

PART TWO

MODALITIES OF THE INTERVAL

CHAPTER XIII

THE ONE AND THE MANY

A) FROM THE ONE TO THE MANY

ART. 1: The relation between the one and the many has its foundation in the essence of the Pure Act.

To want at the outset to attribute perfect unity to the act, thereby breaking every relation between unity and the infinitely fecund multiplicity which is the very life of consciousness, is to allow oneself to be blinded by the simplicity of the words. It is to confuse the unity of the spirit with the unity of the object or the point. But the unity of the spirit is the unity of the diversity it constantly produces and reduces: it diversifies and unifies at the same time. It is self only because it is connection with self, i.e. true unity of self, in a perpetual dialogue with self and return to self.

The unity of the act is not a unity one proposes, it is a unity that is realised. Which is possible only on the condition that this act creates itself ahead of creating anything else, i.e. endlessly produces its own inwardness to itself, or the

spiritual interval through which it endlessly takes itself as its own object. If our participation in the life of the spirit is realised essentially through reflexion it is because reflexion manifests a more profound spiritual character than a creative activity akin to blind spontaneity. In reflexion spirit grasps the perfection of its own activity. In us this is second. But the pure act is an act that simultaneously creates its own reflexion, or reflects its own creation; and it deserves the name "act" only because it engenders its own light. Imagination almost always leads us to think that the nature of the act is to produce some object external to it. But it must first produce itself, i.e. produce the light that illumines it, lacking which it would be nothing, or at least would have no right to the name "act" that we give it.

One will therefore not let oneself be halted by Plato's argument that without shattering the unity of being one cannot say that being is one or that the one is being. For being can be given an infinite number of other names which, instead of shattering the unity of the act, show us only its identical and inexhaustible fecundity. Thus I will say that the pure act is thinking, and in this pure thinking, I know very well that I hold the totality of what-is under the species of the thinkable. But by the word "thinking" the act is both over-determined, since we know very well that the act surpasses thought and makes it be, and under-determined, since it must also be either altogether will, lacking which there would be no creative efficacy in it, or altogether love, lacking which efficacy it would not bear within it the principle of its movement. In the act no separation is possible between these three aspects which constitute it and are set apart only in order to create the interval wherein all the varied and imperfect forms of participation will come to be produced. The distinction one can make between the different functions of spirit is never decisive or absolute, and each of them requires the others to sustain it; but the very possibility of this distinction is singularly instructive: for each function expresses the act completely. And it cannot be isolated without the two others rushing forward to provide whatever it lacks in initiative, ardour or light.

Being is identical with Spirit only if it is a continuous generation and a continuous invention of self through a rapport of self with self. Plurality expresses the production of being by self at every point in its immensity – in each of these points and at every level so to speak is realised an absolute invention, a passage from nothingness into being – which populates the world with liberties, showing that to create self is to create another thing than self, as seen in love which is one and which can be realised only in the appeal to the existence of other beings who have love of beginning and end.

The life of spirit requires the appearance of an infinite plurality of particular spirits who will need to constitute themselves by an original application of their freedom in such a way that opposes and unites, that gives one and the other a common basis and that, in turning their attention, their will, their love or their

prayer toward the principle which gives them life, closes the admirable circuit between creator and creature whose fullness completes everything that is.

ART. 2: *The Pure Act does not bring forth plurality by shattering its own unity but by offering itself so to speak to ever novel participation.*

The Act is what makes self, it is pure efficacy, of which the I is never only the means, instrument or vehicle. But it would be vain to imagine that the pure act is broken into individual souls as the soul is broken into particular ideas. The peculiarity of the Act is exactly to be an indivisible unity. Participation does not diminish it, does not subtract from it in the least. It would even seem that it always adds some new initiative—if one could add to an act that has no passivity; and indeed nothing is added to it since it contains the common origin of all births, though each birth is always the first to the being who is born. Doubtless we here find ourselves in the presence of the characteristic property of the Absolute which is infinite with respect to us, i.e. it contains in a single stroke the principle and *raison d'être* of an inexhaustible series of terms, none of which enriches it, though each is an independent creation. The peculiarity of the act is to be, in its essence, a fructification and a limitless generosity: and for that reason the participated act, like the act in which it participates, is always creative, i.e. offers itself without end to some new participation and cooperation. Now the source of multiplicity is easily understood if one considers that it is the expression of this constantly proposed participation which requires an infinity of modes, not only so that the entire absolute is potentially participable but so that each participated being can freely constitute itself, i.e. by actualising, organising and making a hierarchy of the various aspects of the total being, while never remaining identified with any of them, which would annihilate its independence by locking it in a static separate essence.

