

RESPONSES

FATHER WILLIAM STOHRER (Creighton University):

My comment consists of a suggestion: there is an interesting parallelism between the general Blondelian position with regard to man in action, and that which Maurice Merleau-Ponty was to propose many years later in his *Phénoménologie de la Perception*.

Blondel concerns himself with man in his activity as subject. It is action that determines thought. This emphasis on the pro-predicative serves to preserve the unique nature of the subject as such, and points to man as originating and creative source. It is action which enunciates and protects the spontaneity of the human subject. And it is action which indicates principally the human composite, the synthesis of body and soul. Thought and existence are distinct without being separate, and reflection receives its object from concrete action.

Phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty sees man as an active body-subject wedded to the world," the unitary, transcendent subjectivity revelatory of the world and its "inalienable presence." For M-P, the true transcendental is not consciousness but the world. M-P represents his philosophy as a radical victory over Cartesianism, which is characterized by Descartes' sharp dichotomy between the thinking mind and the mechanical body. The body is not one object among many, but man's means of belonging to his world and facing his tasks. Man is always in the process of self-constitution. He brings to the perceptual and behavioral field the horizon of his own history, and he expresses himself through their union. For M-P, perception is an action; it is man's pro-reflective way of living his body. Man perceives because he is in action in the world situation.

I am impressed by the premium which both thinkers put on the dialectic of human activity. Though their philosophical purposes differ, this common stress on action would perhaps provide a fruitful area for further study. Could there even be a common root in Marx?

FATHER McNEILL (Reply to Father Stohrer):

I agree with Fr. Stohrer that there is a very interesting parallelism between the fundamental insight of Blondel and Merleau-Ponty into the proper point of departure for philosophy and into the methodology necessitated by that point of departure. Both represent their philosophy as a radical victory over Cartesian dualism.

. . . In order that one speak of subjectivism, one must first of all, by an artificial dichotomy, separate and oppose the subjective and the objective as distinct entities. To maintain that nothing is given to us except as states of consciousness implies a reference to an unconscious objectivism. On the contrary, one escapes this deceiving opposition the moment one places the point of departure of philosophy anterior to all realism or idealism, when one is concerned first of all to make explicit the given, to ascertain that which we cannot help but think, and determine that which we cannot but include in the

spontaneous affirmation which is produced in us and thought of as being (Blondel, *Le Point de Depart de la Recherche Philosophique*, *Annales de Philosophie Chrétienne*, Tome 152 [June, 1906] 237.)

Both sought in human action the pre-reflective unity of thought with existence, the objective with the subjective. (Confer p. 15, footnote 21.) In this respect the brilliant use M-P made of phenomenological analysis in the field of philosophical anthropology spells out in detail that central intuition of Blondel's thought which, writing when he did, he could express at times only indirectly and inadequately. (For Blondel's corresponding analysis of the body-spirit confer *L'Action* (1893), pp. 144-201.)

However, the striking parallelism between their starting point and initial intuition makes the contrast between the development and conclusions of their respective philosophies even more striking and enlightening. While both believed that the only valid starting point for philosophy was from within human subjectivity, Blondel understood this as a necessary point of departure in order to arrive ultimately at a true metaphysics. "In order to find God we must not begin from Him where we are not; we must begin from ourselves, where perhaps He is." (*L'Action* [1893], p. 344.) Whereas M-P, at least in his *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, denies any possibility of a true metaphysics on the grounds that no transition is possible from being-for-us to being-in-itself.

In my opinion this all-important difference is due to the fact that M-P refused to grant abstract thought any legitimate organic role man's perceptual development. As a result the entire dialectic within human life of abstract thought with concrete existence tends to be overlooked in his early writings.

In contrast, Blondel understood that thought itself, abstract and universal, had an organic role to play in the dialectic of human life. That role is to lead man to place the ideal goals of his action not in that which 'is,' but in that which 'ought' to be. The initial pre-reflective unity of man must pass through this disjunction of thought and existence in order to achieve the post-reflective unity of conscious free commitment which characterizes moral life.

