

PART THREE

THE SELF ABSOLUTE

CHAPTER VII

THE SELF-CAUSED ACT

A) THE ETERNAL FIRST BEGINNING

ART. 1: *The act is an eternal first beginning.*

If everything-that-is must be posited, only the act posits itself. Thinking naturally seeks, beneath the fluid forms of being which cannot satisfy it, a first term that supports them: this has given birth to all the various theories on substance, and perhaps to all the difficulties of metaphysics as well, since we obviously have no means of reaching this term which is placed in another world than the one we live in and therefore can only be an unverifiable hypothesis. And one always wonders, what is the point of supposing this single unknowable substance whose relation to phenomena can never be grasped? The first term is not this contradictory object which would have to be given but never can be; it is the act that is ever the origin of itself and all the rest, that makes us assist¹ in the genesis of possible objects as soon as we perform it, and that is the sole reality that can be known through intuition since it is anterior to the distinction between knowing and the known and is necessary for grounding this distinction itself. We therefore discover the first term in a true experience: the perpetual renaissance

¹ The French word also conveys the sense of witnessing or being present to something.

within us, in every internal act, of a Being we always recognise, whose very essence is to be eternally reborn.

This suffices to show that the first term is the act and that whatever first term does not refer to the act is merely a bastard concept: that of substance which is a frozen act, substance so to speak borrowing its permanence from the act and its objectivity from phenomena.

Thus where participation occurs I am at the point where everything-that-is has its source and first beginning. Initial experience is therefore the experience of the first term upon which all others depend: it is the experience of participation, at once constant and eternal. Its reflexion determines the conditions of possibility and its employment permits all beings to create and enrich themselves indefinitely.

The nature of the act is, as we have seen, less distinguished by its effects than by its character of initiative: it is the sought-for first term, the beginning of itself and all-that-is. It is indeed noteworthy that we always use the word "act" to designate an origin; but it is even more the origin of itself than it is of being, and for that reason we need to consider it as being itself rather than to seek being as its product, which only ever stands in relation to the act as a phenomenon or a testament. Yet to say that the first term is less what posits everything else than what posits itself is to say that it eternally is. And to say that it excludes all exteriority already suffices to warrant that it can only be a first beginning, or that it has always been, or that is eternally born from nothing.

If being is act we understand without difficulty that the world begins at each instant, for the act entails an exercise that is always current. It can be deduced neither from an anterior act—which could be distinguished from it only by its limit and point of application, i.e. by the passivity with which it is mixed—nor from a state, which cannot serve as its origin since the state marks, on the contrary, a fall from it: not an extension of the act but a break with it. We can say that the act is cause of itself and of all-that-is because it amounts to the Absolute Efficacy in which every process with the least relative efficacy participates.

ART. 2: The reflexive circle bears witness to the absolute primacy of the act.

Just as in the realm of logic the assumption of being necessarily excludes non-being, and the affirmation of the All necessarily excludes any external term from which it might be derived, similarly in the realm of metaphysics the act we are now examining, the origin of everything-that-is, is necessarily its own origin. For whence could it be derived but another act that would suppose it and for which it would be so to speak the specification?

This obliges us to return to the circle which is characteristic of all that is first and which led us to recognise that the idea of being is adequate to being

precisely because it is inseparable from the being of this idea, and that the act is act only because it produces in reflexion the consciousness it has of itself.²

The idea of this circle is the foundation of being's eternity as well as of its incessant movement; it is the true significance of both platonic recollection and the affirmation—perhaps at the core of all religions—that spiritual life always involves rebirth and resurrection. For only through reflexion can we take possession of what is within us and our place in being, the peculiarity of reflection being to create that inward disposition through to will what we are.