To take an example, it can be seen in a particularly clear way how the plurality of ideas is inseparable from the appearance of thought. For each idea per se, while having a place in being, is nonetheless inadequate to it: the plurality, indeed infinity, of ideas needed even to hope to recover the total being would never exhaust the depths from which we have drawn them. Thus intelligence safeguards its free play, in part thanks to the possibility it enjoys of constituting the content of consciousness through its choice of ideas and the way it organises them, and in part thanks to the responsibility it assumes with respect to the truth which is its work, which exposes it to error but also allows that the world in which it lives is always up to a certain point the world it gives itself.

Hence it will not be said of thinking that it breaks itself into ideas. Doubtless one can assert that it is the idea of all the ideas it will ever think. All the same one risks an ambiguity. Either, each idea must be considered as a particular act that effectively stands in the same relation to thinking as the act of participation to the Pure Act, with this reservation: thinking founds its reality by way of

participation, i.e. by the ideas it thinks, while the Pure Act, which sustains all possible participations, does not depend on them in any manner whatever. Or, it must be said that the idea is the object of thinking rather than its act, and then thinking itself becomes the act of participation and resides above all the ideas it thinks, in which case one could not say that it is itself an idea, since that would contradictorily require an act to convert itself into an object.

It is perhaps not necessary to establish a relation as direct as that of Malebranche between the infinite act which governs the world and the particular events accomplished by it. This infinite act has an immediate relation only with our freedom: and the whole task of metaphysics is to define this relation or, rather, to describe the spiritual experience through which we take possession of the act. But once the step is taken the nature of the universe and the laws regulating it seem deducible from the very conditions that permit each liberty to be exercised and to enter into rapport with all other liberties. And one can glimpse how the pure act, in order to be reflected in an individual consciousness, must engender all possible forms of multiplicity.

Hence we must neither seek to derive the multiple from the one nor the one from the multiple because neither of the terms can be posited without the other. This is a rapport we can only describe. Plurality is internal to spirit: as soon as its activity is exercised it is pluralised.

ART. 3: The rapport between the one and the many can be reduced to the rapport between absolute freedom and particular liberties.

The rapport between liberties therefore places us at the heart of the problem of creation. For on the one hand, freedom stands for that principle of origination within being which makes it be, and on the other hand, the peculiarity of freedom is always to call forth another freedom which, because it is distinct from it, immediately forms a spiritual society with the first; it is in this real society between God and himself, God and his creatures, creatures and God, and one creature and another, that freedom finds its true application. But in the freedom which ever creates itself, in the unity and plurality of liberties, in the mutual connections they maintain with each other, resides also the mystery of Being. The peculiarity of our doctrine is to replace the relation between parts and the Whole with the relation between liberties and the principle which sustains them all. We are acutely aware of all the problems to which such a pursuit exposes us. But doubtless it will be granted that participation such as we have defined it expresses nothing more than the simultaneous difference and unity between pure freedom and particular liberties, which is realised in four ways: first, through the need for participated freedom to be exercised in an act of consent which can doubtless be turned into a refusal but which nonetheless remains a consent to the activity it puts into play in a changed sense; second, through the need for this participated freedom to be linked with a spontaneity or nature

which limits it and from which it delivers itself but which also gives it an impetus it takes charge of and directs; third, the need it has to find before it a matter that serves as obstacle and means, simultaneously providing the effect, the symbol and the trace of its exercise; fourth and last, the need presence has for a plurality of endlessly-offered ends—precisely because it enters into a world that spreads beyond it—in order to manifest itself by way of a free will which is so to speak a continual choice of itself through time.