I limit this contrast of Blondel's thought with that of M-P to his early writing; because, if Kwant is correct in his understanding of M-P's posthumous work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, then, in the last years of his life Merleau-Ponty moved toward an understanding of the role of thought in life, very close to that of Blondel. For instance, in that work M-P tries to give a metaphysical foundation to his concept of "reversibility" between man and the world. (Confer Remy C. Kwant, *From Phenomenology to Metaphysics*, Duquesne University Press, 1966, pp.90 and 129.) Our human life is seen in this work as the fulfillment of the fundamental potentiality of the world and of Being. Being is said to come to an awareness of itself in man. Man is understood as "the revelation of the structure of Being." Thus, M-P grants a fundamental role to reflective human thought in that process of the self-revelation of Being.

I do not think that the points of similarity in Blondel's thought with that of M-P have their origin in a study of Marx. Rather, as I maintain in my book, *The Blondelian Synthesis*, Blondel drew his inspiration from a critical reflection on the same philosophical sources as did Marx himself, the German Idealists. The fundamental inspiration for what was new in Blondel's thought, distinguishing him from the idealist tradition, he drew from

the philosophical message which, he believed, was contained implicitly in the New Testament.

FATHER NORBERT J. LEMKE. (Creighton University):

How are intellect and will interrelated in the movement of the will to the absolute in Blondel's thought? How is a person certain that his will is moving toward the absolute?

FATHER McNEILL. (Reply to Father Lemke):

In Blondel's philosophy of action there are three dialectically related moments in the movement of man toward the absolute; and in each moment both intellect and will are involved. However, the relation which exists between intellect and will at each of these moments is different. Consequently, the reflection on philosophical methodology must bring out the difference of that relationship at each moment of the dialectic as well as their organic interrelation in the lived unity of human life and action. The first moment in that dialectic of life I have designated as the 'plane of action or existence;' the second moment as the 'plane of thought or reflection,' and the third moment as 'option.'

In order to answer the question posed we must recall to mind that for Blondel one cannot legitimately separate intellect and will in such a way that one treats them as distinct entities, as was frequently done in traditional 'facultative' psychologies. The human intellect and the human will are at one and the same time both action and knowledge. There is a difference, however, in how these inseparable elements relate at each moment of the dialectic considered in separation from the other moments.

At the first moment of the dialectic on the plane of action or existence Blondel speaks of a direct or practical method or again of a "method of experimentation." At this first step in the dialectic of life it is obvious that the will aspect, the element of action, must take precedence over the intellectual aspect, the element of knowledge. But this precedence should not be so understood as denying the presence of a type of knowledge at this inchoative level. Blondel speaks of knowledge here as necessarily more intuitive, more a question of tradition uncritically accepted and of direct experience. (Confer *L'Action* [1893], pp. xi-xv.) Thus, one is incapable of an objective justification or even communication of one's understanding.

The second step of the dialectic occurs on the plane of thought or reflection. Here, as we have seen, the intellect takes precedence over the will. All the traditional principles of reason and rules of logic have their legitimate function on this level. It is on this level that one attempts an abstract, rational, universal and, thus, communicable understanding before one acts or commits oneself. Blondel speaks of the intellectual element contained in this second moment of the dialectic of life as the "fruit of past action and the seed of consequent action." Blondel also locates the entire traditional concept of metaphysics within this moment of the dialectic. Metaphysics, he maintains, does not represent a truth already constituted in fact; rather, it has the function of placing what one wishes to will as an ideal object before thought. "It [metaphysics] does not express an absolute and universal

reality; rather, it expresses the universal aspiration of a particular will.” (Confer above, p. 18, footnote 27.)

Option represents for Blondel the synthesis of the first two moments. For, as we have seen, option has the function of ‘existentializing reflection.’ Obviously there is at this synthetic moment precedence once again of will or action over intellect understood as reflection. For it is the function of option to render the unity of the abstract universal discovered in the second moment simultaneously experientially and rationally real.

. . . My *realism* does not consist only in affirming speculatively that the object is, but in affirming that that objective certitude puts us in a position to choose the alternatives on which it will depend whether we will be deprived of that objective existence or whether we will possess it. (*Lettres Philosophiques*, Aubier [Paris, 1961], p. 166.)

