

# The Relation Between Philosophy and Religion in Blondel's Philosophy of Action

by John J. McNeill

From the very beginning Blondel understood his philosophy of action as laying the foundation for a new philosophical understanding of the role religion plays in man's life and the achievement of human destiny. Two central insights governed the entire development of Blondel's philosophy. The first, philosophical and epistemological in nature, had to do with the relation between thought and action, intellect and will. As the young Blondel expressed it in his *Carnets Intimes*: "Is it not true that action alone can define the idea."<sup>1</sup> All ideas, even our idea of God, according to the mature Blondel "are the fruits of past actions and the seeds of consequent action."<sup>2</sup> The originality of Blondel's philosophy was, therefore, his effort to explore in all its ramifications the role that will-action or commitment necessarily plays in the genesis and development of ideas and especially our idea of God.

The second insight has more of a religious character. It had to do with the agnostic attitude of Blondel's fellow philosophers, which led them in the name of philosophy itself to maintain a systematic refusal even to examine what they considered to be the purely extrinsic claims of Christianity. As one of his fellow students expressed it: "Why should I feel any obligation to inquire and be concerned with certain events which occurred over 1900 years ago in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire when, indeed, I am content to remain ignorant of many other contingent events with the result that my interior life remains impoverished."<sup>3</sup>

This type of objection led Blondel to the conclusion that, if religious faith can be justified as necessary in order that man achieve his destiny, then there must be an a priori foundation immanent in every man, a real interior need, open to philosophical investigation. Obviously, however, every man does not have an explicit conscious awareness of this need. Thus, the question poses itself: the explicit consciousness of a necessary religious dimension of human destiny in some way depend upon commitment? Are there moral conditions of possibility for true self-knowledge? Or, once again, does action in some way define the idea?

With these two insights in mind Blondel gave himself over to a profound critical study of the evolution of modern philosophy. He examined each philosopher from the viewpoint of his two insights. What role, if any, did the philosopher give to action in the definition of ideas? How did his understanding of the relation of thought and action influence his understanding of the religious dimension of human destiny? In the process of that investigation Blondel became convinced that in the progressive development of modern philosophy a true foundation had been laid for a new, more adequate philosophical understanding of the necessary role religion plays in the achievement of human destiny.

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<sup>1</sup>Another early formulation of Blondel's insight was expressed in these words: Between the classical doctrine according to which the will acts in conformity with its object to the point that it is one with it, and the Kantian doctrine which places the will exterior to and above reason, there is something to define; it remains true that to act well, one must think well; it is even more true to say that to think well, one must act well. *In operibus lux*.

Confer John McNeill, *The Blondelian Synthesis* ("Studies in the History of Christian Thought," Heiko Oberman, Editor, Vol. 1; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), p. 42. All translations of Blondel's works used in this article, unless otherwise indicated, are those of the author, published in the book mentioned above. Consequently, references will be made directly to this book, where the reader may find further references to the original sources from which these translations are derived. The best introduction to Blondel's thought available in English is Sommerville's book, *Total Commitment: The Drama of Human Action* (Washington, D.C.: Corpus, 1969).

<sup>2</sup>*The Blondelian Synthesis*, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup>Blondel, "Le Problème de la Philosophie Catholique," *Cahiers de la Nouvelle Journée*, XX (1937), p. 11, footnote.

## *The Inadequacies of The Scholastic Synthesis*

There is an understanding of the historical development of philosophy of religion which is intrinsic to Blondel's philosophy of action and serves as a frame of reference interior to the Blondelian system itself. My purpose in this paper is to explore the highlights of that interior frame of reference. Blondel is quite explicit, especially in his famous work of 1896 entitled *Letter Concerning the Exigencies of Contemporary Thought in the Matter of Apologetics and Concerning the Method of Philosophy in the Study of the Religious Problem*, that the most important inspiration which led him to undertake the construction of an original philosophical synthesis was the desire to redefine the relation of philosophy to religion. He intended in his own words to establish "an integral philosophy wholly appropriate to Christian belief, but only in so far as that philosophy would be autonomous."<sup>4</sup> He believed that each new stage in the evolution of modern thought from Spinoza to the final Schelling had as its aim to create a philosophy adequate to the Christian concept of human destiny. The failure of each stage and the renewed effort to create a more adequate philosophical synthesis frequently was due to an explicit desire to arrive at a philosophical understanding compatible with the Christian understanding of human destiny.<sup>5</sup>