The circle we identify with the first term explains why the Pure Act and participation are inseparable. In defining the act as creative we mean above all that it is creative of itself rather than of the world; yet in being completely interior to itself it is perforce no more than the gift of self and a perfect generosity: there is nothing in it that can be held as an object capable of being possessed. Wherever it acts, i.e. in the infinite sphere of its efficacy, it is always offered for participation to a possible liberty³. Nature brings together all the conditions for the possibility of this participation: but it can happen that they remain unemployed. And freedom can never be constrained. But as soon as it is exercised it is a return toward its source, i.e. toward the act that has allowed it to be born and that the individual liberty seeks to realise inwardly in an ever more perfect fashion. The secret of the world, the principle of all intelligibility and joy, consists in the admirable eternal circuit through which the pure act is given for participation to all beings so that they may consent to make it living within them. It asks us to take it as an end purely so that it can become the source of ourselves. The ideal toward which our enthusiasm tends in the future is the very ideal to which this enthusiasm was attached in the past. The analysis of participation suffices to show that the peculiarity of the act is to be a circle that closes on itself, in which the total being is continually offered for participation precisely to receive into itself all those beings who give themselves being by putting into play a possibility it has proposed to them. Yet up to the very end they retain the freedom not to realise it. It is this eternal circle that makes the universe a vast wheel continually advancing through time (if we consider the career of all creatures) and that forever turns on itself (if we consider the movement that animates the whole).⁴

² Of course “reflexion” suggests a duality in which consciousness takes itself as an object. Yet self-knowledge is not limited to this. ARTICLES 7 and 8 of Chapter One (“The Experience of the Act”) recognise a direct knowledge that is wholly *in* the act and not obtained by way of the object. ARTICLE 1 of Chapter Two (“The Reflexive Act”) seems to describe a kind of reflection that does not amount to a feedback process: “And there is in reflection at the moment we perform it a constant regaining of self, which is not as often believed the knowledge of our activity’s effects after it has subsided but the very consciousness of this activity in its constitutive operation. . .”

³ I take the word “liberty” in Lavelle’s works as virtually a synonym for a free human being.

⁴ My parentheses.

B) ABSOLUTE ACTUALITY

ART. 3: The act has no origin in time because it is the origin of time: within the act time is always beginning.

We might ask why there is a world in which there is time, and consequently beginnings. But nothing and everything begins in time, according to whether we consider objects that depend on one another or the act that, breaking their succession, introduces into the world a fresh contact with the creative power. Thus each being's power to begin is the power of being in the form of an initiative that is appropriate to him, i.e. the power to become. Each being begins at every instant in the absolute. With reference to the source upon which they draw these beginnings are not set apart in time: but with regard to their mutual relation matters are quite different: from the perspective of a particular act all other acts are objects. And in order to be distinguished from them it must be situated among them, as an instant among other instants, in the same way that the subject who perceives the world can define his limits only by being situated as a body in the world he perceives.

All temporal beginnings must take place in the eternal act: and the mutual exclusion of temporal instants conveys in the language of the act the same idea as the mutual exclusion of places in the language of the object. Moreover just as the object is always correlative to the act of participation we understand without difficulty that the two types of exclusion are linked to each other and are even interdependent, as the theory of movement shows. The nature of freedom is to regulate it⁵, and consequently to prevent it from enslaving us.

The act is never within time save with respect to events we trace back to it. Of them we can say only that they limit the act but do not explain it. Each time it is performed by us it plunges us back into eternity; the exact moment of participation can be dated but only in connection with events and not in connection with the act itself, which in itself and in us escapes time, raises us above it and on every occasion makes efficacy come down, i.e. makes transcendence descend into the given world, i.e. into immanence.

But there is no privileged instant in time, any more than there is a privileged location in space: to select the most remote instant with the aim of according it metaphysical primacy would make no more sense than to select the most distant place for the same reason.⁶ In every place, in every instant, we have a revelation of the first term, provided we contemplate within it the act that produces it and not its limiting conditions, i.e. the other terms upon which it depends. We

⁵ I assume exclusion is meant.

⁶ Interestingly modern science links the beginning of the universe with both the most remote instant and the most distant place since it regards the universe as originating in a central Big Bang from which we are still reeling.

therefore must be able to start from anywhere⁷, and the philosopher who seeks the first term holds it in his hands as soon as he begins the search, or as soon as he poses this question.

In that sense the first term can be seized at each point and at each instant, since the act is always present everywhere. To indicate that it is alien to objectivity, i.e. time and space, we could say that it is nowhere and never yet the prerequisite of what is always and everywhere brought forth, and that it is never an object that supposes another object on which it depends. On the contrary we cannot go back further than the act, and it is absurd to imagine for example another act by which it could be determined. And for that reason each point and each instant offers the individual a vantage-point embracing the totality of the world.