There is still one more step in Blondel’s total philosophy which would take us beyond the dialectic of life. Blondel refers to that step in the final chapter of *L’Action* as “metaphysics to the 2nd power.” (Confer *L’Action* [1893], pp. 464-465; *Lettres Philosophiques*, pp. 69 and 126-127. Also *The Blondelian Synthesis*, pp. 97-103 and 285-289.) With this further step the relation of intellect and will is once again reversed with intellect taking precedence over will. But to expand further would take us beyond the purpose of this paper.

Corresponding to the three moments of the dialectic, there are two criteria of certitude by which one may judge that his will is moving toward the absolute, as well as their synthetic unity in the third moment of option. The first criterion, since it corresponds to the plane of existence, cannot be discovered in the objective essence of the action proposed. Rather, the morality of a course of action is discovered from its effects on the individual’s self-consciousness. The person forms his choice from the basic experience of himself and the feeling of congruity or incongruity that the object of choice has with his fundamental experience of himself. Blondel had in mind here a method of achieving certitude in choice similar to the system implicit in Saint Ignatius’ doctrine on the discernment of spirits, with which he was profoundly familiar. The essential presupposition here, as we have seen, is fidelity. The one choosing must be prepared a priori to refuse any course of action which would result in an experience of self-contradiction.

The criterion of certitude for the second moment of the dialectic on the plane of reflection is identical to the logical principles and laws operative in any abstract rational system. Here the foundation for judgment will be found in the relation between the objective essence of the action proposed and an objective concept of human nature.

These two criteria are fused into one at the synthetic stage of the option. However, just as the will takes precedence over the intellect at this stage, so the experiential criteria take precedence over the rational criteria, using them as directives but finding ultimate certitude in the immediate and, therefore, absolutely certain experience of fulfillment or privation. Since this experience follows the second stage of the dialectic and is consequent on acceptance or refusal of transcendence, it is no longer an experience of the isolated self. Rather, in its positive form it is an experience of being one with the other. “The knowledge

of being implies a necessity of option; the being which is within our knowledge is not before but after the liberty of choice.” (*L’Action* [1893], p. 436.)

FATHER DAVID J. HASSEL (Loyola University, Chicago):

Your probing and incisive description of the basic dynamics of Blondel’s will-to-will raises a question which has puzzled me also in Thomistic metaphysics. To clarify myself, may I state the Thomistic problem as I see it? The Thomist’s unchanging act of human existence must contain within itself from man’s first embryonic moment all that is necessary to cooperate with God’s primary causality in meeting forever the constantly developing environment of man’s world. Otherwise, man is not a perduring substance and/or his existence is potency. Thus the human act of existence must have an expansive virtuality capable of confronting, assimilating, and decisioning not only *de facto* events (the futures) but also those situations which the free directionings of man’s history actually missed but which could have been met-given the free choice of other alternatives.

When I read your analysis of Blondel’s will-willing (“ . . . to be true is to become that which one really is.” p. 25), his final option (“ . . . the source of the necessary ideal of God is to be understood as man’s projecting out of all the unused and unusable potentialities of the human spirit. p. 33), his logic of action (“ . . . each new step in the dialectical development of man’s freedom demands to be lived BEFORE it can be reflected.” p. 26), it struck me that Blondel’s will-to-will is a given which, at man’s first embryonic moment, is already present in all its ‘future’ complexity and is merely waiting to be successively revealed through actions when certain successive events or situations offer the opportunity for decision to man’s will-to-will. (“ . . . we are concerned here with an active identity in the process of creating itself.” p. 24).

It would seem as though man’s future decisions were pre-packaged in a particular virtuality whose structure would be man’s final option (“Before one can discover the exigencies of life, and in order to be able to discern them, one must be already committed.” p. 16; “Thus all rational necessity is to be found ultimately enclosed within a free option.” p. 34).

My problem then is this (for Thomistic metaphysics as well as for Blondel): how can a man freely appropriate what he already is when the very act of appropriation is issuing from his very structure (his final option taken as will-to-will or as his act of existence) and is made according to a virtuality which precontains his future decisions? In other words, how does Blondel reconcile a ‘programming’ of man’s freedom with his free actions -- a necessity previous to any cognitional necessities? If he does not have this problem, do you see it as a problem? If so, what would be some approach to its solution?