Blondel was convinced that a philosophy of religion compatible with Christianity did not yet exist.<sup>6</sup> The Scholastic tradition, in his opinion, had achieved a provisional and unstable equilibrium between faith and reason by means of a subordination of the objects of faith and reason one to another, but without any intrinsic and dynamic unity.

*Thomism appears to many as an exact description, but, if I may so speak, as static, as a superposition of elements, but without power to provoke from within us a movement which raises us from one to the other; an inventory, but not a discovery capable of justifying by the dynamism which it engenders the ascending movement of thought.*<sup>7</sup>

Blondel attributed the static nature of the Scholastic synthesis to the presence of the Aristotelian concept of the "divinity of reason." The entire realist tradition had its roots in the philosophy of Aristotle, especially in his theory of the supremacy of the contemplative act. Scholastic philosophy tried to accommodate Aristotle's intellectualism to Christian revelation. But, according to Blondel, it did not succeed in intrinsically mitigating the exaggerated role thought had in pagan tradition.<sup>8</sup> A trace of this exaggerated influence can be found in the Scholastic concept of heaven as a *visio beatificans*, a concept which implies that human destiny is a question of contemplation and objective understanding. This is in sharp contrast with the theological doctrine and ideas which the Scholastics derived from Christian revelation, where salvation is understood not as a *visio* but as a *vita*, a subjective life which is a participation in divine life. Consequently, within the Scholastic tradition Blondel found a matter derived from revelation and a form derived from pagan antiquity which were in conflict with one another.

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<sup>4</sup>Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, translated by Alexander Dru and Illtyd Trethowan (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964) p. 54.

<sup>5</sup>A slow and laborious evolution of thought was necessary in order to disengage the true perspective, to give birth to the only method which permits the erection of an integral philosophy within the context of an integral Christianity. Perhaps it is time now, after so many superficial attempts and overhasty efforts, for the precisely Catholic idea to reveal its efficacy and give rise to a philosophy which will be wholly appropriate to It, but only insofar as that philosophy is autonomous. *The Blondelian Synthesis*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 38

The Protestant revolt destroyed that provisional synthesis achieved by the Scholastics. The result was the rise in the 17th century of autonomous rational philosophy. Having separated faith from reason, Luther, by a sort of reverse process, freed philosophy to press its ancient claim to be everything or nothing. This modern rationalism at first gave the impression of returning to the free spirit of Greek thought and to the pagan concept of the divinity of reason. That appearance, however, was deceptive. The continued presence in philosophical consciousness of the Christian idea made impossible any complacent return to pagan rationalism. Its hidden and, at times, contradictory persuasion forced the new rationalism to widen its horizons far beyond anything conceived by classical thought. At the same time it forced philosophy to undertake a process of self-criticism and development according to its own inner law.

*This evolution, which in appearance was spontaneous and continually more autonomous, led philosophy to define its own limits and convert itself in precisely that way in which Christianity could have hoped; because in fact it was the Christian idea which invisibly prepared that evolution.<sup>9</sup>*

The end result of that slow and laborious evolution was a philosophy which Blondel believed was finally apt to serve as a valid philosophy of religion. Philosophy had achieved a sober and realistic appraisal of both its limits and its competence. Consequently, philosophy could now serve as a fit instrument for a philosophy of religion which would not be a substitution of philosophy for religion.

#### *The Contribution of Spinoza to the Evolution of Philosophy of Religion In Modern Philosophy.*

Blondel saw in Spinoza's philosophy the first modern attempt to broach the most important and all-embracing philosophical problem of human destiny, including its religious dimension, as an object of autonomous philosophical inquiry.<sup>10</sup> It was also Spinoza who established the principle that this problem of human destiny must be resolved by a method of immanence.<sup>11</sup> However, Spinoza's understanding of the principle of immanence, in Blondel's opinion, was prejudicially limited to the purely intellectual order.<sup>12</sup> Since according to Spinoza "the order and connection of ideas is identical to the order and connection of things," man must find the solution to the problem of his destiny solely by means of the processes of his own thought and reasoning.