ART. 4: *The act is exercised in the instant as a perpetual reprise.*

The act is always exercised in the instant and cannot be said to spill over into the past or future, or even to endure since one can stretch into duration only whatever is not actual or at work in it, i.e. whatever is not act. The instant is not the same as the act itself. The act is situated in the instant precisely because the instant is without content. It is not, as believed, a cut in time. It is the generator of it. And this generation is understandable if we reflect that all we have done and all we can do necessarily enters time while every act we perform⁸ tears us away from it, giving our life the character of an apparent discontinuity and a perpetual reprise. The dream that delivers us into passivity has a continuous character, and we find this continuity again in a chain of events once they are realised, as determinism shows. But to act is to begin again, it is to put everything back into question, it is to engage freedom, which is always there but not always put into play, it is to regain contact with the timeless principle of all creation. For that reason the act is always manifest in the form of an interruption to the natural course of things. It is always available within us but not always realised: we can abandon ourselves to passivity. Thus the act always appears intermittent. It seems ever in need of being reanimated or regenerated. Yet with respect to time it is always new though in essence it is forever the same, for its effects alone descend into time, more as witnesses to its limitation than to its efficacy. Also, the nature of the instant is always ambiguous; for I can situate it in time and give it a date only by allocating it a content, only by relating it to what precedes and follows it, and I therefore legitimately speak of a plurality of instants. But if one considers the perfectly indivisible point in each of them where the act is exerted—for example, when I say “yes” to you—then there is no more than an instant; I always find it the same. Only I do not always have the force to install myself there, for it is a breakthrough into eternity.

⁷ Literally, everywhere.

⁸ I.e. in the present instant, as distinct from “all we have done” and “all we can do”.

ART. 5: *The act is an act of presence that gives things their actuality.*

The instant always brings us a presence; and we plainly see that presence is an act and not a fact: there is for us no other presence than that we give ourselves. Where presence is lacking, being is lacking, the Absolute Being as well as the participated being; and even absence is a mental or ideal presence. The act as act always creates presence, which is the very character of being: and this presence does not change; what changes are its modes, i.e. transitory perspectives on being, none of which suffices because all are finite and imperfect. I have to make an effort to show that for me things are absent: moreover *I have to represent them to myself*. Thus reflection discerns nothing but different forms of presence: it compels me constantly to pass from one to another. But in creating time, reflection also overcomes it, for it contrasts the various moments in which the aspects of becoming succeed one another with an identical presence in which reflection is reinstated each time it acts.

With respect to the object all presence is evanescent. It resides not only in time but in space as well; and it cannot be in one without also being in the other; it is, so to speak, spatiotemporal. For every present event has a site, and all our thoughts, all our sentiments, are actualised in connection with an event. But objective presence is only a participated presence, i.e. a penetration into a presence that is immutable because it is that of an act which can be deemed alien to time. Yet within it phenomena are unfolded (i.e. the modes of being) and each of time's moments are realised so that it is in a sense the origin of time itself (which is the measure of the distance between the absolute act and the shared act). We could therefore say that the act is in a sense the insertion of the supra-temporal or the eternal into time—if this were not to give an independent existence to time when it is only the condition and effect of participation.

It hardly needs comment that language confirms this thesis by always associating the present with the actual.⁹ These two words have become synonyms; but we ought not to forget that the second evokes the act that makes present precisely what it actualises. Now the experience of this act is that of eternity. In calling it a creative act, we mean that its creativity can be said to be continuous with respect to its participated forms, as Descartes had it¹⁰, but with respect to the operation that makes them be, it does not itself enter time and lift the individual forms into its own eternity.

⁹ As Lavelle observes in the next sentence, the French word “*l'actuel*” means both the present (i.e. what is current) and the actual.

¹⁰ Descartes claimed that things are actively held in existence from one moment to the next.

