

Chapter XI

PARTICIPATION AND FREEDOM

A) BIRTH OF FREEDOM

ART. 1: *Freedom is the heart of participation.*

Participation is inseparable from freedom. And though it is true we could, at the extreme, legitimately attribute to the pure act all the positive features we will discover in the activity of participation, above all freedom itself, the word “freedom” has an accessible sense to us only where participation comes into play. The two notions are reciprocal: indeed, where freedom disappears participation vanishes as well, for I am then merely a part of the All since what I possess is no longer the effect of an operation I accomplish. Inversely, freedom in us appears to be always expressed by a choice, i.e. by an original participation that manifests a determinate perspective within the totality of Being and indicates that there must be as many such perspectives as there are consciousnesses.

Because in this book we always take departure from the highest point—i.e. not from a supreme principle which then suffers a series of degradations but from the source of all beings which permits them to create themselves by participating in its perfection—we must begin the study of participation with the

study of freedom, at once showing how each liberty¹ borrows from the pure act the initiative it puts into play, how it is distinguished from the pure act by its connection with nature and how it necessarily supposes an infinite plurality of other liberties in the world to sustain it.

Freedom is therefore the heart of participation. For I know very well that it exists only if I am capable of exercising and producing it through my own initiative. But one also knows that the only thing pertinent to it is initiative, that it supposes a possibility without which it could not enter into play, that it retains to the very end the character of possibility and that the efficacy it disposes is always a borrowed efficacy.

That being always coincides with the point at which true freedom is exercised can be sufficiently demonstrated by the identity we have established between being and inwardness to self. If it were not so, being would be for us only a display which might arouse our curiosity but would remain external to us and finally bore us. But if the encounter with being always produces an incomparable emotion in us, it is not only because it is an encounter with our being at the point where it is inserted in the absolute but because it puts us in the presence of a being we give ourselves by virtue of a creative power we consent to take charge of. It will therefore not be astonishing that no question awakens true interest in us and no problem merits consideration unless it is a question or problem that requires us to put our freedom into play and to engage our responsibility. The Stoics were not deluded in thinking that everything that does not in some way depend on me leaves me indifferent, as if it did not exist.

ART. 2: Through the participation of its essence the pure act gives birth to particular liberties which have an analogical rapport with it.²

Creation is nothing like an object from the hands of an artisan. The absolute being acts purely through communicating what he is, i.e. he creates beings, not things; but the nature of a being is also to determine himself, i.e. to be up to a certain point self-sufficient: for in as much as he is a being he is also a liberty. For reality not to fade into mere appearance we need to rediscover, even in the simplest aspects of creation, traces of spontaneity and totality which are like imitations or rough sketches of a perfect sufficiency; by way of them creation's inclusion in the total being is realised. To create, for God, is to summon an infinite number of particular beings to participate in his essence. Matter is not the aim of creation: it takes rise from the conditions of participation whose inexhaustible fecundity it expresses, in both extent and limit. In the strict sense there is nothing but participation in the Act by way of an act. The Total Being

¹ That is to say "each free being".

² In other words they are not identical with it but have a parallel or analogous meaning. In *Louis Lavelle et le renouveau de la métaphysique de l' être au XXe siècle*, commentator Jean École makes much of this "analogical rapport".

reveals its presence to us solely by way of an operation that is ours and that allows us to insert our participant being into it. We do not, as too often believed, participate in the world such as it is given to us, even though this world is evoked by us as the faithful expression of the act of participation: for it indivisibly conveys a sense of what responds to it and what surpasses it. All the difficulty and all the mystery of the creative act resides in the apparently contradictory proposition that it can only create free beings, i.e. beings fit to create themselves. This is indeed the sole creation *ex nihilo*, for it has no need of a pre-existing material like potter's clay. Each created being effectively passes from nothingness into being, though he can subsist nowhere else than in the supreme act from whose depths he is graced to draw the very power of subsistence. And if pure freedom is defined both as an absolute creation and as a limitless generosity, we understand that it is manifest through a participation of its essence, ever on offer to liberties born without end.

Thus, though the pure act itself is incapable of diminution or growth, it calls forth an infinity of particular beings to exist in their own right, none of whom will possess any other reality than that which he has chosen or given himself but which the pure act endlessly nourishes and supports.