Nonetheless, by choosing this problem and principle, almost contrary to his own intention Spinoza opened up the route to a philosophy of dialectical process and subjectivity which would prove so fruitful in subsequent thought.<sup>13</sup> It was Spinoza, then, who paradoxically indicated the privileged approach to being from the side of subject. And if he unwittingly set modern philosophy on the route of subjectivity, he also pointed out under what conditions it must follow that route, if it would escape the inherent danger of subjectivism and relativism. Spinoza's example led Blondel to the conclusion that the problem of human destiny, including its religious dimension, must never be treated as a special or separated

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<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup>Blondel published three articles on the thought of Spinoza. His first article was "Une des Sources de la Pensée Moderne: L'Évolution du Spinozisme," *Annales de Philosophie Chrétienne*, LXIV (1894), 260-275, 324-341. In 1921 he published the second article as a tribute to the memory of his friend Victor Delbos; "Un Interprète de Spinoza: Victor Delbos, 1862-1916," *Chronicon Spinozanum*, Tome I (Hague: Comitit, 1921), pp. 290-300. The third article appeared in "L'Évolution du Spinozisme et l'accès qu'elle ouvre à la Transcendance," *L'Archivo di Filosofia*, XI (1932), 1-12.

<sup>11</sup>The essence of immanent criticism, the idea which is its foundation, is that every act, every work of man or nature, has its value as well as its reality determined by the whole of which it is part. *The Blondelian Synthesis*, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup>Spinoza was the first philosopher in modern times to pose in its radical form the principle that the mind can find in itself alone and by itself alone *all* truth necessary for life. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 35, footnote 2.

problem, as Descartes believed, but as *the* metaphysical problem par excellence.<sup>14</sup> If Spinoza was wrong to identify absolutely these allied problems of destiny and being, he was right to see in the immanent treatment of the problem of human destiny the best point of departure in order to arrive at a satisfactory solution to the problem of being. He was also right in demanding that the route of immanence must lead us to transcendence; that human destiny has no ultimate rational solution unless that solution be ultimately founded on the absolute.

Not only did Spinoza, in Blondel's opinion, appreciate that the problem of human destiny could not be solved, apart from a metaphysics, he also attributed to that destiny of man a specifically religious and even Christian interpretation.<sup>15</sup> Man's destiny was to achieve eternal beatitude by means of a union in love with God. Spinoza maintained, however, the ambiguity of understanding this act as one of intellectual contemplation. Spinoza tried to conquer a Christian heaven with pagan reason. He failed in that attempt. But his failure itself would eventually lead to a more precise and just concept of both the powers and the limits of reason in the task of giving an effective answer to the problem of human destiny.<sup>16</sup> Blondel saw Spinoza's failure as leading inevitably to the next step in the dialectical evolution of modern thought. Kant's moral philosophy would appear as the logical antithesis to Spinoza's *Ethics*. Where Spinoza saw an absolute identity between thought and being, Kant would argue for a radical dichotomy.

### *The Contribution of Kant*

Blondel's philosophy of action was an explicit attempt to redefine the relation between the rational and the practical orders in such a way as to transcend the traditional realist as well as the Kantian critical position. As he himself put it in a thesis note “. . . find for thought an ultra-Kantian attitude.”<sup>17</sup> This intention using the Kantian criticism against the Kantian position itself was profoundly connected with Blondel's objective of establishing a valid philosophy of religion. Blondel represents Kant as the “Luther” of German philosophy. He remarks that the separation of faith and science in Kant's doctrine is, as it were, a philosophical restatement of the Protestant doctrine on the separation of faith and reason. He, in turn, would seek in his philosophy of action a point of contact between faith and reason which would be in agreement with the Catholic tradition of the compatibility of faith and reason.<sup>18</sup>

