

TRANSCENDENCE¹

A) THE LINK [BETWEEN] IMMANENCE AND TRANSCENDENCE

ART. 1: *Transcendence is the character of all spiritual activity as compared with the states that manifest or express it.*

Philosophers [bandy] the words “transcendent” and “immanent” as if it were necessary to choose one and exclude the other; and so they go on reproaching [each other], sometimes for wanting to impose affirmations on an absolute of which they know nothing, 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 intended to show us how they must be united.

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 very act through

¹ Chapter Nine, contained in Part Three (“The Self Absolute”) of Book One (“The Pure Act”). The final chapter of Book One.

which the world is posited; [it is] the *realising* [element] without which there would be no *realised* [element]. I [can] legitimately say, therefore, that my thinking is transcendent with respect to its 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 [having no] connection with these various 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.

[As with] the essence of the act, [so with] transcendent being in relation to all effects and states; 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, by definition, the act is transcendent to the given, the transcendent can no longer mean [something] inaccessible or alien to consciousness for there is an experience of the act when it is performed, and not only an experience of the thing when it is given. 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 make of it a blind force, to nullify it as act. And if we insist on claiming that we can never turn it into a represented object, this is not to put it below the latter but to put it above it: yet in [bringing the object to consciousness, the act] makes it participate in a dignity that is its² very essence.

No one can doubt that the 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 only because it is the unity of intellect and will—indivisibly exercised, as we see in the Cartesian *cogito*--and [taking it as understood] that we can conclude its existence only in an inductive manner, by grounding ourselves in the factual features we have before our eyes. Then its reality is suspended in the void; and since we want to make it neither transcendent nor immanent to consciousness, which is transcendent to all its objects, we qualify it with the ambiguous word “transcendental.” The word [is] only needed if we [consider] the transcendent an object (which puts it [completely] out of [our] reach) [or] if we [regard] the act of spirit [as] the simple condition for the possibility of consciousness; then it is the heart of its actuality.³ Whether the act is inferred or

² The representation of consciousness receives its essence when joined to consciousness itself.

³ The difficulty of translating this sentence can be gathered from my many bracketed insertions.

immediately-seized in its performance—that is the difference which forever separates critical philosophy from true spirituality⁴.

ART. 2: *The transcendence of the act--there at the interior of the I – [is to] the states [what] the transcendence of 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.⁵ But this operation [places limits on] an act that is exercised eternally: creative efficacy wanes within us as soon as it enters into play; and whatever the bounds within which we enclose 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 us⁶ 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, compared with the world, is one with the transcendence of the act of consciousness [as] compared with our states: neither God nor consciousness ever become objects, and we understand very well that materialism and atheism, which [are concerned solely with objects], find neither God nor consciousness anywhere. [This] same God, i.e. [this] same creative efficacy on which everything [that transpires] 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 even renders the world present, we 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 [its] élan and [its] growth). "You would not search for me if you had

⁴ 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. It should be understood in opposition to materialism.

⁵ The statement asserts an internal I that is ahead of and beyond the manifest I. However its exact nature is something of a puzzle, at least at this stage in *The Dialectic*. How is this transcendent I distinct from other transcendent I's—and indeed from God? Does it possess any inherent traits? And where exactly does it fit in the grand scheme of things? To the extent that it is individual it cannot reside in the domain of Pure Being. But then neither can it reside in the manifest world since it is distinct from the phenomenal I. That logically points to a variegated middle-zone where the I enjoys some sort of independent status ahead of worldly expression, perhaps a region of ideal essences. The preceding problems are treated at length in *Of the Human Soul* but I am not convinced that the author's perspective there fully jibes with his perspective here, in *Of the Act*.

