

CHAPTER IX

TRANSCENDENCE

A) THE LINK BETWEEN IMMANENCE AND TRANSCENDENCE

ART. 1: *Transcendence is the character of all spiritual activity¹ in contrast to the states that manifest or express it.*

Philosophers bandy the words “transcendent” and “immanent” as if it were necessary to take one and exclude the other; and so they go on reproaching one another, sometimes for wanting to impose on this or that term affirmations of an absolute they know nothing about, sometimes for clinging to an experience they refuse to go beyond, an experience to which their self-love thinks itself adequate. But the two words “transcendent” and “immanent” make sense only in relation to each other, and the word “participation” is precisely meant to show us how they must be joined.

Firstly we will note that we cannot speak of the transcendent as of an already-realised world. For whatever is realised, whatever merits the name “world”, is immanent to whoever perceives or imagines it. The transcendent is beyond the world, i.e. beyond whatever is realised. It is the act through which the world is posited; it is the *realising* factor without which there would be no *realised* factor. I can legitimately say therefore that my thinking is transcendent with respect to its

¹ This could also be translated as “mental activity”.

object, my will with respect to its goal, my operations with respect to my states, the activity of another consciousness with respect to the effects that make it sensible, and creative power with respect to the world before my eyes. Only, there would be no object, no end, no states, no effect and no world if each of these terms did not refer to an inward and invisible process that founds its possibility before giving it actuality. Transcendence is this very process; far from being unrelated to these different forms of reality which would be nothing without it, it is the very principle that makes them be and from which they can never be separated.

Transcendent being plainly stands in the same relation to effects and states as does the essence of the act; conversely only an act can be transcendent, i.e. incapable of ever becoming an effect or state, though without it no effect or state could ever be posited.

But if the act is by definition transcendent to the given, “transcendent” can no longer mean “inaccessible” or “alien to consciousness” for there is an experience of the act when it is performed, and not merely an experience of the thing when it is given.² Consciousness is the act through which we give ourselves a thing and not the thing as it is given. To say that the act excludes consciousness is to render it a blind force, to nullify it as act. And if someone insists that it can never become a represented object, this rightly does not to put it below the latter but above it: yet in rendering the object conscious the act makes it participate in a dignity that is its very essence.

No one can doubt that experience of the world and of life depends solely on an act we perform. Only, there is a good deal of difference between asserting that this act is consciousness itself and subsuming consciousness in knowledge of the object, as Kant did; there is a good deal of difference between asserting that the act is act because it is the indivisible unity of intellect and applied will, as we see in the Cartesian *cogito*, and supposing we can conclude its existence only in an inductive manner, relying on the factual features before our eyes. Then its reality hangs in a void; and since there is a desire for it to be neither transcendent nor immanent to consciousness, which is transcendent to all objects, it is qualified by the ambiguous word “transcendental.” The word is only needed when the transcendent is considered an object (which puts it wholly out of reach) or if the mind’s act is taken as the simple condition for the possibility of consciousness; then it is the heart of its actuality. Whether the act is inferred or immediately-seized in its performance – that is the difference which forever separates critical philosophy from true spirituality³.

² Here again is clear affirmation of knowledge-in-the-subject as distinct from knowledge gleaned from an object. The act is directly known, not merely inferred from effects. This and the discussion that follows are important because they counterbalance Lavelle’s frequent references to knowledge, including self-knowledge, in terms of circularity, i.e. a feedback process.

³ Literally, “*spiritualisme*”. Of course spiritualism evokes images of people contacting the dead in séances but for Lavelle the term means no more than the sort of inwardness he espouses. The term should be understood in opposition to materialism.

ART. 2: *The transcendence associated with the pure act, there at the interior of the I, is to our states what the transcendence associated with creative efficacy is to the total reality.*

Because every act is transcendent to the effects or traces of its operation, the I in so far as it creates itself is always transcendent to the I in so far as it is created. But this operation places limitations on an act that is performed eternally: creative efficacy wanes within us as soon as it enters into play; and whatever the bounds within which we confine it or the deviations we impose on it by subordinating it to our self-love, we have here the experience of an activity that is us and that is above us and that consequently renders us forever transcendent to ourselves, i.e. to our states. This experience of transcendence is that of an all-pervading and available act that is exercised either with us⁴ or in spite of us, either by us or without us. Nothing in it resides as power, though it is with respect to us a power. Whether in itself or in us such an act is transcendent to all phenomena.