Despite their apparent contradictions, Blondel understood Kant's subjective moral autonomy and Spinoza's objective moral determinism were at base contrary aspects of the same total moral philosophy.<sup>19</sup> Both were guilty of the same basic error of exclusive rationalism.<sup>20</sup> It is true that Kant's avowed intention was “to do away with metaphysics in order to make room for faith.” However, the tendency to substitute speculation for practice was so great that even when Kant opposed practice to theory, it was a theory of practice or practical reason of which he spoke. Where Blondel saw Kantian criticism as wrong was in investing practical reason as an isolated and abstracted element “with a sort of power of exclusion in regard to anything in the neighboring forms of moral life, such as religion, which could not virtually be reduced to it.” This led to the Kantian conclusion in his work, *Religion Within the*

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14The profound flaw in his (Descartes) Christianity was to put to one side the absolute mystery which the will alone could attain by means of grace, and to the other the absolute clarity of thought which is totally sovereign in its domain.

15*Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

16*Ibid.*, p. 37.

17*Ibid.*, p. 43.

18Confer "The Antithetical Relation of Kant's Moral Philosophy and Spinoza's Ethics," *Ibid.*, pp. 48-52.

19*Ibid.*, p. 53.

20*Ibid.*, p. 58.

*Bonds of Pure Reason*: “Anything which man believes he is capable of doing in order to make himself pleasing to God, if that is not merely to conduct himself well, is pure superstition.”<sup>21</sup>

But why this substitution of thought for practice? We must clarify the implicit aspiration in such an undertaking, Blondel claims, in order to open up the way for a true development of philosophy. At the heart of this undertaking is the need to see the problem of destiny resolved absolutely by the efforts of man alone.<sup>22</sup> Once we have accepted this norm for our philosophical effort, then we must turn exclusively to speculation for a final answer. For, in so far as concerns those things which do not pertain to us nor depend on us it would seem that thought and only thought gives us at least a representation; and this representation does pertain to us and depend on us. Consequently, if it is necessary, philosophically speaking, that the problem be resolved by the sole efforts of man alone, it follows necessarily that the solution must be the exclusive product of thought. In this manner Blondel traces exclusive rationalism back to a desire to place human destiny exclusively within human hands.

*If there is one idea which is common to the idealism of Kant and the pantheism of Spinoza, an idea which is the proton pseudos of every exclusive rationalism, it is the idea that man can succeed by his own powers to reintegrate himself into the absolute and fulfill perfectly his being or his duty. This is the central idea concerning which modern thought must be disabused.*<sup>23</sup>

The true point of departure for philosophical research, according to Blondel, is neither the critical act of reflection nor the realist affirmation of being. Criticism in his opinion was arbitrarily restricted by Kant because it remained within the confines of thought; it did not undertake the task of criticizing thought itself but only ideas. By artificially abstracting the subjective a priori aspects of ideas from their objective referents, it brought to light the constitutive role of the subject and the unique characteristics of moral knowledge. What remains to be found is a point of departure which would permit a simultaneous criticism of the whole of reason both practical and speculative.<sup>24</sup> Thus the basic task of criticism still remained to be accomplished. Criticism must forsake its claim to give a final answer to the problem of human destiny and be content to determine the necessary limits of all thought and science. In fact, in order to be logically consistent with itself criticism must determine the limits of philosophy itself. It must determine what philosophy can and cannot hope to contribute to the solution of the problem of human destiny; where exactly philosophy must, by reason of its very nature, abdicate in favor of a superior instrument.<sup>25</sup>

This critical search for the limits of philosophical knowledge will lead us, Blondel believed, to the fundamental truth that action is the limit of all knowledge.<sup>26</sup> The phenomenological investigation of consciousness should lead to an *ideogenesis*, a genetic study of thought and action in order to comprehend the principle interior to the will-willing which is the source of all partial thought and action and the norm by which we judge their efficacy.<sup>27</sup> That which is a priori in thought should serve as a means of

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<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>24</sup>Confer "The Critical Illusion: The Dualism of Thought and Being" *op. cit.*, pp. 52-55.