A particular being's freedom therefore cannot be defined in terms of a fall, since it refers on the contrary to the originality of the creative act, whose essence is ever to produce, i.e. to be always available for an act of participation in the ineffable and secret centre of Being where—even in the case of God—creation and sacrifice are one. For on examining the nature of the act we observe these two apparently contradictory features: that it is completely interior to self (one acts only in oneself and there is no other inwardness than there, where an act is carried out) and that it is nonetheless always creative (as if it were constantly transported outside itself in order to add to itself). It is above all an inexhaustible creation of self—yet a *generous*³ creation which constantly seeks to share itself and which, according to its degree of power, awakens around it centres of initiative to which it imparts the creative power within it, or transforms the very matter before it⁴ so as to address other consciousnesses with a message that is also a gift of itself: which we could indeed express by saying that the act is—in God and in us—always and indivisibly a creation of self and a sacrifice of self. And such is doubtless the unsoundable secret of the creative act.

That the pure act is always expressed through creation—by a call to the being of various liberties, each of whom gives being to herself—is what experience verifies, provided we agree to apply a method that allows us to recognise features of the pure act in every act of participation. Going from human freedom to the pure act we will discover an analogical rapport between the two terms. Indeed, if we observe an action we perform, we can consider it in four successive aspects: first, it makes us be; second, it always imposes some modification on the

³ My italics.

⁴ I.e. alters the material world.

material world; third, it thereby creates a communication with other consciousnesses on whom it exerts an influence, which often tends to become a domination comparable to that which it exerts over things; and fourth, it awakens and liberates other consciousnesses, tends to multiply centres of personal initiative, propagates around it the initiative it disposes – and everyone readily acknowledges that an action is pure and perfect in the measure it is capable of ascending this high. Such is the form of activity of all those humanity has recognised as its masters: sages, heroes and saints. We should not be surprised therefore that the act which is only act and creates itself absolutely (or again, exists eternally) has, in order to exert itself, no need to be applied to a material it modifies (though it has often been considered a demiurge), that it does not try to reign over other consciousnesses through the intermediary of universal laws (though it has been considered a supreme despot), and that this eternal creation of self is none other than the infinite liberality which calls other beings to share in its own power and dispose it as it disposes itself. That a feeling spreads, that an idea fructifies – this is a kind of testament or echo of the act by which a liberty is constituted, whose nature is ever to give rise to another free being.

ART. 3: Participation founds rather than destroys autonomy.

In so far as our freedom requires us to participate in an act that is self-caused it must be said that our self-being and our encounter with pure being reside at the point where our freedom is exercised. However freedom demands an independent initiative such that it always takes the form of an emancipation or liberation: with respect to what it does not take responsibility for, it is a negation; in matters where it has a positive character, the pure act is its source; where it has a limiting character, it receives the act and diverts its course. Thus one understands without difficulty how, regardless of whether freedom is not exercised or the manner in which it is exercised, nothing is changed in the pure act though everything else changes, not only in my participated being but in my rapport with other liberties and in the entire world of participation.

Human freedom therefore appears as the supreme mediator between the world and the Pure Act. Paradoxically we can say that freedom alone is given to us but in such a fashion that we nonetheless must always give it to ourselves: it therefore appears the very reverse of every given. But since the world always appears to express the very conditions of its employment we can say that freedom ceases to be a given at the very moment it becomes for us the principle behind all givens.⁵

⁵ The paragraph's complexity derives in part from different slants on "the given". Usually the phrase refers to the fact-world that is simply there before me. But the phrase can also refer to something that is inwardly granted. Freedom too can be a given in this sense; it might indeed be the primary given. Yet as soon as I exercise it, it ceases to be a given and becomes my free initiative, something I determine.

The secret of participation resides in this: if it is a participation in a Pure Act, in an Absolute Self, it should also render each subject an act or a self which, instead of possessing absolute interiority and freedom, indefinitely tends toward them. That is precisely the experience consciousness gives us. Hence there is between human freedom and divine freedom both independence and identity: independence because wherever freedom is exercised it is a hearth of original initiative; and identity because freedom is always a creative act, though in such a way that it is both within man and beyond his nature; it is an ideal in which he participates precisely to the degree that he delivers himself from the chains that bind him: to be free for such a being is not to have fulfilled conditions which permit him to seek the light and goodness of his ideal, it is already to have found them.