⁶ With our conscious participation.

not found me"⁷: *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 that which exists for self and not for another, [meaning] that there is an experience of the transcendent that [does not] enter into any experience.⁸ It can only be self, i.e. that which, being solely act, passes all the limitations of individuality but nonetheless permits each individual to say "I" in the measure that – not being a mere thing – he is also author of himself, always beyond his own states and incapable of being identified with either those states he is required to suffer (without which he would have no [individual] existence) or the act upon which he constantly draws, [as from] an infinite possibility of which he can know nothing but what he actualises of it. Participation, which always places us 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 [but] which always goes beyond it.⁹

We therefore understand 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 that has so far been given to it, i.e. all nature.

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

It is a prejudice of thought to believe that the transcendent exists outside of the immanent and that it is necessary to leave [the latter] behind in order to raise ourselves to the [former]. 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 within it, and not outside of it, that the transcendent is revealed to us. No one can hope to [make] contact with it other than by conducting his earthy business, by making of all the objects that surround him [and] of all the actions he accomplishes so many paths of access [leading] him 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 it, [strips] away all significance in the very same stroke, for he is not situated at the point where the immanent enters into existence; he forgets the act that makes it be and that, through a kind of return, gives the immanent its true destination as soon as it appears. Accordingly whenever someone proposes to us [that we abandon] all that experience presents us so as to turn back to the interior

⁷ Lavelle does not give the source of this oracular statement.

⁸ I take it the author means that the transcendent is intimately known yet never experienced as an object. See the discussion of internal consciousness and consciousness-of in the Translator's Introduction.

⁹ Apparently the choosing/creating self inhabits this in-between-ness. (See note 5.) For that very reason its status is unclear. Does it have true being? Is it a genuinely independent? Perhaps the indeterminate status of the creative self or soul is precisely what defines it: it inhabits a region of possibility where beings neither *are* (in the full sense of being) nor are not.

principle from which [experience] appears to separate us, it is not [with the aim of abolishing] experience but [of allowing] us to take possession of it and to give it significance.¹⁰ 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 order of true values. For the immanent is merely the instrument through which the transcendent manifests itself; and it seems to be self-sufficient only when it grants us the revelation of [the latter].¹¹ We therefore only succeed in understanding it, in giving it [full] relief [and] all its plenitude, if thanks to it we [penetrate] the transcendent. And perhaps the most lively [doctrinal differences in philosophy] reside in just this: while some will consider the transcendent as a simple power to which the immanent so to speak gives completion, others on the contrary make of the immanent a means handed to us which, according to the use we make of it, permits us either to cleave to it—[all the while] bemoaning its insufficiency—or to give it a supreme justification in the act through which it invites us to pass beyond it. It is in a sense very true that all transcendence is destined to be transformed into immanence: but that is only a provisional attitude; [flesh and blood people] alone can take up residence there. For immanence has no meaning [and] can sustain itself only on the condition of being changed into transcendence in its turn.

The unity of the transcendent and the immanent, or the necessity of affirming both in a single act of spirit, of which they express two linked aspects¹², appears [even more clearly] if we reflect that the dialectical process that puts me in [touch] with a transcendent that I depend upon and that is the very initiative through which I establish my own essence, supposes another process, inverse to the former, that is so to speak a process of descent through which the transcendent is always offered for participation under the form of a pure possibility which, as soon as it is exercised, becomes a given and thus begins to constitute the very world in which we live. Indeed we glimpse here the characteristic circle through which is revealed to us the secret of the creative act and which at every level of being demonstrates to us the same reciprocal call between these two movements of spirit that never cease to give, or to receive and give back.

¹⁰ In other words a kind of ontological reduction is performed (see Translator's Introduction): all that is not-self and not-being is distanced as an object whereas all that is essential and inward is embraced. In the same stroke the object is supplied with significance by the inward sphere.

¹¹ 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.

¹² Again and again the act exhibits this bi-fold character. On the one hand, it creates itself. On the other hand, it gives rise to its temporal reflection.