<sup>25</sup>There is no independent idea of obligation which is valid in itself, which is capable of establishing what is good by means of totally formal precepts (Kant). Nor is there a speculative truth, the adequate knowledge of which engenders the perfect life (Spinoza). Neither the ethical problem nor the metaphysical problem will ever be resolved alone. No morality apart from truth; but truth completely understood is not, by itself alone, morality. The secret of life lies on a higher level than Kant or Spinoza realized. *The Blondelian Synthesis*, p. 55.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 64.

determining that which is the a priori structure of the human will.<sup>28</sup> For this purpose Blondel proposed his counter Copernican revolution in philosophy: hitherto it has been assumed that it is thought that determines action; let us assume that it is action that determines thought and see if we can make greater progress in philosophy according to this assumption.

Philosophy, then, is seen as a critical search, undertaken from the immanent perspective of action, for the necessary conditions for the perfect accomplishment of action; a search to know what action or actions will effectively lead to the perfect equilibrium of self with self, the *adequatio realis mentis et vitae* which is the destiny of man. Just as Kant conceived of a science of reason which would study that which is necessarily and universally present in the immanent a priori structure of reason independent of its empirical content, so Blondel conceived of a science of action which would study that which is necessarily and universally present in the a priori structure of all human action regardless of its specific end. By means of this science of action he hoped to uncover the basic synthetic laws which govern the evolution of human action from its pre-conscious origins to its final fulfillment in the total adequation of self with self.<sup>29</sup>

Blondel claimed that what preserved him against the temptation of Hegel's absolute knowledge and its pantheistic implications was the critical spirit he inherited from Kant. This led him to be constantly aware of the limits of human knowledge and, thus, to forsake any speculative metaphysics which sought to be the human manner of approaching a divine knowledge of being. It was the secret presence of the Christian idea which led Spinoza to seek man's destiny in terms of a union with God; it was the same Christian idea which led Kant to destroy critically the human pretension to a self-elevation to that union by means of knowledge.

### *The Contribution of Idealism*

Blondel understood the hidden flaw in Spinoza's doctrine, his failure to explain the process of becoming in being. He understood Kant to have isolated and exploited that process of becoming in his doctrine of practical reason. The history of subsequent German idealism was, in his opinion, a prolonged effort to develop fully that idea of becoming and reconcile it with Spinoza's doctrine of the absolute intelligibility of being.<sup>30</sup> With absolute idealism, therefore, we come into contact with the third and final species of the evolution of modern intellectualism, the subjectivist illusion concerning the subjective identity of thought with being. Idealism in general represents, according to Blondel, not a solution to the problem of the relation of thought and being, but a transposition of the conflict of subject and object into the heart of the subject itself where it became a conflict between the actual and the virtual, the apparent and the fundamental.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Contribution of Fichte*

In Fichte's *Theory of Science* is found again the monist idea of Spinoza, but here the infinite subject replaces the infinite object. Further, this infinite subject or transcendental ego is understood not as a

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<sup>27</sup>In place of the reasoning processes concerning our concepts and our-perceptions in order to draw metaphysical, critical and relativist theses from that *logomachie*, one must first of all study *ideogenesis*, seek out the beginnings and consequences of our states of consciousness. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>28</sup>It is the relation of the will-willing and the will-willed which we must determine, rectify and lead back to its identity. And knowledge is nothing more than the middle term, the fruit of action and the seed of action, which has as its function to lead action to that immediation of identity with self, *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>30</sup>Confer "Spinoza and the Idealists," *Ibid.*, pp. 106-108.