If the unity of the Pure Act, in the initiative through which it creates itself, calls upon an infinity of particular beings to create themselves through participation in its essence, the rapport between the mind and determinations and the rapport between unity and numeric multiplicity are no more than expressions and symbols of the profound connection within Being between the act which is supremely cause of self and the act which calls upon an infinity of other beings to become causes of self in turn. Now it is perfectly clear that the difficulty is not their infinitude, since it is sufficient that one of them appears in the world for there to arise from it an infinity which can be considered to express both the measureless fecundity of the creative act and the inexhaustible originality of the particular initiatives through which participation is realised. And it can be said that the infinity of free beings achieves in time and in a participated form the passage from nothingness into being for which the pure act represents both the immanent possibility and the transcendent actuality.

ART. 4: *The univocity of Being calls for, rather than excludes, analogy.*

It is because freedom is the source of being that all the difficulties with the problem of univocity can be resolved. For if the nominal unity between absolute being and the being that participates in it expresses a profound and essential metaphysical union, it is precisely because the participant being displays in his own sphere the same power of self-causation that belongs to the absolute being. Otherwise how could he say he possesses a being of his own? The absolute being grants him participation, though one often thinks that this should nullify him. And if participation did not give him being, how could it truly be called participation? It would be only the appearance or negation of it. This is what Malebranche did not see, or at least did not express with sufficient clarity; for no one has shown more admirably than him that the divine act is indivisible, is present everywhere, animates us and acts within us; but the suspicion, the mistrust his doctrine has given rise to would be dissipated if he had affirmed with equal force that this divine activity is also ours, that we are nothing if it does not liberate us, that its presence within us is our power of consenting to it and, owing to this consent, of founding an existence that belongs to us. Our perfect dependence on God, which is supreme independence, resides in the possibility we have of constituting our own independence, even with respect to the one who gives it to us.

That univocity cannot be cast in doubt follows immediately, not only from the characteristics belonging to being but from the sole reality of participation which demands a single being in which you and I participate, the same being which constitutes my participated being. Whoever denies univocity rends the seamless garment, strips life of all its seriousness and creates between the absolute and the relative, and between the various relatives, a gap that will never be filled.

But if we consider, now in particular terms, not the unity of the being in which they participate but the characteristic originality of participation itself, then the word "analogy" takes on full meaning. For each of the terms, under penalty of not being able to assert a unique claim to being, seeks for his part to acquire within his own bounds a self-sufficiency that imitates that of the pure act. For example, our will imitates the act which is cause of itself and cause of itself in its fashion. There is, on the one hand, between pure being and finite beings, and on the other hand, among finite beings, an analogy founded on their relative self-sufficiency, and this analogy is an extremely fecund principle through which can be discovered, symmetrically, in each of them and under diverse aspects, a character common to all. And it can be discerned that instead of excluding univocity it supposes it, if one agrees to recognise that owing to their dependence on the same being one finds in them different forms of independence which nonetheless correspond.

Participation admits of three different levels: in the order of activity it is expressed by the freedom that reconciles the universality of the efficacy we put into play with the disposition we have of it; in the order of being it is expressed by the analogy of these participated forms, which accords with the univocity of the source from which they draw everything; finally, in the order of intellect, they are expressed by the idea of relation, function or proportion which, instead of destroying the unity of thought, brings it to realisation.

B) THE MANY AND THE ONE

ART. 5: Participation is realised through distinction, which specifies the originating unity but does not abolish it.

Participation immediately shows us the privilege of the act of distinction through which we found the originality of our being within the total being. The synthetic character of all the mind's operations is so much insisted upon that it is sometimes forgotten that every arising is a distinction at work within the confusion of origination, that intelligence is the faculty of clear and distinct ideas, that will is a break from indifference and always marks a particular end which is worth being pursued, as love selects from all beings one on whom the realisation of my destiny seems to depend. There is no free initiative which does not

introduce a distinction into the world, i.e. which is not creative of an absolutely unique and incomparable form of being. This suffices to prove that there is nothing in the world which is not concrete and individual.