Thus God's transcendence of the world is one with the transcendence of our states by the act of consciousness: neither God nor consciousness ever becomes objects, and we understand very well that materialism and atheism, which are concerned solely with objects, find neither God nor consciousness anywhere. Thus God, i.e. the same creative efficacy on which everything that takes place in the world depends, is in a sense absent from the world, as is consciousness itself. As for whether God is transcendent to this consciousness to which he is always present and to which he even makes the world present, one will not hesitate to respond that he is at once supremely transcendent to it, since he is precisely its beyond, whether we take him as its source or its end, and rigorously immanent, since there is nothing consciousness does not derive from him and since it endlessly borrows from him both élan and growth. "You would not search for me had you not found me"⁵: *but it is in searching for me that you find me.* In this two-fold affirmation immanence and transcendence give proof of their indissoluble union.

The transcendent can only be what exists for self and not for another, meaning there is an experience of the transcendent that does not enter into any experience.⁶ It can only be self, i.e. that which, being solely act, escapes all limitations to individuality but nonetheless permits each individual to say "I" in the measure that, not being a mere thing, he is author of himself, ever beyond his states. He can be identified neither with the states he is obliged to undergo, without which he would have no individual existence, nor with the act upon which he constantly draws: an infinite possibility about which he can know only what he actualises of it. Participation, which always situates us somewhere

⁴ With our conscious participation.

⁵ Lavelle does not give the source of this oracular statement.

⁶ The self-contradictory expression is perhaps explained in what follows.

between the pure act and a plurality of states, precisely expresses the ambiguous character of an existence that creates itself by so to speak rendering immanent to itself a transcendent it penetrates yet which always surpasses it.

One therefore understands without difficulty why our personal freedom is founded on an act of pure consent but can only be produced at the point where the I transcends everything it has so far been given, i.e. all nature.

ART. 3: The union of and opposition between immanence and transcendence constitute the means by which we can establish our eternal existence.

It is a bias of thought to believe that the transcendent can subsist beyond reach of the immanent and that one must quit the one in order to rise to the other. We do not have the right to despise our earth: it is for us both a place of sojourn and a path. And it is in the world and not outside it that the transcendent is revealed to us. No one can hope to contact it other than by conducting his earthy business, taking all the objects around him and all the actions he performs as so many means of access to it. For the peculiarity of the transcendent is ever to become immanent. Whoever claims to reside in the immanent and limits himself to describing it⁷ strips away all significance in the very same stroke, for he does not situate himself at the point where the immanent enters into existence. He forgets the act that makes it be and that, as a kind of return, assigns the immanent its true destination⁸ as soon as it appears. Thus when we are urged to abandon everything experience offers us in order to turn back to the interior principle from which experience appears to separate us, it is not to abolish experience but to allow us to take possession of it and give it meaning. There is no more dangerous chimera than the thought that we can encounter the transcendent by a flight from the immanent, for we are precisely required to put it into play.

It would be an error in the opposite sense to say that since the transcendent is a pure possibility it is precisely up to us to bring it down into the immanent where it can take on body and be realised. This reverses the true order of values. For the immanent is merely the instrument through which the transcendent becomes manifest; and the former seems to be self-sufficient only when it grants us a revelation of the latter.⁹ We therefore only succeed in understanding the immanent, in giving it all its depth and fullness, when we penetrate the transcendent by way of it. And perhaps the most lively doctrinal differences in philosophy reside in just this: while some will consider the transcendent a simple power that reaches completion so to speak in the immanent, others on the contrary see the immanent as a means which, depending the use we make of it,

⁷ This seems directed at phenomenologists.

⁸ I take the "true destination" to be "eternal existence".