FATHER McNEILL (Reply to Father Hassel):

Father Hassel is correct, I believe, in seeing a parallel between the Thomistic concept of a predetermined unchanging nature present in man’s existence and Blondel’s concept of the ‘necessary structures of freedom.’ He is right also in seeing that the most fundamental problem which arises from this concept in both philosophies is precisely “how to reconcile a programming of man’s freedom with his free actions.” This was, I believe,

the most fundamental problem which Blondel faced and tried to resolve in his philosophy of action.

The context in which Blondel faced and resolved that problem was, however, radically different from that of Thomas. At the time Blondel wrote *L'Action* (1893) he was relatively unaware of Thomistic metaphysics. Rather, the problem was posed for him in the context of modern philosophy in his critical reflections on the thought of Spinoza, Kant, Fichte, Shelling and Hegel. I suspect the most radical difference in Blondel's context is that existence itself is understood not as a static given but as a dynamic process of becoming, evolving according to a dialectical law. As a result of that context Blondel would grant that there is a sense in which it is true to say that "man is not a perduring substance and/or his existence is potency." It is only at the end of the dialectical process that man achieves his full substantial reality, his existential actuality.

I have no doubt that there can be a very fruitful confrontation of Blondel's attempt to solve this problem with that of Thomas. (He himself began that confrontation in an article entitled "La Philosophie de L'Action" [F. Mallet, pseud.] *Revue de Philosophie*, Vol. 6, No. 9 [September, 1906], 227-252.) I hope, however, Father Hassel will excuse me if I limit myself here to indicating the context in which that problem was posed for Blondel and how he attempted to solve it.

As the subtitle of *L'Action* (1893): "Essai d'une Critique de la Vie et d'une Science de la Pratique" implied, Blondel understood his philosophy of action as a critical effort to overcome the dichotomy between pure reason and practical or moral reason which Kant had established in his moral philosophy, and which, Blondel felt, none of his successors in the German Idealist school had succeeded in overcoming. Kant's basic illusion concerning the human will was, in Blondel's estimate, that "we act more freely in so far as we experience the least possible influence of truth or being." (Confer *The Blondelian Synthesis*, p. 51. I deal with Blondel's critical reflections on the moral philosophy of Kant in three chapters of this book, Confer pp. 42-106.) It was because of this illusion that Kant proposed in his moral philosophy "to do away with metaphysics in order to make room for faith." Again according to Blondel, it was due to this illusion that Kant adopted his epistemological norm, namely, that "thought and being, essence and existence, morality and metaphysics, the ideal and the real are necessarily and irreducibly heterogene."

Blondel began with the basic intuition that, even if at the start these facets of life are heterogene, it is precisely the role of the human will to introduce idea into fact and thus progressively synthesize thought with being, essence with existence, morality with metaphysics. However, if this interpenetration of idea and fact is possible, it presupposes a certain correlation between thought and being. Reality itself must somehow have a rational structure capable of being actualized by our rational will acts. Because of his search for that interpenetration, Blondel proposed his counter-Copernican revolution for the starting point of philosophy: the center of philosophy must be transposed from the analytic element of thought into the synthetic element of action. In terms of the living synthesis which action produces, Blondel thought he could overcome all dualisms in Kantian criticism, especially the dualism between freedom and determinism.

Action, which produces thought and accomplishes it, has its own proper a priori structure from which the whole of thought, both in its objective and subjective correlatives, derives its meaning. What Blondel proposed was a study of *ideogenesis*: a study of the

genesis of thought from action, which would result in an understanding of the a priori structure implicit in the will itself. For it is the a priori structure implicit in the will which ultimately explains the a priori necessity and structure in our thoughts. Father Hassel is right, then, to understand Blondel as holding that there is in some sense a ‘programming’ of human action insofar as there is an a priori structure involved in the will-willing. In Blondel’s opinion, however, the presence of such a determinism in no way contradicts man’s freedom, since the most essential feature of that determinism is a determinism to freedom.

Blondel’s search for the meaning of the fact of felt moral obligation begins with a genetic study of the necessary genesis of universal ideas in consciousness. The very presence of a universal idea in consciousness with its relative transcendence or infinitude leads man to an awareness of self in some way as transcending and, thus, distinct from the universe. The consciousness of that activity which gives birth to the universal as relatively infinite leads us necessarily to an idea of self as free. We necessarily conceive ourselves as capable of the infinite, as having a creative power of act which transcends all particular determinations. The resulting free rational human act consequent on this awareness is, then, a synthesis of our necessary idea of ourselves as infinite, transcendent, creative and autonomous with the infinite power resident in our will. This necessary idea of such a synthesis is the necessary idea of freedom. In all our free acts we are conscious that “to that which is insufficient to determine it, (the will) adds from its own sufficiency to determine itself.”