It is only with participation that the opposition between subject and object and all forms of differentiation arise. But all the opposites, all the different things are equally included in being; it consequently suffices that participation, which is the primitive experience and fundament of all other experience, appears to us as possible so that the dialectic may be capable of justifying the interval separating the contraries, the intermediaries uniting them as well as the plurality of couples, and the systems they form. In a more general way it can be said that the peculiarity of freedom is to introduce difference into the world but in such a fashion that each difference calls for all the others.

Being has the character of unity; and multiplicity is completely from the side of participation. Thus one easily understands that it can never have a proper existence. It is constantly created and abolished by participation; it testifies at every instant to its originality: it is so to speak the mark of its level. And for that reason a consideration of whatever multiplicity of terms reveals to us a solidarity among them attesting to the common origin of all acts of participation, a possibility of repetition which shows us at once the common conditions to which participation is obedient and the permanent availability to us of certain powers essential to its employment, and finally an inalienable diversity inseparable from the ever-novel and personal character of each operation by which it is realised. This explains rather clearly why diversity does not shatter the unity of the Act and why it has both a numerical and qualitative character.

The observation would finally impart a singularly living character to the notion of difference if one succeeded in showing that difference is always inseparable from preference and that all the distinctions we can impose on things are always correlative of variations in desire and the initiatives of freedom.

ART. 6: Multiplicity is an interrupted and resumed act.

If the nature of the act of being is indivisible, division could arise only by way of successive interruptions, i.e. through its connection with passivity. Multiplicity, as Spinoza remarks, can never pertain to the essence of things. Every act reunites. Numeration, it is said, is an act but it is an act constantly stopped and resumed. If it wasn't suspended it would remain a pure unity. Accordingly multiplicity is generated more by the stopped act than the continuous act. As soon as the elements of nature are assumed to be various the act counts them, i.e. again, reunites them. Its role is precisely to put all the parts of reality into relation. It is the relation between things that renders them interior to the All. Finally it is what puts all consciousnesses in communication with each other; for they are separate in the measure they suffer, while in the measure they

act each of them contains the world; they discover that they all depend on the same source and converge on the same end.

We can say that the property of discontinuity is to express the ever-novel originality of the act of freedom that founds participation. Freedom is always a first beginning. Continuity can only appear in the pure activity on which it draws and in a kind of detente where its effects accumulate from the moment it flags. It could be added that, in each of those resumptions through which freedom punctuates its actions so to speak, it remains incapable of disowning its previous initiatives. It can be linked to the All only if it resides as a pure power between its successive interventions; but this power always becomes determinate when actualised, such that in the course of his development a being little by little constitutes both the unity of his character and the continuity of his history.

One sees the same rapport between continuity and discontinuity in the formation of science. For the irregularity of the atom or the electron expresses no more than the point at which our attention is fixed so to speak; it is an objective expression of an act of freedom. But it breaks up a supposed continuity which is, if you like, that of space; and all effort of thought in breaking it up is to convert it into a determinate and conceptual continuity for which waves provide a kind of image and statistics a kind of schematic approximation.

ART. 7: Participation can be interpreted as both an operation of division and an operation of multiplication.

Doubtless the ideas of one and many are interdependent, which means they form a single idea. For not only is the one defined as the negation of the many and the many as the negation of the one but the one is nothing if not the many unified and the many is nothing if not the one divided, later to be recovered in the elements and their sum. Of the two terms however the first has true pre-eminence, as has been shown; it does not abolish the many but dominates it. It requires it and constructs it. The one is the operation and the many is the object of the operation. This suffices to justify both their opposition and their solidarity.