We are well aware of the modern world's ambition to preserve the mind's autonomy and of how this makes participation singularly suspect. But we will firstly observe that participation such as we understand it founds autonomy rather than destroys it; and it is precisely because it participates in the pure act—i.e. in an absolutely self-caused power which realises within itself the eternal passage from nothingness to being—that our freedom is possible and that we can tear ourselves from nature to become the principle of our own determinations. Participation thus conceived is emancipation and not subordination. But participation has the further advantage of showing how the activity I exert finds a superabundant source in an eternal activity that never fails it and how the world in which I take my place, the world that limits me yet is nonetheless given to me, cooperates with me and constantly sustains me.

ART. 4: Since the Pure Act is completely participable, each liberty calls for an infinite plurality of other liberties owing to her deficiency.

When a limited liberty has appeared (and we mean limited not in her power of choice but by the loan she draws on the inexhaustible power she disposes and by the hindrances to which her efficacy is subject) she calls for the existence of other liberties, this following from the idea that the Pure Act holds nothing back and is completely participable, in such a fashion that each liberty—ahead of making her way along the path from nothingness to being, all the while remaining deficient—would constitute an unbearable privilege if whatever was not participated by her were not participated by others. Since no existence exhausts participation, to posit any one of them is necessarily to posit them all.⁶ The passage from nothingness to being is realised at every point in the All and cannot be realised at one point without being realised at all points, else the integrity and eternity of the All would not be safeguarded. Thus each liberty, at the moment she begins to exert herself, evokes all other liberties, which through

⁶ The same principle is expounded in Section Two “THERE IS A COMPENSATION AMONG ALL PARTICULAR ACTIONS” of Part Five of *The Total Presence*.

their own exertions collectively shape a world that is doubly infinite: in a horizontal or extensive order and in a vertical or hierarchic order, so that God is entirely given in an inexhaustible participation yet preserves his unity, which the participation expresses and never shatters. If one wanted to translate this exigency of the totality, inseparable from participation, into a non-ontological language⁷ we would have to say that each particular consciousness necessarily appeals to all others because the task cannot be fully realised by any of them alone but only by them all. Thus my freedom always requires other liberties around it, for it is incapable of doing without them. Though it can always isolate itself, it cannot be sufficient to itself. Each consciousness needs all others in order to be sustained. And if someone maintained that it is enough that each consciousness remains in touch with the infinity of the act and draws upon it through a solitary dialogue, it could be shown that other consciousnesses are for it precisely the mediators through which it enters into communication with the act in an ever-deepening fashion, through an indefinite series of suggestions and proofs which constantly bring novel forms of participation into play. The history of my life is the history of my relations with other beings. These beings confirm my existence by taking me as an object of their activity, and we have shown that without them I would exist only to myself, i.e. in a subjective manner, as a power or a dream; I would not take part in the world. Even in competition and strife other beings are affirmed along with me if I consider the terms in a positive light, which obliges me to realise myself and to submit myself to a world whose unity derives from the dynamic solidarity of all its parts.

Moreover I need other liberties because my freedom can take only another liberty as a counterpart. We feel that freedom is truly exercised only in the presence of a free being and not in the presence of a thing. The encounter with a freedom that is not mine obliges mine to examine, deepen and even actualise itself. Perhaps it can posit itself only in the presence of another freedom that contradicts it, so that it truly discovers itself, not by meeting some objective resistance, but by confronting the presence of an initiative not its own, which consequently shows it that the other person too has an initiative and is not just another part of the natural order. Unlike absolute freedom—which calls for the existence of particular liberties purely through its own positivity, in such a way that, being itself a gift, it is given to all at the same time that it is given to itself—each particular liberty summons all other liberties by way of both her positive and negative traits: positively, in the measure that she too contains a generous and creative superabundance; negatively, not only in the measure that she needs other liberties to supply what she lacks—i.e. needs to cooperate with them in the realisation of those spiritual aims she is unable to obtain by herself alone—but also in the measure that, just as she has other liberties as counterparts, she in turn asks to become a counterpart for them, to be sustained and aroused by them, as

⁷ In the original document Lavelle speaks of a language that is “*déontologique*” and no longer “*ontologique*”.

she sustains and arouses them. This reciprocity is possible only owing to the limitation within us, such that far from disowning the individual part of our nature, each of us posits it as inseparable from his or her freedom, of which it is the vehicle so to speak. Hence the rapport among liberties always conveys a feeling of experienced or solicited tenderness toward the individual in each of us who, while not being the same in you and in me, precisely allows between us a sympathy founded on the consciousness of our common poverty. The very conditions under which freedom is exercised also constitute the principle from which sympathy is derived. And if someone claimed that he could no longer find himself amid the relations between the pure act and particular liberties, i.e. between the infinite and the finite, one could reply that here indeed reciprocity is broken—but not the bond of love whose perfection precisely requires that particular liberties constantly receive and that the pure act constantly supplies.