⁹ The transcendent does not exist for the sake of the immanent; it is always superior. This seems to suggest that pure possibility is in some sense superior to manifestation and determinateness.

permits us either to hold on to it—all the while bemoaning its insufficiency—or to give it a supreme justification in the act that invites us to pass beyond it. It is in a way very true that all transcendence is destined to be turned into immanence: but that is only a temporary matter; only men of flesh can live in that domain. For immanence does not make sense; it can be sustained only on the condition of being changed into transcendence in its turn.¹⁰

The unity of the transcendent and the immanent, or the need to affirm them as aspects of the same spiritual act, appears even more clearly if one reflects that the dialectical process that puts me in touch with the transcendent, on which I depend and which is the process through which I establish my essence, supposes another process, inverse to the former. It is so to speak a process of descent through which the transcendent is ever offered for participation under the form of a pure possibility which, as soon as it is employed, becomes a given and thereby begins to constitute the world in which we live. Indeed we glimpse here the characteristic circle which reveals to us the secret of the creative act and demonstrates at every level of being the same reciprocity between two spiritual movements that never cease to give—but also to receive and give back.

It is obvious that the act's transcendence with respect to the given should allow us to resolve the problem of defining it in relation to immanence, by contrasting one with the other yet showing how they communicate. For on the one hand we must say that the pure act's transcendence is an absolute transcendence since the act of participation is always correlative of an object or state (though in participating one nonetheless discerns the point of connection between transcendence and immanence because the act in which I participate is the absolute transcendent that grants me all the being and efficacy I dispose). On the other hand we must say that I can only make it mine thanks to an always limited and imperfect disposition whose very limitation and imperfection gives rise to the world in which we live; this shows how immanence is truly a function of transcendence yet is constantly expressed in terms of the power, the misery and all the alternatives of participation.

The idea of progress with which some people hope to replace transcendence seems on the contrary to prove its truth. For progress is a continual surpassing of what is given, and whether we consider progress as a penetration to the heart of a reality hitherto refused us or whether we take reference to the activity that progresses and consider it as a surplus of power over actual exertion, we see in both cases that there is beyond experience a transcendent which is the supposed condition of enrichment. And this transcendent will appear to us as not simply opposed to the immanent in which we live but as its support, nourishing it and constantly descending into it so as to illumine and promote it, although the transcendent always appears to us essentially inaccessible and inexhaustible.

¹⁰ Volumes Three and Four of Lavelle's *Dialectic* devote considerable attention to showing how the options a person actualises in his or her lifetime are eternalised, i.e. "inscribed" in the hereafter.

Thus the transcendent always moves toward the immanent, without which it would never be offered for participation. But all participated being constantly moves toward the transcendent, from which it seeks the activity that makes it be, the power of self-determination and growth, the audacity to negate in order to pass beyond, the resolve without which it would be nothing, and this last moving request: that in creating itself it might penetrate being and eternity. Thence this reciprocal movement, this to-and-fro through which immanence and transcendence come together, will appear far from frivolous since it is through them that each being becomes author of himself and his destiny.

As soon as immanence, instead of obstructing transcendence, becomes an opening to it, one sees simplicity and humility changed into ardour and confidence, engendered so to speak in due measure. We need to be conscious of the total insufficiency of immanence for a perfect sufficiency to be revealed to us: an infinite void must be created in self for an infinite abundance to fill it; we have to feel the frailty of all we are for an irresistible force to penetrate us and raise our ambition and courage.

ART. 4: There is no other transcendence than that of the All with respect to parts, or of the Act with respect to participated acts, or of the Spirit¹¹ with respect to the world.

No one has the right to propose a transcendent that would be beyond our reach and without any connection to us. For then where would the idea of it come from? How could we meaningfully name it?

Faith tends toward the transcendent precisely because it makes us feel, not merely a certain affinity, but a real community of essence with it. To say that we are conscious of our limits, that we cannot shut ourselves within a purely subjective horizon, is already to go beyond those limits and to have access to a universal subjectivity. But there is more: the limitation in question is not an unscalable wall; it is fragile and ever receding. This doubtless shows us there is a continuity of being on both sides of the wall. For we are not outside Being but *in* it. When we consider it as a given reality we say we are part of it; when we consider it as a self-engendering act we say we participate in it. The word "transcendent" expresses nothing more than the idea of that which surpasses us yet is one with the All that contains us; it is that which continually proposes to us an activity to employ yet is one with the total activity by which the real is constantly created.