The many therefore ceases to be a kind of scandal. It is not the effect of some catastrophe whereby the one suddenly shattered; it does not represent the debris. If the one is act, the many is inseparable from its exercise. It forms a body with it, as numeration with unity. And for that reason it can, with respect to the one, appear by turns as a progressive enrichment or as a restrictive parcelling. We can likewise consider the number series as the result of the repetition of unity with itself and as an indefinitely repeated division; then the whole number is no longer merely a fractional number whose connection with unity is momentarily neglected. Partisans of the synthetic method retain only the process whereby the number series always has some new growth; but they should not forget that the infinite power through which unity is posited necessarily contains the virtuality of the entire number sequence; the repetition of unity is precisely produced from

the moment the unity-act, positing a unity-object and refusing to be identified with it, claims the possibility of positing an infinity of other unity-objects of which it immediately ceases to make the synthesis. Partisans of the analytic method retain only the process of division whereby fractional numbers are spread out between a unity they never manage to exhaust and a nothingness they never manage to reach; but they should not forget that fractional numbers are not contained in unity ahead of the operation which defines them—without succeeding, it is true, to detach them from it. In this way the synthetic method is less creative than believed, and the analytic method more than thought. They differ only in their procedure. But the first esteems the originality of all the mind's operations and the second the source from which they are fed. It is admirable that unity is thus the identical origin of a twofold process of composition and division, of a movement through which it seems to spill forth numbers which add to it and of another movement through which it discovers them in itself as if they had been contained there. Thus particular beings multiply pure being which however withdraws them all.

One therefore finds in the formation of numbers a two-fold image of participation: unity as an absolute principle from which all numbers can be obtained by sub-division but at the same time as a generating principle which in every part of the world engenders them through multiplication. It could be said that we are here dealing with two different origins of the real of which one can be taken as an interior genesis and the other an exterior genesis. And it is remarkable that if we consider the completely pure unity, it remains the same whether one divides or multiplies it by itself; it is even remarkable that the product of this division and the product of this multiplication are identical.

It will not be forgotten that in Chapter XII-B we have already distinguished two different senses of the word "one". For the one can be the contrary of the many; it enters into the many as the principle of composition. But it can also be the common principle of the one and the many which would allow us to obtain from it the multiple by division, i.e. thanks to the appearance of another one which, rich due to its absolute nature, would be capable of being repeated indefinitely.

However in explaining how we are led to count, i.e. why there is numeration, it is not enough to say that the one of numeration is an act. The one of numeration cannot be isolated from the living one such as found in the consciousness of the mathematician who decides to count, and who is nearer to the pure act.

But every participatory act can also be regarded as interior to the pure act it divides and imperfectly takes charge of. Pantheism has been especially attentive to the inclusion of all parties in the All, or to the subordination of the participated act to the pure act. It is however obvious that the part is not absorbed back into the All since it is also true that it is detached from it and that the participated act

would not be an act unless it possessed an initiative it borrows from the pure act but nevertheless is its own.

If on the contrary we begin with the part we can say that it is multiplied a certain number of times so that it more and more nearly approaches the All yet without merging with it since this multiplication cannot have any end. In the same way we could say that the participated act, which borrows from the pure act all the powers it disposes, approaches it (without becoming identical with it) in the measure its tension is increased and its efficacy more nearly perfect. Coincidence would reside in a passage to the limit which precisely could never be attained.

In supposing that the one gives rise to the many, both by multiplication and division, we are bound to assert a kind of logical necessity based on the nature of pairs whereby each term calls for the other, lacking which it could not be posited. But there is in this logical necessity an expression of the most profound character of the creative act, which cannot engender itself without communicating and sharing its power, without at the same time engendering not things distinct from it but beings endowed with the same freedom and with regard to whom it is felt to be both separate and united. The two-fold operation of multiplication and division manifesting the rapport between the one and the many finds here an admirable application since new liberties multiply the one – without which they would have no independence and initiative, i.e. would not be liberties – and at the same time divide it. Lacking this a person would doubtless be unable to comprehend either their origin (for liberties cannot do without an origin since they are limited, i.e. inseparable from a nature) or the common name “liberty” that can be accorded to all and is intelligible only by way of an identical freedom from which they draw both their efficacy and the possibility of their being opposed and united.

ART. 8: Matter appears to introduce differentiation to the act only because it represents the possibility of participation.

The act is the common origin of unity and diversity. This will seem obvious if one considers not only that these two terms are inseparable but that diversity itself can only be the effect of an activity which must be exercised in order to be and which is recognised as identical throughout the course of its exercise. That is why we admit without difficulty to the possibility that the act of being perpetually recommences and even undergoes an infinite number of metamorphoses without being changed.