ART. 5: The discontinuity among liberties destroys neither their solidarity with respect to the Pure Act nor their mutual solidarity.

The discontinuity among individuals appears inseparable from the very possibility of participation. For each individual needs to make an initiative of his own that is precisely marked by a kind of separation and denial with respect to actions he has not himself produced. Only at this price can being's intimacy be safeguarded within me. Only at this price can life and the world be for me a veritable new beginning at each instant.

Someone will ask whether this discontinuity which separates me from others does not separate me from the Pure Act as well, thereby ending participation. But we will reply, firstly, that the process by which I found my self-being supposes a power that is given to me and that I am happy to assume; secondly, that I cannot decline this power without losing existence, though I can turn the continually-supplied force I dispose against its source; finally, that the process by which I separate myself from another individual creates only a relative separation between us, because we are all united to each other by way of the common source upon which we draw and because participation does not create worldly parts, does not render beings separate and without communication. On the contrary it fosters constant relations among them and one might say that, while they are united to the same principle through the activity they employ, they are at the same time united to each other by way of their mutual passivity. Which gives participation its strongest and most beautiful meaning since it is possible only on the condition that each individual takes responsibility for all existences, the whole universe and all history. And everyone keenly feels that—though the word “individual” always expresses a distinction grounded in nature between two beings, each of whom possesses an irreducible originality—the

individual is nonetheless only an instrument of the person⁸ and that the person appears at the moment the individual, lifting himself above nature to a spiritual existence while in the same stroke breaking free of his own limits to embrace the entire universe, agrees to a partnership with the act of creation, according to his forces.

Participation alone allows us to understand how beings are at once separate and united. They are separate by way of the free and personal character of the act they accomplish. And they are united because all these acts draw upon the same principle whose efficacy they dispose. They are therefore interdependent owing to their common dependence and solidarity within the unity of a spiritual society where each assumes a chosen role he alone can fulfil.

However the rapport between the Pure Act and particular liberties can be defined only by analogy with the rapport between each of these liberties and all the others. Now, our freedom is always limited since it is linked with an individual nature that simultaneously provides it with a limitation and an instrument. Consequently we can say that in the measure our freedom participates in pure freedom it imitates it so that in its most nearly perfect form it seeks to call upon the existence of other liberties, seeks to aid and support them in the effort they too make in freeing themselves from their natures.

We must go further and say that our freedom ought to offer itself for participation and that the sole means it has of realising itself is by constantly awakening other liberties to existence. Only then will it possess true creative efficacy. Which justifies the formula that there can be no other end for man than to become a god for men, and it sufficiently demonstrates to us that we can render unto God what we have received from him only by doing for others what he has done for us.⁹

ART. 6: The paradox of freedom is the same as the paradox of participation.

It is pointless to ask whether the act we have described in Book One is a free act. If it is true that freedom is supreme independence and the power to draw from self all its reasons for acting we must say that the act is freedom itself. Consequently difficulties are now going to emerge with the study of participation. For on the one hand, there's nothing in which to participate but freedom; on the other hand how can there be a participation in freedom without destroying it?

We have been able to shed some light on these difficult problems only by trying to combine the results of two different methods. One is deductive so to speak and should show us that the pure act can be exercised only by way of an infinite offer of participation to all particular beings, which amounts to a theory

⁸The distinction between the individual and the person seems to be the distinction between physicality ("nature") and spiritual essence.

⁹Lavelle's version of the Golden Rule?

of creation. The other, a kind of confirmation and justification of this, should succeed in demonstrating through analysis of our own freedom, on the one hand, that it is exerted by putting into play a power it has received, and on the other hand, that in its highest form it aspires only to create, i.e. to give rise to other beings outside itself which tend to be self-sufficient as well, or again, other liberties possessing and exercising the same initiative it performs or exerts itself. Thus the highest point freedom seeks to attain in its development should be the consummation of its union with God and the creation of a society of liberties, i.e. a spiritual society. We see therefore that there is a paradox in freedom but that it is one with the paradox of participation.

