donation". The "radical passivity" the ego experiences evidences this "weak sense" of "auto-affection".

However, this phenomenon is not intelligible by itself. It presupposes an active process to *engender* and to *donate* the Ipseity from Life. In other words, the "weak sense" of the ego (I am) needs to presuppose the "strong sense" of auto-affection in a more primordial ego. The "strong sense" of "auto-affection" means not only *self-impression*, but also "auto-engenderment" and an "auto-donation". Only to a personal being such as God, the strong sense of "auto-affection can be applied".[53]

In a phenomenological approach, the point is the *appearance* and *its conditions of possibility*. It is not reduced to logical syllogistic reasoning. Even though it is true that God surmounts the life of the ego and is its conditions of possibility, the *appearance* of ego's self-existence reveals, nonetheless, the inner reality of God himself: God is *Life*, is *auto-affected Life*.

Henry's phenomenological approach thus allows one *to affirm* God's existence, by the establishment of an ontological link between God's nature and human life-experience. Within the phenomenology of life, God is not the "maximal greatness" conceived according to pure rationality, but instead *Absolute Life* in which we participate.[54] The experience of *passivity* in Life allows Henry, not only to *affirm* intellectually God's existence, but also to licitly presume God's presence inside our own life.[55]

5. Conclusions

Alvin Plantinga and Michel Henry have different points of departure. While the American philosopher starts from the *idea* of God, the French phenomenologist examines God's presence within the appearance proper to subjective internal life. Logical consistency is present in both authors, but the continental phenomenology allows life-experience—that is to say, *self-feeling*—to be a sort of criterion that legitimizes religious belief. Thus, reason is not absolutized. Furthermore, within the phenomenology of life, the affirmation of God's existence does not concern a reality outside the human subject. This one can affirm God's existence while he *feels* God's presence through a *Life* that is given.

It is interesting to notice the difference between the rational theistic belief presented by Plantinga and Henry's phenomenological way to Christianity. On the one hand, we have the American author who is conscious that no logical reasoning can move someone to the faith. The only thing he searches for, in his philosophical analysis, is to guarantee the rational legitimacy to the believer.

On the other hand, we have the testimony of Michel Henry: a philosopher who did not depart from Christianity.[56] Henry arrived at Christian faith departing from phenomenology.[57] This movement can only be made in *life-experience*, in the living experience of passivity. It can never be done by abstract reasoning. In this respect, Henry accepts the Marxian's and Feuerbach's critique against all rational arguments for God's existence:

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[51] (Henry 1996, p. 77).
[52] (Henry 1996, p. 136).
[53] (Henry 1996, p. 135).
[54] Cf. (O'Sullivan 2006, pp. 176–77).
[55] It is interesting to notice that Henry's argument avoids, in a certain sense, Kant's critique, because it does not put God's existence in the *accusative term*. In other words, according to his opponents, the ontological argument predicates God's existence. And that is valid only in the *copulative meaning of being*, but it is never legitimate in the *existential meaning of being*. However, Henry underlines that in his own argument is the human subject who is in the *accusative term*, and so God is not predicated (Lavigne 2011, p. 75).
[56] Cf. (Furuso 2015, p. 86).
[57] Cf. (Henry 2005, pp. 152–54).

Feuerbach argues that the "proofs for the existence of God have as their aim the ex-teriorisation of the interior and its separation from man.[58]

The affirmation of God's existence as a being that is separated from the human subject and his life-experience could lead someone to atheism. Henry's approach allows us, in some way, to *perceive* God's presence in the life into which we passively came to exist. In so doing, we can attribute to God a property that we feel inside us: *inner Life*.

As opposed to the analytic approach, Henry does not look for a rational assent to theistic belief on a purely epistemological level. On the contrary, his phenomenology of life founds the affirmation of God's presence in the ontology of life experience. In so doing, the theistic belief is allowed for and legitimized, not from the pure use of reason, but instead from the self-experience of the believer.

In my understanding, Henry's critique against the Anselmian proof opens a new field whereby God can be linked to human affectivity and, in so doing, it makes possible a new discourse on God more appropriate to the post-modern sensibility (according to which reality is not reduced to pure rationality).

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[58] (Henry 1976, p. 102). We used the translation presented by Michael O'Sullivan (O'Sullivan 2006, p. 121).

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