Parallel and consequent to the dependence of the idea of freedom on the necessary consciousness of universal ideas, the idea of free moral obligation finds its foundation and sufficient reason in the necessary concept, at least implicit, of a hierarchy of values, a metaphysical system of ideal realities. As we have seen, this metaphysical system in Blondel’s opinion does not constitute “a truth already constituted in fact; nor does it express an absolute and universal reality.” Rather, it expresses the necessary aspiration of a particular will to become one with an absolute and universal reality. It has as its organic function in human life “to place that which one wishes to will as an ideal object before thought.” (It is this aspect of Blondel’s thought which, perhaps, is basically different from Thomistic thought.)

The presence of an ideal metaphysical order in consciousness moves the will to the effort of incorporating that ideal order, which it necessarily conceives as its transcendental end, into its voluntary action. Just as consciousness of the universal idea is transformed by our consciousness into the necessary idea of freedom and an awareness of self as creative source, so too the conscious awareness of the possibility of incorporating the transcendent ideals of a metaphysics into action leads to an awareness of that action as a properly free moral action and self as a free moral agent. Man is thus freed from all pre-determinisms; “. . . the will is led to place the center of its equilibrium beyond all factual realities; to live as it were on itself; to search in itself alone the purely formal reason of its acts.” (Confer *The Blondelian Synthesis*, p. 87.) The creative power of the moral act is not to be found in the creation of a universal law, for this is given in the necessary metaphysical system. It is to be found in the power of the will to synthesize that given set of ideals into the factual reality of its activities by free choice.

It is evident, then, that Blondel does not hold a pure autonomy of human freedom. He does not imply that each individual creates his own values. But what he wishes to escape was the contrary position which he found equally untenable and, perhaps, more widespread, namely, a pure heteronomy of moral obligation. If moral obligation has its source totally exterior to the will and freedom, then all obligation would be a tyranny which could only result in the denial of freedom as an illusion. But that problem is resolved once we understand that moral law is not an imposition exterior to the will; rather, it is a reflection in consciousness of the very structure potentially present in that will. Thus, freedom is not and cannot be the contradiction of law; it is the product of an interior law and the necessary means for the actualization of that law.

Consciousness of action serves as a pivotal point of a process wherein the immanent necessity which gives rise to the act of consciousness is necessarily transformed by consciousness itself into an idea of transcendent finality. "Our free actions cannot be organized except by a total idea, and by projecting that total idea of its production under the form of a final end to be achieved." (Confer *The Blondelian Synthesis*, p. 99.) As a result of this transformation our action escapes from pre-determination in order to become dependent on an efficient finality. Freedom, emerging as it does by a necessary and continuous process out of the determinism of nature, must, in order to achieve its destiny, freely become one with that determinism itself. Within Blondel's theory the final free option, it is true, is imposed upon us, but at the same time it is by means of that free option that we become what we will. Thus, in the last analysis it is not freedom which is absorbed by determinism; it is the total determinism of human life which is suspended on that supreme free decision.

Granting that there is in Blondel's philosophy a form of predeterminism of the will-willing, it is also very important to note the limitations he imposes on that pre-determinism. As we have seen, a man does not "freely appropriate what he already is;" rather, he freely appropriates what he ought-to-be. But even that ought-to-be is not totally determined from man's first embryonic moment. "If that indeterminate power (of a free will) ," Blondel writes, "can be defined by the fact that it wills and not by the that which it wills . . . there is a necessary logic of freedom." (Confer above, p. 18, footnote 26.) In other words, what is pre-determined is only certain generic and universal necessities present in the will-willing. Blondel would contend, for example, that every free will by its very existence is predetermined in its need of some form of community. What concrete choice an individual ought to make depends on his situation which, in turn, depends on the factual history of his previous choices.