It is obvious that the act's transcendence with respect to the given should allow us to resolve the difficulties that require us to define it relative to immanence: to contrast one with the other yet to demonstrate how they communicate. For we must say, on the one hand, that the pure act's transcendence is an absolute transcendence, since the act of participation is always related to an object or state (though in that participation we nonetheless glimpse the point of connection between transcendence and immanence because the very act in which I participate is that absolute transcendent which grants me all the being and all the efficacy I dispose) and, on the other hand, that I can make it mine thanks alone to this always limited and imperfect disposition, [whose very limitation and imperfection] produces the world in which we live; which shows how immanence is truly [a function of] transcendence yet is constantly [translated into] the power, the misery and all the alternatives of participation.

The idea of progress, through which [some people] would like to eliminate transcendence, seems on the contrary [to prove] its truth. For progress is a continual overtaking of what is given, and whether we consider progress as a penetration to the [heart] of a reality hitherto refused us or whether we consider [it], in the very activity that progresses, as a surplus of power compared with its actual exercise, we see in both cases that there is, beyond our experience, a transcendent which is the supposed condition of enrichment. And this transcendent will appear to us not simply as opposed to the immanent in which we live but as [its] support [and] nourisher, constantly descending into it to illumine and promote it, though it always appears to us as inaccessible and inexhaustible in essence.

Thus the transcendent always goes toward the immanent, without which it would never be offered for participation. But all participated being constantly goes toward the transcendent, from which it demands the activity that makes it be, the power of [self-determination and growth], the audacity to negate in order to pass beyond, the resolution without which it would be nothing, and finally, this last moving instance: it penetrates being and eternity by creating itself. Thereby that reciprocal movement, that going and coming through which immanence and transcendence are rejoined, will appear to us far from frivolous since it is through them that each being becomes author of himself and his own destiny.

As soon as immanence, instead of shutting us off from transcendence, becomes an opening to it, we see simplicity and humility change into ardour and confidence, [engendering these], so to speak, in their measure. We need to have a consciousness of its supreme insufficiency so that a perfect sufficiency can 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 that 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 as compared with parts, or of the Act as compared with participated acts, or of the Spirit as compared with 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 how could the idea of it come to us? What would render us capable of even naming it?

Faith tends toward the transcendent only because it makes us feel that we have not only a certain affinity with it but a real community of essence. To say that we are conscious of our limits [and] that we cannot close ourselves within a purely subjective horizon is already to go beyond those limits and to have access to a universal subjectivity.¹³ But there is more: the limitation we have referred to is not an unscalable wall; it is fragile and forever recedes. Which doubtless suffices to show us that there is a continuity of being on both sides of the wall. For we are not outside Being but *in* Being. When we consider it as a given reality we say we are party to it; when we consider it as a [self-engendering] act we say that we participate in it.¹⁴ The word “transcendent” expresses nothing more than the idea of that which surpasses us but is not different from the All in which we are contained, which continually proposes to us an activity to exercise, which is nonetheless one with that total activity by which the real is constantly created.

The All is necessarily transcendent to the parts which [compose] it; which, if they ever came to coincide with it, would both annihilate themselves as parts and the All 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—before analysis grants them a separate but linked existence within it—can only be an act that engenders them.¹⁵

Consequently, if we dispel [the] double superstition that whatever is real is a thing and that spirit¹⁶ 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 forever appertain to the same world that 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, the error and the evil which are always mixed with them. But nothing is transcendent to spirit—since it is always

¹³ A key insight which makes of worldly consciousness—our awareness of the exact features of our particular situation, this precise here and now—a means of liberation, of attaining the transcendent sphere.

¹⁴ The author defines two senses of participation. However, though he here distinguishes between being party-to and participating (i.e. penetrating), he often uses the word “participation” in reference to both.

¹⁵ The sentence effectively defines the All as a kind of block-like entity which precedes distinctions and which is essentially identical with the Act.