For freedom is an initiative that is nonetheless received. It is the heart of me and the act through which I create myself yet at the same time it requires me to constantly go out of myself in order to create an object exterior to me. It is the formation of me and the determination of what I want to be yet it actualises powers which are already me and so to speak map out my path. It is always an option among possible alternatives yet as long as it remains an option it has a hesitant and imperfect character such that it is fulfilled only at the moment a single option is left and displays a necessary character. It is the affirmation of my independence, such that other liberties can do no more than limit it, yet it needs those other liberties, on the one hand to support it and on the other hand to give it a fitting and worthy end to which it can devote itself: hence freedom is creative in the measure that it is loving. Finally, freedom is the demand of a separate individual seeking to give himself all the being and all the perfection he is capable of; yet freedom remains pure only if it holds fast to possessing nothing and never ceases to sacrifice everything it has.

B) THE PRACTICE OF FREEDOM

ART. 7: Freedom is a return to zero.

What is admirable about freedom's employment is that All and Nothing are contained in it. Owing to this we feel within freedom the passage from nothingness to being. Freedom is nothing; it is an incessant return to zero. From this derives the negative aspect of freedom which does not allow itself to be determined or confined by any already-realised form of being, which breaks with the past, ever wants to be a first beginning and never an end, and requires every being employing it to toss aside habit and memory so as to be always situated at the origin of what he wishes to be, as if all his former life were a chain from which he could release himself, as if he only had to forget it in order to do away with it. The purpose of all the various practices of purification is therefore to lead us back to that pure exercise of freedom through which our being is constantly

reborn. Because freedom separates us from the ready-made world, because it is not an object, it vanishes before the eyes of all those who seek to grasp it: it is then natural they find nothing. Objective observation will only ever reveal to us ready-made things and the implacable order that unites them.

It is nonetheless from this Nothing that we witness everything emerge, the representation we form of the world as well as the modifications our will imposes on it. Though freedom is a return to zero it is an active and creative zero, the very power of acting and creating considered in its absolute purity. Thus the consciousness we have of our freedom while it is being employed is the very consciousness we have of creative action, in so far as we agree to participate in it.

Freedom, which again is not an object, is therefore a perpetual emancipation with respect to the management of the object, a return to the zero of sheer power which takes upon itself the work of creation at each instant. There is no man who does not wake up in the morning ready to start his whole life over again rather than merely to continue it—an illusory ambition if it makes us forget that we need to continue it as well, i.e. to accept the conditions of participation. But then it places the entire universe in our hands as something possible and available.

ART. 8: Freedom is the disposal of "yes" and "no".

The disposal of "yes" and "no" constitutes for us the essence of freedom, and in this disposal also resides both our own absolute and our participation in the Absolute Act: our own absolute, since we are here in the secret recess where no-one can intrude or choose for us and where what we choose is ourselves, not the vanished being we were but the one we are going to be; and participation in the Absolute Act, since it is here purely a question of a choice which through the possibility of saying "yes" inscribes us in Being, thanks to an initiative that is ours, and which through the possibility of saying "no" seems to remove us from Being, even though the execution of this act of saying "no" is still a way of being inscribed in it. The freedom that puts both "yes" and "no" into our soul is therefore rightly a divine power within us. Only, creative power is nothing more than the power to say "yes" while our freedom manifests its independence solely through its power of refusing the being proposed to it and consequently turning against its own origin. From this one should not draw the conclusion that the power to say "yes" and "no" is situated—there within the order of independence and freedom—above the simple power of saying "yes". For it is easy to see that this "no" itself is only another "yes", a "yes" that is so to speak limited and restricted to a participation cut off from the principle on which it depends, and it is easy to see that this "no" testifies to its impotence since it does not succeed in undoing the being we have received and still accept in the very act that negates it. Here, the generosity of the gift always exceeds the ingratitude of refusal. Thus the power of saying "yes" or "no", which is the power of giving or refusing assent, shows that there is a subordination in it—doubtless not with respect to

the choice it is able to make but with respect to the very object of this choice. Not that the object is already given before the choice is realised; rather, it is a possibility contained within the eternal act, and the choice itself frees it as possible ahead of actualising it.

In the most radical “no” there is still a singularly positive will: the will of our particular and separate being, which would agree to destroy the world, together with our existence in it, rather than regard that existence as not absolutely self-sufficient. Here arises a curious contradiction which leads us to demand of the relative that it become an absolute, all the while refusing the sole means of that conversion, which is to regard the relative as participating in the absolute.