Human sensibility and reason are, according to Blondel, initially universal instruments and human liberty is "the power of the infinite." Consequently, the initial state of man on the plane of existence or action appears to be an anarchy, an a-logical reality. However, once man acts this initial a-logical state tends spontaneously to become an order, but a singular individual order which combines the generic with the individual. Consequent on action it is possible to spell out in a generic way on the plane of reflection the determinism the will is under due to the fact itself that it wills and wills freely.

However, every moral decision in its individuality is not merely an instance of general principles, but something positively unique and individual. As we have seen, Blondel understood moral activity as creating a new synthesis, as incorporating the ideal

into reality and existentializing the generic categories of reflection. Like all other synthetic realities, this synthesis cannot be deduced ahead of time from nature or from thought by reason of its uniqueness and originality. Since man, consequent on his free choice, is positively an individual, and not just a negative or material instant of a generic nature, he is more than the point of intersection of determinative truths, more than the particular instance of a multipliable essence. This unique and special factor, the single human existent as such, can be summoned by an imperative prescription which is different in kind from any moral principle derived from generic characteristics. Thus, the individuality of the person, as it manifests itself to him immediately in his self-consciousness, is the norm which the person must obey when pursuing his perfection by free choice. Blondel is fully aware that the divine will is also a personal free will which is capable of entering into a personal dialogue with the individual as such and of exercising free initiative in that dialogue. He is also aware that this personal divine will respects the free choices which the individual existent has made in the past and, thus, in the context of the dialogue respects the limits which those choices have established for future response.

FATHER HAROLD L. COOPER (Loyola University, New Orleans):

Three questions come to mind. First, in your answer to Father Roth you said that Blondel asks us to will unity with all men. Doesn't this seem to be demanding that we tend toward, and even elect an abstraction? Indeed, is such a unity existentially possible? On the one hand, Blondel means to "existentialize or concretize reflection itself" (p. 12 of your paper); on the other, he seems clearly to indulge, at least here, in abstractions.

Secondly, in your paper and in the discussion you stressed what Blondel calls the "final option." "Every free human agent is *necessarily* faced with the decision to accept or refuse the transcendent (i.e. the Judeo-Christian God) within his will" (pp. 32-33). But then, "any truth which would impose itself from without, and would not be man's own creation, would *necessarily* involve a diminution if not the destruction, of man's freedom" (p. 12). Isn't there a patent contradiction between these two demands? I must choose God, finally, in order to be truly free, truly myself; yet any such "fulfillment" of my being, which in no way depends on my choice for its reality, diminishes my freedom.

Lastly, to me Blondel doesn't even attempt a demonstration that his transcendent *has* to be God. Am I being rationalistic to expect that he do so? Am I correct in assuming that he merely intends to elicit from his readers personal experiences similar to his own? That he deliberately eschews the probative method? But isn't there a danger of subjectivism here?

FATHER McNEILL (Reply to Father Cooper):

In response to the first question a distinction is necessary: Yes, Blondel's insight that we find ourselves necessitated to will a unity with all men at a given point in the dialectic of human life does demand that we tend toward and even elect what is merely an abstract ideal prior to the election itself. No, he is not demanding that we will an abstract ideal precisely as abstract. Rather, it was his understanding that it does lie in the synthetic

power of the human will to render actual whatever it necessarily projects out as a necessary goal in its striving for self-identity.

Is such a unity existentially possible? The ideal of such a unity with all men is the primary example in Blondel's thought of the category of those commitments which remain simultaneously necessary and impossible. Insofar as these commitments are necessary, they represent a possible immanent dimension of man's existential reality; insofar as they are impossible for man to realize out of his own unaided freedom, they indicate the presence of a power within man that transcends man himself. This, in Blondel's opinion, is the key experience which leads man to project out an idea of God as the immanent-transcendent. Our idea of God, taking its genetic origin in the experience of the necessary and impossible, is a "projecting out of all the unused and unusable potentialities of the human will." Man finds it necessary, in order to find the perfect identity of himself with himself in his voluntary action, to look within himself until he reaches the point where that which is of himself ceases. What we can know of God, Blondel argues, is precisely "that surplus of interior life which demands its employment." Blondel is well aware that the possibility of an existential unity with all men would remain forever an abstraction unless man could somehow realize an existential unity with the divine will. "At the very root of being, in the common practice of life, in the secret logic of consciousness, without God there is no fellow man for man. In order to be one, in order to exist, it is necessary that I do not rest alone. I have need for all the others. That which is necessary, then, is to capture within myself the source of all unity (the divine will) and to transmit the truth of its intimate action." (Confer *The Blondelian Synthesis*, "The Problem of Interpersonality," pp. 190-197.)