The All is necessarily transcendent to its parts: if they ever coincided with it they would annihilate themselves as parts and the All itself in the same stroke. Nothing can be transcendent to a world composed of parts but the All within which we distinguish them. Yet this All within which all things are contained –

¹¹ Or, Mind.

before analysis renders them separate but linked existences as parts of it—can only be an act that engenders them.¹²

Consequently, if we dispel the superstitions that whatever is real is a thing and that spirit¹³ is a power without reality, there is indeed a world that is transcendent to the sensible world; it is the world of spirit. For it is impossible for a thing to be transcendent to another thing: they both belong to the same world our thinking penetrates more or less deeply. By contrast spirit is always transcendent to the world, as the act is always transcendent to the state, and the inside to the outside.

There is no other transcendent than the spirit, which is indeed transcendent to all particular forms of existence, to the limitation, error and evil with which they are always mixed. But nothing is transcendent to spirit— since it is always the genesis of self—or even to participation, which is the same ever-proposed, ever-accepted genesis within us. And as the world before our eyes is testament to the operations of spirit, so immanence plunges its roots into transcendence and so to speak delivers its secret to us. It is for the spirit a denial of itself, a sort of internal contradiction, to believe it can resolve any of the problems it poses by locating the solution outside its own limits. That it cannot do without the idea of eternity is because it has an absolute need to find within the Being in which it participates an eternal presence that is at once the origin and fundament of the constancy it associates with its presence to itself. Thus a transcendent world is not a world alien to the spirit; it is a spiritual absolute in which our own world finds an inexhaustible power of renewal. The Pure Act is necessarily transcendent to all participated acts, which, if they were brought to completion in it, would nullify its fecundity, i.e. its very reality, at the same time that it nullified participation.

ART. 5: *Taken in itself, the transcendent can be called an absolute; taken in relation to us, an infinity; taken in its efficacious activity, both in itself and in us, a free cause or a liberty.*

If spirit alone is transcendent it must enfold and pervade the world that is immanent to it and would be at a loss to sustain itself without it. Most people want to define the absolute only negatively. Yet they speak of it as something positive against which they are forbidden to raise a hand: thus we can say they are those who posit it as something apart and not those who reproach it and posit it solely in relation to us. It is only when we refuse to break the pair composed of the relative and the absolute that the word “relative” receives both its limited character and its true value: for if the nature of the relative is plainly not, as often believed, to exclude the absolute, there is no longer a call for

¹² The sentence effectively defines the All as a block-like entity, or again a universe in embryo, that precedes distinctions and is essentially identical with the Act.

¹³ Again, the French word also means “mind”. Indeed, some of the statements below seem to have predominately mental connotations. For Lavelle the two meanings are one.

something else to which it could be joined. For the relative is inscribed in the absolute where it expresses that sort of genesis and unanimous flourishing through which, in an act of pure generosity, an infinity of possible beings are called to actualise their existence by way of a borrowed initiative that is nonetheless their own. The impossibility of introducing any separation between the immanent and the transcendent teaches us to live in a kind of familiarity or intimacy with the creative act.

Some deny us the right to posit the absolute – quite correctly it seems – on the grounds that it is contradictory for a relative being to be able to posit the very absolute on which it depends. But to posit the absolute is precisely to posit myself as relative, or at least to affirm that-without-which I could not posit myself as relative. To posit the absolute therefore is to recognise that it posits me, or at least furnishes me with the conditions that allow me to posit myself. This doubtless comes to the same thing if it is true I can only posit myself through an act that is an absolute with respect to the determinations of my nature but that is at the same time only the exercise of a possibility given to me through which, with my consent, the Pure Act is changed for me into a participated act. The transcendent is considered by us alternatively as an absolute in so far as it is posited in itself as the fundament of all relations or again as an infinity in so far as all relative beings find the principle of their growth in it, but without ever being to equal it: thus, owing to the distance that separates us from it, the Total Being, the Pure Act, is manifest to us under the species of infinity. The link between the terms “the absolute” and “the infinite” thereby testifies to the link between a transcendent that sustains all the various forms of participation yet remains above them and an immanent in which each of them must be inscribed: more exactly still, the infinite is a kind of hyphen-mark between the absolute and the relative, i.e. between transcendence and immanence.