<sup>31</sup>Confer "The Subjectivist Illusion," *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

static reality but as a pure activity, a moral process of becoming. "In place of an ontological pantheism where God is one and all, we have an ethical pantheism where the moral law is one and all."<sup>32</sup> Fichte posed the basic problem of philosophy in almost identical terms as did Blondel after him. The primary task of the philosopher is to uncover the meaning of human destiny. But, contrary to Spinoza's philosophy, human destiny has meaning and reality for Fichte only on condition that one can establish the ultimate validity of human freedom. Fichte also established that the human subject as such can never become object for itself; rather, it stands in relation to all objects of consciousness as an *ordo ordinans*, to all specific actions as an *ordo ordinata*. Fichte also was responsible for finally destroying the effort to characterize the subject or ego as substance, a thing-which-acts, and for revealing its true character as pure activity. Further, it was Fichte who maintained ". . . that philosophical and moral truths cannot be imposed on man from without, that they become light only if first they are action, living personal action."<sup>33</sup>

Blondel points out that there are two levels of meaning present at every state of Fichte's philosophy. The first is an original and profound phenomenology of consciousness. The second is an idealist metaphysics in which elements of that phenomenological analysis were absolutized as metaphysical principles. Fichte tried to reconstruct divine consciousness in terms of the elements he derived from an analysis of human consciousness. Fichte began and ended his *Theory of Science* as a pure logical system under the guiding thesis that "philosophy is not life but an explanation of life."<sup>34</sup> Blondel was convinced, on the contrary, that "philosophy must be one with life itself in so far as it takes consciousness of itself and gives direction to its action." A real and not just a logical synthetic identity of thought and practice, the real and the ideal, can be found in life by means of action. The profound error of all idealist rational systems was to confuse a formal logical identity of form with content with that real existential identity.

Fichte's avowed objective in his first *Theory of Science* was to synthesize "heart with head," his Christian religious belief with his philosophical convictions. At the end of his *Theory of Science* Fichte acknowledged failure in his system to arrive at a real identity of consciousness with being. For Fichte this was not just a relative defeat, a question of purely human limitations and impotence. Rather, it is an absolute defeat, a problem which involves a limitation in the absolute itself. This defeat led Fichte to the final stage in the evolution of his thought, an attempt to formulate a philosophy of love following the Johannine model of the Christian ideal of a union of man with God through love. "What began as an affirmation of consciousness with being ended with a radical dichotomy between consciousness and being.

### *The Contribution of Schelling and Hegel*

Blondel considered the metaphysical doctrine contained in the philosophies of the early Schelling and Hegel to be continuations and logical evolution of the *Ethics* of Spinoza. Spinoza had implicitly introduced the anthropomorphic idea of becoming into the absolute. Kant isolated the process of becoming from the science of being. Fichte made the becoming of the absolute explicit. Schelling attributed the value of the primary truth to the becoming of the absolute. Hegel maintained that it was the only truth; absolute being in his doctrine was identified with the relativity of becoming. Since Spinoza had proposed to resolve the ethical and religious problem of human destiny within the context of his metaphysics, in direct correlation with this evolution of metaphysical theory there was an evolution of moral doctrine. This evolution expressed itself in a progressive tendency to identify the true and the good

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<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 140.

with that necessary process of becoming of the absolute immanent in the world, and, correspondingly, to refuse any ultimate value to man's exercise of individual freedom.

In Blondel's opinion this tendency to objectify the good in terms of the necessary self-manifestation of the absolute showed itself first in Schelling's philosophy of art, which represented a shift of interest away from Fichte's insistence on the value of subjective moral life and action to objective artistic creation and contemplation. It was developed further in Schelling's theory of necessary progress in history and reached its logical completion in Hegel's theory of a subordination of individual man and his free actions to an a-personal system of social ethics. With Hegel's moral doctrine, Blondel maintained, we have arrived at the exact contrary of the position of Spinoza. But contraries are always members of the same species. For Spinoza the true and the good became the exclusive properties of a static objective substance. For Hegel the true and the good became the exclusive properties of a dynamic absolute becoming. What Blondel found missing in this entire process of evolution from Spinoza to Hegel was a clear idea of a third possibility. Namely, that the true and the good represent the possibility of the presence of the absolute within the relative itself, that moral value represents not a pure transcendence nor a pure immanence, but the immanence in human action of the transcendence. In a word, what Blondel found missing was a true understanding of the metaphysical import of free human action.