I believe that the answer to your second question follows from what has been said above. Yes, we must be able in some sense to choose God in order to be truly free and truly ourselves. Yes, any such fulfillment which *in no way* depends on my choice for its reality would not only diminish but totally negate my freedom.

Blondel does not hesitate to apply his methodological principle of immanence to manifestations of the divine will itself. Although the divine will must manifest itself as in some way distinct from our finite will, yet that revelation, if it is not to destroy our God-given freedom and authenticity, must be made in some way from within our consciousness of self. "If it is necessary, Blondel wrote, "to consider revelation itself as something which arrives completely from without as an entirely empirical given, then the very idea of a revealed dogma or precept would be totally unintelligible." (Confer *L'Action* [1893], p. 394.)

Ultimately, man's knowledge of God is his immanent experiential awareness that "at the roots of his ego there is an *ego* that is no longer his *ego*." However, it is only in the very act by which we would freely consent to such an intimate presence that we can achieve actual consciousness of it as an immanent dimension of our own existential reality. For it is only by free consent that we can change that presence from an abstract possibility to an experienced actuality. This, then, according to Blondel is the ultimate meaning of man's freedom—it lies in our power to make God exist or not exist in our lives by reason of our freely chosen existence.

In answer to the final question, Blondel does attempt by a probative method to demonstrate that his transcendent has to be God. However, he is quite clear in limiting the

purely rational proof to the second moment of the dialectic, the moment of reflection, and in indicating the subordinate role it has to play in the total dialectic of life. Consequently, one would not be correct in assuming that Blondel merely intended to elicit from his reader's personal experiences similar to his own. I will attempt to sketch Blondel's "proof for the existence of God" in answer to the next question.

FATHER ROBERT ROTH (Fordham University):

Your paper proposes to show that Blondel's "metaphysics of freedom" presents a solution to the problem of preserving "the undeniable exigencies of freedom, subjectivity and existence within the context of a philosophy which recognizes objective and universal truths and values." For the solution of this problem Blondel's final option of a transcendent is crucial. Yet to me your treatment does not adequately show how Blondel grounds this option. Could you enlarge on this a bit?

FATHER MCNEILL (Reply to Father Roth):

I trust that I have already answered Father Roth's question, at least in part, in the last response, where I outlined Blondel's idea of the genesis of the idea of God as the immanent-transcendent from the experience of the "necessary and impossible." What I would like to add here is a brief outline of Blondel's proof for the existence of God on the plane of reflection. (For a fuller treatment of this all important aspect of Blondel's thought confer *The Blondelian Synthesis*, "Blondel's Solution to the Problem of the Absolute," pp. 167-186.)

The most important thing to establish at the outset concerning Blondel's proof for the existence of God, or the *Unique Nécessaire* as he calls it, is the context in which that proof occurs. That context is a search for the meaning of human destiny. Blondel assumes that it has been already conclusively established that man is necessitated from within himself to search continually by means of his voluntary actions for a total fulfillment of himself. Once the human will has exhausted the entire relative or phenomenal order in that search for perfect identity with itself, it factually finds itself dissatisfied. This apparent failure could not be a conscious fact except in contrast with a previous desire.

By his voluntary actions, then, man goes beyond the phenomenal order; he cannot by his own will satisfy his own exigencies. Consequently, man necessarily comes to the realization in and by his own conscious experience that there is a greater potentiality in his will than he can possibly put into exercise by his efforts alone. Man's idea of the absolute has its genetic source precisely in this subjective experience of apparent failure in the drive of his will for self-identity.

By proof of the existence of the absolute Blondel understood a reflexive phenomenological analysis of one's will-action with the objective of grasping that which is already in some sense present in the will-willing as necessary goal. In Blondel's opinion, only this genetic study of the necessary formation of the idea of the absolute has the value of a constraining proof for the existence of the absolute, because this genetic study is based on the total synthetic reality of action.