From this it is understandable how the transcendent is with respect to actual or realised being only an infinite possibility. But this possibility is not abstract, it is living and efficacious: it is offered to us so that, in actualising it, we can penetrate it and make it ours, albeit without adding anything to it by way of our actualisation. Just as it is for us a supreme possibility to which we give reality, it is to itself a supreme reality that gives us our possibility. For that reason instead of characterising the transcendent with the word “absolute”, which marks its independence from all the relations that nonetheless have meaning only by way of it, or with the word “infinite”, which at once defines the path leading us to it and the impassable distance separating us from it, it would be better to associate it with the word “freedom” which defines the causality of self both in God and in us, i.e. a first term beyond which it is impossible to go further back; for it contains, without our being able to deduce them from it, a infinite plurality of effects, each of which has a right to exist only owing to an option freedom has provided which contributes to forming a world in which it can never have a place.

One can then define the transcendent in six different ways: (1) as the origin of every immanent process, since each has its source within it, (2) as the end of every process, since it tends toward it, (3) as the participable without which a process would have nothing in which to participate, (4) as the nutrient for all its growth, lacking which it would be hard to explain how it could be enriched, (5) as the principle behind all our duties, which duties come down to probing an absolute efficacy for the means to go beyond what we are, and (6) as a pure object of faith—since the transcendent is ever unattainable by us—precisely so that the operation which gives us being will always be our own and so that it can never be suspended.

B) THE ACT OF FAITH

ART. 6: *The act of faith expresses the act in its purity – and there is no act that is not an act of faith.*

We say “*the act of faith*”: now there is no act more pure, none that can be reduced like this to the simple essence of act, none in which we better grasp how, by stripping ourselves of everything visible and every given, we discover within ourselves just a naked activity, an initiative, a consent that depends on us but cannot come into play unless the act we dispose becomes a handing-back¹⁴ or a relinquishing; unless it gives up, in utmost purity, everything that still seems to belong to it in order to become transparent to an act which surpasses it, which penetrates it and to which it confides itself so to speak.

If faith resides in an internal act one carries out, one understands how it makes no sense to the person who refuses to carry it out. For faith does not bear on any given object, however it alone renders its peculiar object present to consciousness. Moreover faith always implies a mode of conduct: the obligation to perform certain acts, lacking which its very sincerity would be suspect. Faith therefore unites the extremities of the act: from the secret processes of the engaged subject to the testimony he is given through the visible changes he introduces to the world.

Conversely one can say that faith is involved in every act we make: it sets it in motion, links its impulse with its future, or again, more precisely and in more rigorous language, it gives rise to the point where all power will be converted into act. Faith is needed to make this conversion possible. Neither the dormant power nor the completed and possessed act truly amounts to faith. It is there on the path from one to the other. It belongs neither to man considered as the power

¹⁴ I am guessing that the word Lavelle uses here (*remise*) is taken in the legal sense of referring something back to a higher authority. Interestingly the related verb (*remettre*) had a religious use in former times: it alluded to handing one’s life over to God (first appearance 1611).

to act nor to God considered as a pure act but to man in so far as he is called upon to realise his powers through participation in the Pure Act.

It must not be forgotten that in our doctrine the act is justified less by its effects than by its exercise, its being set into play. The act cannot be isolated as a particular concept in the framework of reasoning. It is nothing that can be constructed, even though it is the principle behind all possible constructions. Yet neither is it a simple theoretical hypothesis. It is faith for this sole reason: at the moment every act is performed it can be defined as a faith that affirms itself, since it has neither support nor object and since it possesses a purely creative character. The word "faith" implies the requirement that a self-positing act posit its efficacy and value in the very same stroke.

ART. 7: Faith expresses our confidence in the fecundity of the act and in the worth of its pure exercise.