This new effort to substitute the *visio* of an objective necessary process as an object of intellectual contemplation for a free, vital subjective commitment of self was reflected in a particularly striking way in Hegel's final effort to subordinate religion to philosophy. Hegel understood the distinction between true and false, the good and the bad, as being the properties of reality only in so far as it is understood in a state of differentiation from the absolute spirit. By means of the dialectic man can by his own powers achieve the vision of that universe which transcends that state of differentiation. The intellectual element in religion is, in Hegel's opinion, an imaginative anticipation of that philosophical vision. In Blondel's opinion, Hegel had confused the necessity which governs the formulation of that philosophical vision with the necessity of a free vital commitment of himself which man must make, if he would participate in the subjective existential reality which that vision indicates. In order to pass from vision to life, from speculative understanding to practical participation, one must commit oneself in a decisive option. Consequently, beyond the philosophical vision there is still need for vital religious activity. In fact that need is the dynamic genetic source of the philosophic vision itself.

According to Blondel Hegel's major contribution to philosophy was his clarification of the dialectical law which governs the vital evolution of human action. But he remained within the center of perspective of thought and, as a result, identified the logical necessity contained in a rational reconstruction of that dialectic with the total free dialectical evolution of life itself, of which the rational reconstruction is only a partial aspect. Hegel's express objective in his search for a dialectical philosophy was an attempt to save the truths contained in Christian dogmas against the rationalist attack of the *Aufklärung*. The primary reason Schelling gave for his attack on Hegelianism and his attempt to establish what he called a positive or existential philosophy was, he maintained, to find a place in philosophy for the real personal God of Christianity and his free revelation of Himself in history.

In his *Philosophy of Revelation* Schelling was led to affirm the existence of a personal God capable of free initiative in relation to man by reason of "the need inherent in man's will for such a God." This postulate opened up the way for an a posteriori search in history for the free revelation God made of Himself in the process of the evolution of man's religious consciousness. Both Fichte and Schelling at the final stage of their philosophical development realized that as long as the center of perspective of philosophy remained exclusively within reason it could never achieve its objective of understanding the dynamic evolution of life. So both attempted to shift the center of perspective outside of reason into will. But once again, Blondel held, they only succeeded in substituting a partial aspect of the real dialectic of life for the whole. If it is the role of free human action to synthesize thought and reality into the unity of a

living act, then the philosopher must develop a method whereby he can disclose the secret of that synthetic process.

Nowhere is Blondel's genius and originality more evident than in his idea of a total dialectic.<sup>35</sup> If one wishes to avoid a false metaphysics which absolutizes a relative aspect of being, such as pure thought or pure will, then, Blondel maintained, one must presuppose and include within metaphysics that "moral option" which has the power to introduce the absolute of being into the relativity of phenomena. Man's destiny is not to think or will the absolute but to think and will the insertion of absolute truth and being into the relativity of his acts, and by willing to know it.

This idea of a total dialectic provides the key also for a proper understanding of the relation Blondel establishes between philosophy and religion. A philosophical study of the synthetic function of action, such as Blondel conceived of it, necessarily leads man to a realization that the only means of achieving the total actualization of the infinite potentiality in his will is by an active synthesis of his will with the divine will. The absolute must become the "act of his act." Philosophy as such can make clear the necessity of such a synthesis; it can establish the necessary a priori conditions of possibility for such a synthesis, but it can by no means supply it. Nothing which man can do or think, nothing in the natural order of action can bring man to his perfection; yet it is only by means of action that we can hope to introduce the divine light and life into our lives. Consequently, at this point the initiative of man must give way to the initiative of the absolute will. A purely autonomous philosophical process, having clarified what is necessary in order that man achieve his destiny, must give way to a true religious activity.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Confer "Blondel's Logic of Action," *Ibid.*, pp. 216-36.

<sup>36</sup>What we cannot even conceive without help, much less can we accomplish alone. Nothing which man can do, nothing in the natural order of action can bring man to his perfection or lead him to God. In order to constitute God as the destiny of man, according to the imperious need of our will, in order to become His cooperator and to introduce into our lives what is its source and its destiny, we need a helper, an intercessor, a pontiff who will be, as it were, the act of our acts. *Ibid.*, pp. 281-82.