ART. 6: *In the measure that our activity is pure it abolishes consciousness of time – which reappears as soon as it flags.*¹¹

It is obvious that the first term cannot be the one necessarily found at the end whatever regression. For the process of regression excludes the possibility of reaching a final term.

But the first term is already there in the initial step of putting to myself the problem of the first term: there is an idolatry in thinking I will find it on the side of the object, it is already there in the act through which I posit this object, which seems to me given first and requires me to posit other objects as well because it is incapable of being enough. No object can be enough.

It is therefore impossible to take as a first term a *fact* to which I might succeed in analytically reducing all others and which could then become the origin of all syntheses. To say that spirit, relying solely on itself, engenders everything else does not go far enough. The important thing is that it engenders itself, i.e. that it is an absolute and omnipresent act—from which I am separated, it is true, but only in order to be able to create my own temporal development ahead of incorporating it in the act.

It should not be thought that the immutable permanence of being is here replaced by a more precarious principle that might one day stop acting. The permanence of being has for its support an act which, being sheer act, cannot fail. That would not be the case if the act had a subject whose act could be, for instance, an intermittent modality. Rather, the essence of being is the act itself, and one cannot conceive of an act that does not act. The repose of being-in-itself is one with this act, which is never finished because it is always fulfilling itself. Hence spiritual activity is, according to Descartes, never interrupted, either in us or in God: but in us it knows progress and degrees, and we could not conceive of any connection between what it is in us and what it is in God except as a power that is unequally engaged.

Time itself is void and without action, it only defines the law according to which the world is constantly becoming. One can say that the consciousness we have of time – which is none other than its reality – conveys the rapport between passivity and activity within us. When our activity is at minimum, though not completely suppressed, as in waiting, Being is indistinct from time. In the measure that objects come to fill it they claim more and more of our attention and time so to speak recedes. Only, as they impose themselves on us, it is necessary to detach them from us and from each other, which obliges us to order them consecutively. This succession itself is effaced in the measure that our activity grows. In the perfection of the act, time not only ceases to be felt but ceases to be. We will recover it in the effects or traces the act leaves behind so to speak, which is only possible when our activity begins to flag again. Moreover will's effects

¹¹ Compare the following with Section IV of “Presence Regained” in *The Total Presence*.

alone enter time, not its operation. Only intellectual research has need of time, not the act of thinking that contemplates truth nor indeed its intelligible object: each time thinking exerts itself it sets out anew; it is always an origin, never a sequel. Likewise the tribulations of love have a history but not the act of loving, which abolishes the succession of instants, not only in appearance but in reality. That is to say that the act abolishes appearance as well as time itself, which is only an appearance or, rather, the condition for the possibility of all appearances.

C) WILL, OR THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF'S CAUSALITY

ART. 7: *The paradoxical duality of terms in the expression "cause de soi"¹² brings to light the original character of the act as being a pure initiative, i.e. as being always cause and never effect.*

The expression "*cause de soi*" is plainly very difficult to analyse. For the peculiarity of the causal nexus, so it seems, is to introduce a difference between the terms "cause" and "effect", is to suppose that a cause is already in being for an effect to be produced.

Let us put aside for the moment the problem of whether the element of novelty found in the effect is not itself necessarily a creation *ex nihilo* and whether the theory of change merely reduces without eliminating the difficulty we encounter in passing from nothingness into being. When we say that being is *cause de soi* do we not suppose that it exists in two ways: as creator of self and as something created by self? The difficulty therefore bears on the distinction we make between these two modes; yet when we consider being as creator we have no right to consider it as already existing before starting to create, or at least we do so only because we consider this creator as external to us, which means that it is already, up to a certain point, a created being¹³, if only a denizen of our thinking: being alone can posit itself from within as creative. But we also do not have the right to proceed in a reverse direction and to set apart its act from its being so that its being would be with respect to its act a kind of product akin to the work of an artisan. What we want to say is only that within being the act and being are one such that there is nothing in it of a created character that differs from the act that creates it. God's being is the same as his eternal act. Only, it is natural in light of the temporal link we make between cause and effect that we employ the expression "*cause de soi*" to designate a being that is always cause,

¹² Literally "cause of self" but its meaning is consistent with the English phrase "self-caused". I have used the French phrase in this section owing to its emphasis on cause. The "duality" in question doubtless refers to the assumption (here denied) that self derives from a cause that is prior to and distinct from it.