Whatever the apparent limitation to freedom it is enough that freedom puts us in the presence of an absolute via the power freedom has of giving a “yes” or a “no” so that our being, our knowledge and our happiness depend on us, even though we might not always be able to produce what we want, i.e. make the universe conform in reality to our caprices. Our own power is at once more subtle and more profound. For the Pure Act, which is everywhere present, is also present to us. It gives our mind its power of regulating and directing our attention. And there in the world before us we never lack the light given to us, the call made to us, the occasion offered to us.

In so far as human freedom is a participation in the absolute, the absolute is present within it; and indeed it is in the “yes” and the “no” it is able to give. But the power of saying “no” shows that human freedom can be enchained, can introduce contradiction into itself by seeking to reject being through an act of negation originating in the same act that grants it its being, or again it can allow itself to be seduced by appearance or passion, i.e. can prefer its limitation to its pure exercise.

Doubtless it can be said that freedom is perfect inwardness and that it is even the fundament of all interiority since all passivity supposes, at least in some measure, an external agent that limits us. However there is here a great difference between the Absolute Act for which nothing is external, such that the initiative and efficacy disposed by particular liberties still come from it, and an individual liberty who is interior to herself only owing to the choice she makes, which supposes an uninterrupted oscillation between reason and passion, or between grace and necessity.

ART. 9: The conditions of participation require freedom to take the form of free-will.

It is well understood that human freedom has always encountered adversaries despite the obvious clarity of the word “freedom”, the constant testimony of consciousness in its favour and the constant demand for social freedom—which through a curious paradox often coincides with a negation of

inner freedom by the most zealous partisans. Freedom cannot be given¹⁰ but only the conditions that allow it to be manifest. These conditions can be realised even if all individuals remain slaves. To deny freedom is to complain of not possessing limitless power; yet freedom only permits us to insert our action into a world that spreads beyond it and consequently always compels us to reckon with necessity. It disposes certain powers it finds within us and certain objects it finds about us. Also, it is always manifest as a choice: we recognise it solely in the form of free-will, with freedom in the strict sense, i.e. perfect independence, referring to the Pure Act and free-will proper referring to a particular being engaged in the world of plurality, a being who is always in the presence of other beings from whom he must distinguish himself and various options of which one will become his own.

Not that these options are so many objects already given before freedom is exercised, since freedom's nature is first of all to give them birth, i.e. to release their possibility through an act of thought. Nor has free-will an absolutely creative character within its sphere of operation since it resides purely in a consent that cannot be forced. Indeed, free-will, through its connection with certain conditions that are imposed on it and certain motives and ends that are constantly proposed to it, clearly displays its participatory character. And this participation shines forth all the more when we note that free-will never enters into play in the form of a choice between possibilities on the same level. Choice is of-a-piece with value: it makes sense only in a hierarchy we have set up among various values. And the peculiarity of choice is at once to create and to recognise value. Here we encounter its origin at the same time as its true criterion. For we all know that free-will does not operate according to a horizontal order of options but a vertical order of preferences: and each of us shapes experience from this vertical order in accordance with whether his spiritual activity is more nearly perfect and pure, or whether it is abandoned in favour of passivity and the body.

C) FREEDOM AND LIMITATION

ART. 10: *To say that freedom is the power of self-determination is to define it as the act of participation.*

The classic definition of freedom is singularly instructive: we say that it is *the power of self-determination*. And it is noteworthy that by "determination" we understand a voluntary decision as well as an act by which we agree to give ourselves limits, i.e. an act through which we agree to create ourselves. To depart

¹⁰ This might appear to contradict the assertion in ART. 3 that freedom "alone is given to us" but of course the full statement is: "freedom alone is given to us but in such a fashion that we nonetheless must always give it to ourselves."

from indeterminacy is to depart from a state which was until then, at least for us, composed of an ensemble of indistinct possibilities, none of them chosen and none of them ours. To be self-determined is obviously, as so often remarked, to bring forth one possibility and to sacrifice others (though no choice within Being can be wholly eliminated from it and we are compelled to regard sacrificed possibilities as the ways and means of possibilities held in reserve).