¹⁶ Again, this word also means “mind” in French, and indeed some of the statements which follow seem to have a predominately mental slant.

the genesis of self—or even to participation, in the measure that it is this same forever-proposed and forever-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 [self-denial], a sort of internal contradiction, to believe that it can resolve any of the problems it poses by [locating] the solution [outside] its own limits. If it cannot do without the idea of eternity it is because it has the absolute need to find, [there] within the Being in which it participates, an eternal presence that is at once the origin and fundament of that constancy which is inseparable from its own 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 completed in it, would nullify its fecundity (i.e. its very reality) at the same time [that they nullified] participation.

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

If spirit alone is transcendent it must enfold and penetrate 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 a positive term [on which they are] forbidden to lay a hand: thus we can say that these are [people] who posit it [as something apart] and not [people] who make grievance of it and posit it solely in relation to us. It is only [when we refuse] to break the couple composed of the relative and the absolute that the word “relative” receives both its limited character and its true value: for if the peculiarity of the relative is plainly not (as we too often believe) to exclude the absolute, [there is no longer a call for another term from which it could be derived¹⁷]. For the relative is inscribed [within] the absolute and [there] expresses that sort of genesis and unanimous flourishing through which, [thanks to] an act of pure generosity, an infinitude 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 would] deny us the right to posit the absolute (quite correctly, it seems) [on the grounds that] it is contradictory [for the relative 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 the

¹⁷ Literally, suspended like a pendant.

absolute posits me, or at least that it furnishes me with the conditions that allow me to posit myself, which doubtless [comes to the same thing] if it is true that I can only posit myself through an act that, with respect to the determinations of my nature, is an absolute but that is in turn only the exercise of a possibility given to me by 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, and as an infinitude, in so far as all relative beings find the principle of their growth in it without ever being able to equal it: thus the Total Being, the Pure Act is, through the distance that separates us from it, manifest to us under the species of infinity. The link [between] the terms “absolute” and “infinite” thus testifies to the link between a transcendent that feeds all the various forms of participation (but remains above them) and an immanent in which each of them must be inscribed: more exactly still, the infinite is the hyphen [between] the absolute and the relative, i.e. [between] transcendence and immanence.

From this we understand how the transcendent is with respect to actual or realised being only an infinite possibility. Only, 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, without adding anything to it by way of that actualisation. Just as it is [with respect to us] a supreme possibility to which we give reality, it is with respect to itself a supreme reality which gives us our possibility. [Thus] 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 which leads us to it and the impassable distance which separates 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 through a [course freedom has taken] which contributes to forming a world in which it can never [have a] place.

We can therefore define the transcendent in six different ways: (1) as the origin of each immanent initiative, since each has its source in it, (2) as its end, since each tends toward it, (3) as the participable without which [the initiative] would have nothing in which it could participate, (4) as the nutrient for all progress, without which we [would be at a loss] to understand how it could be enriched, (5) as the principle of all our duties, which can only [amount to] seeking within an absolute efficacy the means to go beyond what we are, and (6) as a pure object of faith, since the transcendent is never attained by us, precisely so that the operation which gives us being always remains [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 of every given, we discover within us no more than a naked activity, an initiative, a consent that depends on us but can never come into play unless the act [we dispose] becomes a [handing-back]¹⁸ or a surrender; unless, in utmost purity, it gives up everything that still appears to pertain to it in order to become transparent to an act that surpasses it, that penetrates it and to which it entrusts itself, so to speak.

If faith resides in an internal act we accomplish, we understand how it makes no sense to the person who refuses to accomplish it. For faith does not bear on any given object though it alone renders consciousness present to its object. Moreover it always implies a [mode of] conduct: the obligation to perform certain acts, lacking which its very sincerity would be suspect. It therefore joins together the extreme phases of the act: from the secret initiatives of the [engaged] subject to the testimony he is given by the visible changes he introduces to the world.