¹³ Literally, a creature.

that has no starting-point, since it is the beginning of each thing and the current efficacy that makes it be.

It is not because it is void and lacks everything but because it is full and perfectly self-sufficient that it is forever reborn. It always gives itself everything, but one would be very wrong to consider it never an effect of itself, even though it is a cause whose essence is to be only cause.¹⁴ It can therefore equally be said that it obtains everything or that it never obtains anything; it is the creator that is itself never created. There is for it neither spectacle nor possession. It is beyond. Whoever creates has no need to possess anything. But as soon as participation begins, being suddenly imparts sense and value to all the objects it seemed to surpass and exclude a short while ago: now it grants us the power to behold and possess them.

ART. 8: Self-causation is inseparable from infinite activity, and is found again in every finite activity.

If there is an ambiguity in the expression “*cause de soi*” which seems to indicate an inconceivable split between the being that gives itself being and the being that receives it, it is because this distinction is purely intended to evoke a form of activity that goes beyond the distinction and in fact nullifies it.

The same can be said of the definition of the act when it is conceived as the passage from nothingness into being. For there, where this passage is eternal, as in the pure act, this expression¹⁵ amounts to no more than the exclusion of nothingness and the affirmation of the total being’s inwardness to itself. The expression, it is true, makes sense with respect to a finite being because, on the one hand, the conditions in which he is called to give himself personal being are determined by the order of events in time, so that before they arise he is a pure nothingness (though he is already contained in the act as pure potential) and because, on the other hand, the being he gives himself through an act of will is indeed for him a first beginning which grants him access to the totality of Being in which he had, until then, no distinct personal existence.¹⁶

With these reservations we can say that, in God or in us, the exercise of self-caused activity (i.e. the passage from nothingness into being) starts again so speak at every instant.

¹⁴ I gather the author wants to allow an effect-like character to being in that it is given to itself and somehow enjoys itself, even though it possesses nothing external. Despite insisting that being’s “essence is to be only cause” he also seems keen to affirm the absolute unity of cause and effect in the eternal sphere. By comparison the temporal sphere is where this unity is broken into before and after.

¹⁵ I.e. “the passage from nothingness into being”.

¹⁶ I take it Lavelle is here describing an instance of participation. One goes along in a typically mindless state until circumstances present the possibility of waking up, taking effective consciousness. If one chooses to realise this possibility, i.e. wills it, one becomes fully present to oneself and the world. A kind of birth occurs. Compared to the present alert state the former state was a kind of nothingness. One has come into being.

In saying of the Act that is self-caused we mean that it is also the cause of all finite being. On the one hand, in the measure that a finite being is self-caused he finds within himself the source of his operative and participatory efficacy (so that the degree of his participation expresses the degree of his union with the source, making it the end as well as the origin of his action). On the other hand, in the measure that he is not absolutely self-caused he is directly or indirectly subject to the action of another being who in turn is self-caused.

It is easy to show that if the act is capable of creating the least thing it is also capable of creating everything. As Descartes has already observed, the leap from nothing to something is the same as the leap from nothing to everything: whatever can span the one can also span the other. Consequently there appears to be a singularly strait liaison between infinity and the power of self-causation; and this liaison becomes obvious when we reflect that a finite being cannot be the origin of his own limits and that there is nothing outside of infinity upon which infinity itself can depend; there is even between the notions of infinity and self-causation a kind of reciprocity since infinity cannot be conceived as anything other than an inexhaustible power to engender itself.

But the fact that we can exceed our limits and even go beyond time to posit an All that includes us and which we ourselves contribute to creating—this is the constitutive character of the mind itself. It is clear indeed that the All depends solely on self, which is properly the only definition we can give for the Absolute.¹⁷ This dependence upon the lone self or, what amounts to the same thing, this self-causality—represented in human terms as a duality when in fact we have to do with an inscrutable unity—allows us to grasp the internal genesis of Being: the voluntary act through which we create ourselves furnishes us an imperfect image of that genesis.