Every particular act therefore presupposes on the one hand a negative idea, i.e. a limitation or negation of the pure act, and on the other hand a positive idea that signals our taking charge of the act, at least up to a certain point, which is precisely expressed by the word "participation." Yet it might be said that participation never comes without a limitation and can only give me a sense of my imperfection and poverty. But for a particular being, to be limited is to inscribe his being in Being, and therefore to consent to be. In this consent resides the act of participation: it is the affirmation not only of the value of the total being but of the determination that makes me be. And one must not merely consider what is lacking in it and what outstrips it but what is interior to it and what it enables me to possess. Neither should it be forgotten that I determine myself through a choice, and indeed through a series of choices: first, between being and nothingness, then between positive or affirmative determinations and negative and destructive determinations, and finally between certain ways of acting that accord with my individual nature and correspond with my vocation and certain other ways of acting that I exclude because they awaken no power in me and solicit no interest. It is therefore understood that I shape myself by limiting myself and that this limitation itself becomes the trademark of the personal operation through which I engage my responsibility and will to be this and not that.¹¹

But when we consider this choice that engages us as a limitation it always seems to make us lose some good we already possessed. Only, until then no good was really possessed by us. Determination is therefore not merely limiting. There is in it the affirmation of a preference, the will to an order and the aim of a perfection we must create in order to lay hold of them. In the Absolute Being these limits come down to sheer possibility; but that is because they can be isolated only by us; and at the moment we isolate them so as to actualise them we precisely carry out the primordial operation that makes us participate in the pure act. One would therefore be at a loss to consider this operation as limiting with respect to us since it brings about the original initiative that makes us be. It can therefore be affirmed without fear of error that it is not only through the abundance and richness of determinations but also through their intractability and execution that our participation in the perfection of Being is best realised.

¹¹ Sartre gives a thorough and insightful treatment of this theme in Part Four of *Being and Nothingness*.

ART. 11: *Since human freedom is solely a matter of participation, the necessity that reigns in the world marks the limits of its efficacy.*

Until now no one has ventured to examine in depth the problem of the connections between divine freedom and our own. What is more, God's freedom together with his omnipotence has almost always been considered an obstacle to our freedom. People have sought to reconcile the two without succeeding. They believed it was necessary to take divine freedom and human freedom as two independent and antagonistic principles, or indeed to consider human freedom a pure illusion, a simple extension of divine activity. It seems therefore that one has a choice between pluralism and a monism like that of Spinoza. However it strikes us that the doctrine of participation cuts a path between these two extremes. The solution we will bring to the problem of the connections between divine freedom and human freedom raises a ticklish point but at the same time constitutes the touchstone of this doctrine. Here we must offer proof of its truth and consequently triumph or fail. For if the act is self-caused, then there is a real participation and the act can offer in participation only what it has, or rather what it *is*¹², so that all beings participating in it have the same property of being self-caused; alternatively, particular beings are considered either as created by God in the manner of objects crafted by an artisan or as modes that express divine freedom without themselves possessing any initiative or autonomy – in these last two cases participation is an illusion.

One would find confirmation of such a view in this observation: thinkers who affirm the existence of God or of human freedom are always the same ones who negate one or the other. The first however must always defend themselves against the reproach and the danger of absorbing human freedom into divine freedom, though they have the feeling that, whatever the dialectical difficulties, human freedom establishes the existence of God so that it is at the point where our freedom is exercised in the purest fashion that our union with God is most nearly perfect. Which in a sense confirms the truth of material determinism, since it is necessarily the case that in separating ourselves from God we precisely become slaves of the passions, i.e. of the body.

The subordination of particular beings to the absolute is almost always thought to entail the negation of freedom, as seen in the philosophy of Spinoza. But that inference cannot be granted. For if perfect independence, which is the character of the absolute, is realised in an inward and positive fashion only through freedom, i.e. through the power of self-causation, then we see that it is precisely by way of freedom that participation is accomplished and that necessity expresses what eludes participation in the various forms of being yet results in the solidarity of them all. Our participation in the absolute resides therefore always in consent, which cannot be forced and which, regardless of the causes

¹² My italics.