But it is not enough to say that it has this possibility: it must be shown how it is realised; now for that one must call upon a material whose origin remains mysterious and which, on receiving the unity of the act, brings forth differentiation. Thus the Ancients considered matter as the unity of an infinitely supple stuff which not only lends itself to all the operations we want it to

undergo but allows them to be distinguished. Now that is simply to project into it, under the form of a static possibility, the unity and diversity that are inseparable from every accomplished act. And that would perhaps be a tempting solution, though purely verbal, i.e. to maintain that from an undifferentiated act and an undifferentiated matter difference could result. To posit the act and matter is already to posit difference and consequently to present the problem as resolved.

Locating the principle of division in an indeterminate matter considered irreducible to the pure act is an overly simple thesis; for this matter can only be the condition of division or its effect; it cannot be its origin. It defines the interval that is inserted between the one and the many and that is the rapport between the two symmetrical and inseparable operations of union and division through which the act is realised.

In reality matter is only the abstract possibility of receiving all forms, while the act is that which creates them. Matter, which is insufficiency itself, receives forms from without; until it does, it remains in a state of negative virtuality, designated in a derogatory manner by those who say it is "unformed". The act, which is plenitude and perfect self-sufficiency, introduces form, order into everything it touches, into all participation, however humble it might be. It is not unformed but without form because it is spirit, i.e. the invisible principle of everything.

Thus the opposition between the act and matter is only a means of expressing the conditions of participation; but everything that matter contains of reality, even negatively, is from the act that it wears, and the absence of determination which characterises it is in reality only the inverse, static and motionless expression of all the possible determinations that are offered in a single stroke by the pure act to all the beings it calls to life i.e. that it calls upon to become.

ART. 9. By itself unity is not intelligible; it becomes such only if unity is multiple.

Philosophic speculation has always turned on the problem of the one and the many; that is because the world, consciousness and the connection between consciousness and the world derive from their relation. However unity as such has always been considered the expression of intelligibility itself, such that it has never been for us a problem but rather the solution of all problems. By contrast multiplicity has always seemed a scandal from which it was important to be delivered. However it is clear that if multiplicity is abolished and reduced to unity then the world itself disappears, as M. Meyerson¹ does not shrink from recognising. In order to spare the world he derived the endeavours of reason from a series of irrationals designed to defend reality against the reductive, i.e. destructive, activity of reason. Absolute unity is not the unity of Nothing.

¹ Emile Meyerson (1859-1933). An opponent of positivism.

Identity, i.e. total lack of difference, is the same as nothing. And the opposition between nothingness and being is the introduction of the first difference into nothingness. It follows that to consider identity as the supreme principle of intelligibility is sure indication that being is not the essential object of all explication but a problem which admits of no positive solution, requiring from both intellect and will a veritable refusal which can give us a real appeasement only through a return to nothingness.

But the act ought to be considered the principle of both the one and the many. In it the one and the many join and can be said necessarily to suppose one another: not only does every act unify and imply a multiplicity, without which it could not be, but it carries within it a unity that is divisible, without which the terms of division could not be part of the same ensemble and consequently would not form a multiplicity.

The nature of unity is therefore not to abolish the many through trying to reduce it. Every active unity organises multiplicity and at the start produces it. However that multiplicity is not an absolutely indeterminate one, as generally believed, i.e. a unity indefinitely repeated. At the point where no more is retained of number than the possibility of this repetition there must be, for its realisation, a temporal or spatial distinction between unities, or perhaps both, where number is abolished only because it is too abstract. In fact a unity different from the first can be posited only by way of a difference within it, and if number can grow to infinity it is at once because every act is eternal and perhaps can be indefinitely resumed and because no matter how small a difference I introduce into the real an infinity of others is called forth, without the real ever being susceptible of being considered their sum.

Number is a means for us to engender the real with multiplicity alone, i.e. with the sole idea of pure difference, without this difference being more than a thought-about difference, as seen in the distinction between one unity and another. Time and space are meant to create among these unities a distance which is the distance between two operations involving the time and space between two objects, i.e. between two effected operations in the case of space.