ART. 9. *The voluntary act gives us an experience of the causation of self by self.*

It cannot be claimed that this notion of a self-caused activity is strange to us and that the nature of causality always implies the causation of one thing by another. That is true solely with respect to the world of objects where there is only legality and not genuine causality. By contrast, interior activity such as we observe in attention or will is not born from nothing but remains ever present and available, always capable of being suspended or taken up again¹⁸: it defines our initiative only because, instead of being the sequel of what we were, it on the contrary breaks with what we are and announces a taking-charge of what we are going to be. In the consciousness of willing we have within us an experience of causation of self by self. Granted, it is rather difficult to isolate because we are not pure will. We are always associated with a nature and we have the self-

¹⁷ A topic to be addressed in the next chapter.

¹⁸ As I read this, “interior activity” is always going on, and one either meshes with it or disengages from it in somewhat the way that one works the clutch of a car.

contradictory belief that will arises as an effect or an extension of nature – which is in fact its negation, as we see in determinism. In reality, will breaks with nature and always goes beyond it; it is whatever in our activity cannot be explained by nature, whatever adds to it, whatever contradicts it. Nature evinces will's limitation and always remains irreducible to it. Even if the will adds nothing to nature, it is bound to acknowledge it. Nature is a chain that links the will to the All by a bond of factualness – until the will frees itself from nature to participate in this All from within, through an act of initiative. Nature is also the trace will leaves behind when it flags and turns into habit. Nature plunges us back into those glooms of the past where the impulses and instincts that enslave us are formed independently us. Hence we understand very well that the composition of nature and will can be compounded in different ways by different beings: the will that depends on me can be renounced, though always freely; but then I confuse myself with my nature and cease to be cause of myself; everything that takes place in me is explained by a causality that I no longer govern. And I can, on the contrary, without ever denying my nature, subordinate or transfigure it so that it becomes a docile servant of the will. At the extreme, where nature disappears and I have to do with an infinite will, I also rediscover the pure act, i.e. a being that – limited by nothing, subservient to no action that comes from without – is the total, rather than partial, self-cause. And particular beings draw near it, or more or less distance themselves from it, depending upon whether their will is deficient or more nearly perfect, with the consequence that, contrary to what we suppose, it is when these beings are most closely united with God that they become the authors of their own being.

But will always comes to light as a first beginning. It is exactly the reverse of how Schopenhauer conceived it¹⁹: it is born when we rediscover within ourselves the first beginning of all things through participation in the creative act. Thus the relation between nature and will within us allows us to better comprehend what should be understood by pure act; we might express it by saying that it is a will stripped of nature, or what amounts to the same thing, that it is the absolute cause of itself.

We are not much impressed by the objection that will doubtless be made to us, one that naturally comes to mind, namely, that we have no right to consider this pure act as an act apart since we can never observe it anywhere else than in particular wills. For we posit it less as an act apart – which would oblige us to

¹⁹ Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), German philosopher of Dutch parentage. His central opus, *The World as Will and Idea* (1818), parallels *Of the Act* in its assumption that the world of manifold appearances conceals a fundamental unity of being that has the character of will. Unlike the pessimistic Schopenhauer, for whom will is an ugly and unwelcome truth, Lavelle extols its positive qualities. In the above passage he seems to be responding to Schopenhauer's sense of entrapment in the painful sameness of a will whose aim is merely to perpetuate itself. In his *Introduction à l'ontologie* (p. 91) Lavelle says "the will Schopenhauer speaks about is a blind will devoid of interiority . . ." He chastises Schopenhauer for equating being with instinct and the unconscious while making thought and consciousness illusory "consolations" without any power to heal. He asks where these illusions could possibly come from in such a bleak reality.

regard it as a particular will – than as the interior and omnipresent principle that animates all particular wills. But each particular will compels us to affirm it when we isolate what is purer, more interior and more efficacious in its exercise, when we recognise its kinship with other wills and when we encounter the instrument of their separation and mutual mediation in nature.

Will leads us from itself toward the pure act, provided one first agrees to banish from it the need always to look outside its subjectivity for the support that confirms it, the gift that completes it, the food that nourishes it, and provided one reflects that Absolute Being has no need to be remote from itself in order to find what it should be and wants to be through an act of liberation and interiorisation that is up to it to perform, i.e. existence within it is the very existence of essence and not the means that allows it to be discovered.