Inversely, we can say that faith is inseparable from every act we make: it sets it in motion, it forms the link between its élan and its future, or again, in a more precise fashion and in a more rigorous language, it gives rise to the very point at which all power will be converted into act. [Faith] is needed to make this conversion possible. Neither the power (before it is put into play) nor the achieved and possessed act truly amounts to faith. It is [found] on the path from one to the other. It belongs neither to man, considered as [the] power to act, nor to God, considered as a pure act, but to man in so far as he is called precisely to realise his powers through participation in the Pure Act.

We must not forget that, [throughout] our doctrine, the act [is] justified less by its effects than by its performance, its [being put] into play. The act cannot be isolated as a particular concept within 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 it is performed every act can be defined as a faith that affirms itself [since it has] neither support nor object and [possesses] a purely creative character, the word "faith" implying the obligation for an act that posits itself to posit its efficacy and value in the same stroke.

¹⁸ 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).

ART. 7: *Faith expresses our confidence in the fecundity of the act or in the value 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 nor by an experience that might [surpass] their truth. They can be [justified] only by their fecundity, i.e. by the inferences we draw 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 one with the very initiative that brings them into play. Such is the case with the Act upon which everything depends yet which itself depends on nothing. It too is the object of a spiritual faith through which each of us has consciousness of constituting his being and his destiny, which [faith] beholds only the response it constantly solicits and that God constantly delivers. We see therefore that the spiritual faith we speak of—bearing [as it does] on the very essence of our life, we might say on the very point where it is inserted into the universal Being—possesses an internal efficacy through which it veritably decides for us.

Yet the peculiarity of faith is not only to be fecund but to bring our entire life back to an almost¹⁹ pure activity so that, without [taking issue with] the maxim that we judge the tree by its fruits, we are here very far from pragmatism, which seems to have regard only for the effects an activity can produce. For spiritual activity has solely itself as an end, and the effects it leaves behind are merely the marks or indicators of its degree of perfection: they have all the more richness and plenitude in that it has less directly wanted them and indeed less set its sights on them. Likewise, in positing [the] act of a supremely fecund immobility, which we can [do] only by putting it into play, we are [beyond] the reproach someone might [lay against] us of providing ourselves in advance with everything we seek to obtain, and of somehow [arriving] before having set off. For we are wrong to think that the absolute [as] act halts the momentum of the I when [in fact] it constantly promotes it. And there must be no mistake: we do not petrify an act without annihilating it.

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

The very 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, as soon as participation begins, and in order for it to be possible. But this unity [has] a double significance [with respect to] faith since it

¹⁹ An indication that the author is speaking of a stepped-down act: the Act translated into the realm of participation.

is, on the one hand, the ever-present support of participation, and on the other hand, the very 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 for us a supreme value such that every object of faith is for us 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 is open before us, as well as that constant courage through which, instead of positing an inaccessible transcendent beyond our world (as we frequently think faith ought to do), we require the transcendent to penetrate our world and be incarnate there so as to illumine it and give it its true significance. Or indeed, reversing the terms of this rapport, 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: as much 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 which is Faith in the Spirit, considered as the present source of all possibilities in the participated world.

There is between faith and the life of spirit a kind of consubstantiality. 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 we easily understand that faith is always the same and that it always entails three different [but mutually supportive] assertions: first, that of freedom, i.e. of that initiative through which the spirit gives itself being, or is a spirit; then that of immortality, i.e. of the impossibility of the spirit one day [finding] its development arrested, or again of its being subjected to time and finally left to be swept away by it, 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 thwarting the unconditional affirmation of the spirit by itself) i.e. to posit myself as only [a] participant in its pure essence.

[Going further], the whole problem of Faith is reducible to [the problem] of faith in God. And we only invent proofs of God's existence in order to establish that there is within us a [need for] Faith, which the role of reason is to justify and not do away with. It is Faith in a being [that is] purely being, i.e. in an act free of passivity that founds my own reality, i.e. the very power I have of forming 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 very source of all spirits.