It is the peculiarity of true principles that they cannot be justified by a higher principle from which they might be derived or by an experience that might exhaust their truth. They can be justified only by their fecundity, i.e. by the inferences one draws from them and by the operations they make possible. They can be posited only by an act of faith—but a living faith that is in a certain sense identical with the process that puts them in play. Such is the case with the Act upon which everything depends yet which itself depends on nothing. It is also the goal of the spiritual faith through which each of us is conscious of constituting his being and destiny. This faith lives only for the response it never stops seeking, and which God always delivers. One sees therefore that the spiritual faith we speak of—bearing upon the essence of our life and one might say upon the very point where it enters into universal Being—possesses an internal efficacy through which it really decides for us.

Yet the nature of faith is not only to be fecund but to lead our life back to an almost¹⁵ pure activity so that, without taking issue with the maxim that we judge the tree by its fruits, we are here a long way far from pragmatism, which seems to be interested only in the effects an activity can produce. For spiritual activity has solely itself as an end, and the effects it leaves behind are merely marks or indicators of its degree of perfection: they have all the more richness and fullness in that it has less directly needed them and indeed has less set its sights on them. Likewise, in positing this act as a supremely fecund immobility, which one can do only by putting it into play, we are beyond the reproach that might be laid against us of providing ourselves in advance with everything we hope to obtain, and of somehow arriving before having set off. For we are wrong to think that the absolute as act checks the momentum of the I when in fact it never stops

¹⁵ An indication that the author is speaking of a stepped-down act: the Act translated into the realm of participation.

promoting it. And make no mistake: one does not petrify an act without annihilating it.

ART. 8: Faith is implicated in participation as the condition of its possibility.

The word “participation” already implies the necessity of Faith, for the being in which we participate can only be an object of faith. Only Faith can posit the indivisibility of the Total Being, i.e. the unity of the participated and the non-participated which occurs as soon as participation begins and is necessary for Faith to be possible. But this unity has a double import with respect to faith since it is on the one hand, the ever-present support of participation and on the other hand the condition of its growth. So we discover here the essential features of faith: that it posits a being which surpasses us yet with which we hope to unite ourselves, i.e. a being that has supreme value for us such that every object of faith is necessarily an object of love. The word “faith” here admirably expresses our confidence in the infinite help that is given to us and in the infinite future that lies open before us, as well as that constant courage through which, instead of positing an inaccessible transcendent beyond this world, as one frequently thinks faith ought to do, one requires the transcendent to penetrate our world and be incarnate here so as to illumine it and give it its true meaning. Or again, reversing the terms of this relationship, we can say that the peculiarity of faith is to make the immanent itself a path toward the transcendent. But if faith is always active, every man of action can be called a man of faith, and doubly so: he is as much a man of faith when he considers the source of his inspiration, which is invisible but which he believes can never fail him, as when he considers the vocation he has to fill, though it entails a factor that forever escapes his grasp.

ART. 9: There is only one Faith: Faith in Spirit, considered as the present source of all possibilities in the participated world.

There is a kind of consubstantiality between faith and the life of spirit. Spirit is something that can never become an object of constation or proof, though it is what constates and proves; it resides entirely in the faith it has in itself, subsists only by way of this faith. Thus one easily understands that faith is ever the same and that it always entails three different and mutually supportive assertions: first, that of freedom, i.e. of the initiative through which spirit gives itself being, or is a spirit; then that of immortality, i.e. of the impossibility of spirit one day finding its development arrested, or again of its being subjected to time and bound to be swept away, which would make it an object among objects; lastly, that of God defined as the infinity of spirit which permits me to posit myself as a limited being, without however undermining the unconditional affirmation of spirit by itself, i.e. of positing myself as a participant in its pure essence—but only a participant.