ART. 10: Being is an act that eternally wills itself and the value that justifies it.

When one tries to penetrate deeply into the nature of the Absolute Act one realises that it is an act that wills itself eternally. And just as we are, as subject or I, only then when we will ourselves to be²⁰, one also finds that there must be within the pure act a self-will through which self-causation receives its true meaning and becomes no longer a logical necessity but a creative exigency whose root is indivisibly metaphysical and moral. Thus the ancients sought the essence of and reason for Being in the Good. Being creates itself eternally, purely owing to the affirmation that being is worth more – and infinitely more – than nothingness: in creating itself it justifies itself; it so to speak creates its own reason for being. And for us all reason for being resides in the value of what we affirm and what we do.

We can justify our life in our own eyes only by making it such that it is preferred, wanted and loved, not only by us but by all those to whom it might be proposed as a model. And to act morally is not to submit to a mysterious law against which our nature might rebel, it is to multiply within and around oneself all the reasons for preferring, wanting and loving life.

One sometimes thinks that the affirmation of value is superadded to the affirmation of being, and that it constantly denies what-is in order to reshape it. Even then, when one supposes that value denies what-is one must not forget that being is required for value to be posited. It is above all important to note that it is only by descending ever more deeply into being that we discover value, and that whoever denies value forfeits both the world's being, which is then dissipated in a play of appearances, and his own being, which remains on the brink of nothingness, over which it becomes incapable of preferring itself.

²⁰ The most straightforward rendering of this clause is: “we are . . . only there where we will ourselves . . .” However I feel the author’s idea is more nearly related to time than to place, i.e. I need to make an act of will in order to be fully present. I suppose his identification of being and act derives from just such an observation. The French words in questions can imply either time or place.

We can will being only because to will being is also to will value. Willing value is not wishing to escape being in order to rise above it. It is having an inner revelation of the absolute: the Being from which we believe the experience of the world, such as it is given to us, separates us. But that experience is either its manifestation, as we see in the discovery of beauty, or its condition, as we see in all the tasks to which duty constantly calls us.

It is remarkable that Descartes saw so deeply that the power of being self-cause is always associated with perfection, i.e. with the possibility of being self-sufficient. This is the supreme quality of the Sage. Yet that supreme efficacy, which is foremost an efficacy with respect to self, can be expressed in two ways: first negatively, in terms of magnitude, for a power outside of which there is nothing else must engender itself eternally; then positively, in terms of value, for this efficacy prevails only because it creates its own supreme reason for being.²¹

²¹ Because I take this chapter as central to *The Dialectic of the Eternal Present*, and because its theme is a challenging one, I have decided to attach these supplemental comments.

Though the chapter begins by addressing self-causation with respect to the act, and only later focuses on its counterpart in human volition, I suppose the author's thinking originally ran in the reverse direction. Specifically he observed how the act of taking consciousness—i.e. returning to oneself, experientially coming into being—entails a determination to be present that is identical with its achievement, and in corresponding measure. At the same time he noted the paradox of a person effectively giving himself being, i.e. willing his own existence. I take it that the idea of self-causation in the "Absolute Act" is based on such considerations.

Given the prospect of a truly timeless dimension, as the Absolute Act requires, it might seem more fitting to speak of an "uncaused" or "uncreated" act than of one which is "*cause de soi*". Heidegger for instance entertains the notion of uncaused being in his *Der Satz vom Grund*. But Lavelle sees being as a magical fount of newness, independently of whatever manifest novelty. For him being is inwardly disclosed not as a frozen state but as a dynamic and living emergence, a permanent coming-to-be, only secondarily related to the world. Even though there can be no progression here, a sense of something-from-nothing can still apply.

The phrase "coming-to-be" of course suggests becoming, which in turn implies time. But in felt, intuited or ideal terms being and becoming can fold together. Indeed they must originally be one in order to ground the simultaneous validity of sameness and difference, timelessness and time. These issues are given detailed treatment in Lavelle's *Of Time and Eternity*.