bearing upon it, ever retains the disposition of the “yes” and the “no”. The inner activity of every particular being comes from God but becomes the activity of his own self through an alignment that constitutes the I of his being. Freedom therefore remains forever absolute in form, and Descartes correctly discerned that it is equal in God and in us, though the efficacy at its disposal is singularly unequal in him and us. Alternatively, it might be the case that efficacy is completely in God while the disposition is left solely to us, as Malebranche had it.¹³ And one can say in another sense that divine freedom is rigorously non-material since matter always signals the gap that separates it from human freedom or measures the power it puts into play. Also, we should not be astonished that matter always appears to contradict freedom and that the most rigorous determinism reigns within it. This however does not allow us to think that matter truly puts freedom in check, as if it proceeded from another principle, or that it requires us to make an arduous compromise with it, since it is always the expression of freedom, its negative aspect so to speak, and since in constantly defining freedom’s limits matter also and always provides a fulcrum for its overcoming. One can go so far as to maintain that the very adventures in which an individual is involved, rather than implying a calamity imposed on him that begins by restricting the exercise of his freedom, are on the contrary a kind of reflection of the original determination of our freedom relative to the absolute act. Which is plainly just the reverse of the position taken by classical determinism, and doubtless the sole means of reconciling freedom with necessity if it is true that freedom could never be drawn from necessity whereas there is no difficulty in considering necessity as the product of freedom, the trace it leaves behind and the history of its failures so to speak.¹⁴ Moreover, here is doubtless a view that experience would easily confirm for all those who fix attention on the inner act through which they constitute their secret personal life and consider the events of existence only in relation to it, instead of first attaching themselves to those events and wondering how freedom could be inserted into them and capable of modifying them.

ART. 12: *We have received all that we are yet give it to ourselves.*

Freedom is participation itself in so far as it is participation in an act that is cause of itself and cannot be present in my being—however humble that may be—without rendering it cause of itself as well. And we can say that the

¹³ Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715), a major thinker in the Cartesian school and another key influence in Lavelle’s philosophy. Malebranche argued that all knowledge, whether internal or external, is in God so that objectivity in the scientific sense is undercut: knowledge does not originally come from things but from God. Our relations therefore are solely with him—to the extent that all efficacy or power resides with him and humans are limited to its employment.

¹⁴ Of course the argument assumes the existence of both freedom and necessity whereas a strict determinism would deny the former. Here the argument of William James is perhaps relevant: how in a world of strict necessity could the notion of freedom ever have arisen?

originality of each being consists precisely in the circumscribed sphere where his power of effectively being cause of himself is exercised.

But this power is a power we have received: it is available within us even before we use it. The possession we take of it is ours but we can leave it unemployed. It is first in us through this taking-possession¹⁵ and it veritably renders each being cause of himself; yet it surpasses us, both in its possibility, which we are restricted in actualising, and in its efficacy, which we are pleased to behold as a perpetual miracle.

We witness thought hesitate between these two contrary assertions: that everything we are and everything we have is received and that we give ourselves everything. But both are true and false at the same time. For in one sense everything is received but what is received is freedom, i.e. the dignity of being cause. Yet the peculiarity of this freedom is to borrow from the pure act both its operative power and the matter it disposes, matter always expressing what is lacking in the operation and must be supplied from the outside so to speak. Nonetheless this matter is not purely received, for it can be received only by an initiative that lays hold of it. In this fashion everything is given to us but on the condition that we agree to take it and that there is within us no other act but usage and no other possession than the right to benefit from what is not essentially ours.¹⁶

Freedom can still be regarded as the passage from nothingness into being, and that definition is just, at least to a certain point, since whatever freedom brings forth is new to the free being. But this novelty is not absolute. Freedom brings forth our being from the total being within which it will have its place. The total being furnishes it with both the efficacy through which it realises itself and the stuff of all its acquisitions: at the point where we say "I" the Being who creates himself eternally permits us to welcome into ourselves the acting power. We pause here and feel the truth of participation so acutely that freedom itself strikes us as limited through and through. It is so to speak limited for three different reasons:

1. because it is a power we have received whose employment depends on us through a consent that can be either given or refused;
2. because in us it is always associated with an individual nature that carries certain determined powers which we are capable of actualising or leaving in a state of pure potentiality, and among which we make a choice whereby we contribute to the constitution of our being;

¹⁵ Unless "first" has the sense of "foremost" there seems to be a contradiction since the power is already "available within us". I gather from what follows that it is originally in us only as a possibility. It first becomes ours in actuality when we take possession of it.

¹⁶ Literally, what is *usufruct*: a legal term for the right to use and profit from another's property.

3. because this freedom is consequently never manifest in the form of a *creation* but always in the form of a *choice*, whether with respect to the powers that make up the originality of each I, the objects offered to him and to which his activity is applied, or the proportion that should be established between those powers and objects, through which we succeed in striking an accord between our vocation and our destiny.