Going further, the whole problem of Faith is reducible to the problem of faith in God. And in inventing proofs of God's existence one only proves that there is within us a need for Faith which reason ought to justify and not abolish. It is Faith in a being that is pure being, i.e. in an act free of passivity that founds my unique reality, i.e. the power I have to form myself. This suffices to show the infinite distance separating the divine being from the being we give ourselves, albeit by way of an efficacy that comes from him and requires us to see him as both a spirit and the source of all spirits. Such a doctrine enables us to understand two things: on the one hand, why our life proceeds only by way of free invention—but an invention that is participation in the inexhaustible richness of divine activity, so that in effect we constantly shape the representation of the world before our eyes without however being able to regard ourselves as its creator—and on the other hand, why all the works of participation are not analytically spelled out as specific possibilities in God, since there is in him the ever-accessible power of producing them, which we take charge of and exercise in an initiative that is always our own. Will it be said that this only subsumes ahead of time, as a supreme possibility, all that will ever be produced? But possibility is not nothingness; neither is it a simple abstraction. Granted, possibility as such makes sense only with respect to of us, we who have not yet translated it into experience. But in itself it is perfect actuality, or if you will, supreme efficacy, and indeed the power through which we actualise, here in ourselves, what would otherwise remain for us a mere possibility if not for an assertion of our freedom.

To believe in God is to posit the actuality of this supreme possibility: it is therefore less the infinity of possibility than the fundament of this infinity. That infinity begins only with participation. But the fundament of all possibilities is precisely absolute actuality; possibility is born in the interval that separates the absolute actuality from participated actualisation.¹⁶ Possibility is the form in which absolute actuality had to appear in order for us to take charge of it according to our powers; when participation is effected this possibility is realised by way of an act that is ours, though the pure act sustains it; and because our act does not coincide with it, an experience is formed as soon as our act is accomplished. Experience is whatever in the pure act (which is for us an infinite possibility) we succeed in conceiving so as to render it our own.

ART. 10: *Faith is the internal act that founds my personal life.*

In shaping our experience of the world we exercise our freedom and become persons. Personality resides in our inner disposition of the act that makes us be. And because my being never equals such an act, because there are un-actualised

¹⁶ What human beings call "possibility" and regard as wispy and unrealised is fully actual and complete in God, though not yet articulated as worldly facts and events. The "interval" is where the divine actuality is translated into worldly actualities through worldly choices and acts.

possibilities and givens within it, forms of passivity, correlatives of the act within me that is never self-sufficient, I am always a person in search of himself rather than a true person. God alone, whom we a little while ago feared having to regard as an abstract possibility, is the absolute person since he is the being who realises plenary independence, perfect identity between what he does and what he is, those essential traits of personhood that I always aspire to but never attain. This suffices to show that the idea of the absolute and that of the person cannot be separated: for that reason the absolute is not, as sometimes imagined, a kind of menhir standing at the end of all avenues of knowledge and action, destined only to obstruct our view in every direction. There is life in it, i.e. an internal circulation explained in the most profound theologies as the distinction-between and the unity-of persons at the interior of the absolute act, and doubtless in every philosophy, as the constant relation between beings and the absolute that demands they find within it their origin, i.e. the very principle of their initiative, as well as their end, i.e. all the goods they can enjoy, each according to his merit. And as will be seen, infinity is less the character of the absolute than the expression of its rapport with us, an always positive rapport yet always incommensurate. Infinity is the goodness of God realised through an inexhaustible offer of participation to all the particular beings he calls to self-creation, beings who will never know any limit, either in their number or in what concerns their future.

Faith therefore does not consist, as sometimes thought, in positing an absolutely transcendent being of which we would have no experience. How could we ever have the idea of believing in this being? But God is both the furthest and nearest being: the furthest since he infinitely surpasses all forms of participated existence and the nearest since only he is participable. Yet Faith is surer than all knowledge because knowledge is of an object exterior to us whereas Faith is God's presence in consciousness; it is at the same time the affirmation of the mystery from which all existence is derived and in which our life nourishes its secret, its élan and its hope.

Faith is one with the consciousness of participation at the moment we realise it. It is not on the same plane with knowledge and consists not at all in positing the existence of an unknown object. If there were nothing in the world but objects there would be nothing for us but knowledge, and all the pretensions of faith would be illegitimate. But faith has no other object and no other end than the act we accomplish, and would never accomplish (even in a pure act of knowledge) without the confidence that animates it. It does not occur without a dawning of light but a light that illumines this act itself and not some represented thing that we might claim to put in its place. Yet Faith is Faith and not simple self-consciousness because it is impossible to employ this activity of ours without recognising that there is an inspiration that infinitely surpasses it, an inspiration that it is never lacking but that our activity always lacks in itself.