[This] doctrine enables us to understand two things: from one side, why our life proceeds only by way of a free inventiveness—but an inventiveness that is a participation in the inexhaustible richness of the 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 from another side, why all the works of participation are not analytically contained in their possibility in God, since there is within it the ever-available power of producing them, which we take hold of and exercise in accordance with an initiative that is always our own. Will we say that [this] is only to [subsume] in advance all that will ever be produced in a supreme possibility? But possibility is not nothingness; neither is it a simple abstraction. Granted, possibility as such makes sense only for [those of] us who have not yet made it enter into our experience. Yet it is in itself [a] perfect actuality, or if we like, [a] supreme efficacy, and the very power through which we actualise within ourselves what would indeed be—without an assertion of our own freedom—only a pure possibility in relation to us.

To believe in God is to posit the actuality of this supreme possibility: it is therefore less the infinity of possibility than the ground of this very infinity. [Such] infinity begins only with participation. But the ground of all possibilities is precisely the absolute actuality; possibility is born in the interval that separates it from participated actualisation.²⁰ It is the condition under which absolute actuality had to appear so that we could in some way take charge of it, according to our powers; when participation is carried out, this possibility is realised through an act that is ours, though [the] pure act sustains it; and because it does not coincide with it, an experience is formed as soon as [the act of participation] is accomplished. It is whatever in the pure act (which is for us an infinite possibility) we succeed in thinking in order to make it ours.

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

It is in shaping our experience of the world that we exercise our freedom and become a person. [Our] personality resides in the inward disposition of the act that makes us be. And because my [personal] being is never reducible to an equivalent act, because [it contains] both un-actualised possibilities and givens, [i.e. types of] passivity, correlatives of the act within me which never suffice, I am ever a person who tries to find himself rather than a veritable 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 this plenary independence, this perfect identity between what he does and what he is, [those]

²⁰ What human beings call “possibility” and regard as wispy and unrealised is complete and fully actual in God, though not articulated as worldly facts and events. The “interval” is where the divine actuality is translated into worldly actualities through worldly choices and acts.

essential traits of [personhood] that I always aspire to but never attain. This sufficiently shows that the idea of the absolute and that of the person cannot be dissociated: for that reason the absolute is not, as we sometimes imagine it, a kind of menhir standing at the foot of all avenues of knowledge and action, destined only to obstruct our view in every direction. There is a life in it, i.e. an internal circulation, described in the most profound theologies as the distinction-between and unity-of persons at the interior of [the] act, and doubtless in every philosophy, as a constant relation between beings and that which [requires them] to locate their origin in it, i.e. the very principle of their initiative, and their end, i.e. all the good they can enjoy, each according to his merit. And as we will show, infinity is less [a] character of the absolute than the expression of its—always-positive yet always incommensurable—rapport with us. Infinity is the very kindness of God, realised through an inexhaustible offer of participation to all the particular beings he calls upon to create themselves—who will never [reach] any limit, either with respect to their number or with respect to their future.

Faith therefore does not consist, as we sometimes think, in positing a transcendent absolute of which we would have no experience. How could we ever have the idea of it? But God is at once the being most distant and most near: most distant since he infinitely surpasses all forms of shared existence and most near since there is only himself to be shared. Yet Faith is surer than every cognizance because [all cognizance] is [that] of an object exterior to us, whereas Faith is God's [very presence] to consciousness; it is at the same time the affirmation of the mystery to which all existence is [linked] and in which our life nourishes its secret, its élan and its hope.

Faith is one with the very consciousness of participation at the moment [it is] realised. 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, then 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 very act we accomplish, and would never accomplish (even [in] a pure act of knowing) without the confidence that animates it. It does not [occur] without [a dawning of] light—yet a light that illumines this act itself and not some represented thing that we might try to put in its place. Yet Faith is Faith and not simple self-consciousness because it is impossible to employ this activity which is ours without recognising that there is an inspiration that infinitely surpasses it, that it is never lacking but that it ever lacks in itself.