Any proof which is nothing more than a purely logical argument always remains abstract and partial. By abstracting the purely ideal or rational aspect of action, one can arrive at the idea of the absolute as pure form, the term of a purely abstract philosophical process. Or, again, by abstracting the purely real and voluntary aspect of action, one can postulate by a basically a-rational act of faith and love an identity with the absolute as existing. In both these arguments the absolute which one affirms is arrived at by an abstraction of one aspect of the synthesis between thought and reality in human action, and by the erection of that partial aspect as an absolute.

The privilege of action as such is to be total, to be the synthesis of the real and the ideal. In the dialectical exposition of the proof one must try, then, insofar as possible to recapture this spontaneous synthetic movement of life itself. Thus, in imitation of this dialectical movement, there are three steps or moments in Blondel's attempt to prove the existence of the absolute. The first, corresponding to the traditional cosmological argument, argues from all those syntheses, which have already been willed and have manifested themselves as both necessary and insufficient. In this argument Blondel seeks the foundation for the affirmation of the reality of the absolute synthesis in our consciousness of those syntheses which have already been achieved.

The true cosmological argument, Blondel maintains, is not based on contingency experienced in our conscious will-action as need and dissatisfaction. On the contrary, the contingent reveals itself to consciousness as both necessary and insufficient, as that which one can neither renounce nor be content with. Thus, the reality of the finite reveals itself to consciousness as what cannot be suppressed or eliminated in order to leave us with a purely formal ideal. The argument, then, is based on the very necessity of the reality of the finite syntheses. The true character of the contingent is "to participate in the necessity of the real without participating in its privilege."

This relative necessity of the contingent reveals the absolute necessity of the absolute. Instead of searching for a necessity which is completely exterior to the reality of the finite, the argument shows that necessity as present in the finite itself, as immanent in all that which is and has already been willed. It proves not only the impossibility of affirming the contingent alone; it proves also the impossibility of denying the necessity which founds it. The world of phenomena is not absolute in form; it is not of its essence to exist. Nor is it absolute in its content which is limited. But there is a trace of the absolute precisely in the synthesis which binds together thought with action, form with content. For the finite, once it exists, necessarily exists and necessarily is that which it is. Even if its reality has been synthesized into our subjective life by a free act of our will, it cannot consequently be suppressed by an act of our will.

This relative necessity of these finite syntheses reveals itself in the living conscious experience of relative fulfillment of the will at each step in the development of the dialectic of action. Consequently this proof for the necessary reality of the absolute takes its force and value from the entire order of phenomena: nature, science, consciousness itself, society, metaphysics, and morality. All these phenomena, once they have been, necessarily exist for the will in its search for the absolute without being sufficient for it. The progress of the will towards the absolute has manifested itself not in a process of suppression and annihilation of these syntheses, but rather, in a process of assimilation and transcendence, where all that was of value in the previous synthetic step is preserved and continued in the

next. Thus, one is forced to conclude that there is something “which is neither nothing nor phenomena, which sustains the phenomena in being and makes them participate, but only participate, in its absolute necessity.”

Whatever that absolute may be, it does not exist for us in itself, nor is it to be found in the order of extension, that is, in the phenomena. Therefore, I cannot continue my search with the phenomena or with the uniquely necessary itself; rather, I must continue my search with myself, and with the power of synthesis which I find in myself.

The second argument corresponds to the traditional teleological argument. Here Blondel argues from the evidence provided by the subjective act of the will reflecting on itself. In this argument he seeks in the subjective will-act itself the basis for the affirmation of the absolute as *ideal*. In keeping with the dialectical concept of the proof, this second argument necessarily presupposes and includes the first. It includes the relative necessity of the world of phenomena and adds to it the subjective history of its discovery.

Just as in the first argument one proves that it is necessary that the absolute be real because the phenomena are real, so here it is necessary that the perfect coincidence of thought and action, “the pure act of the perfect thought,” must exist and not merely be postulated, because a fleeting glimpse of that harmonious synthesis is given us in fact. When we reflect on our past actions, what we find is a process taking its origin in the spontaneous pre-conscious life-force within us and necessitating us to think and to act continually in such a way as to acquire a true adequation within ourselves. For the purpose of the argument what is important in that process is the experiential fact that in that dialectic there is always an indefinable moment when thought and action, the ideal and the real, coincide in a momentary harmony only to be immediately separated.

However, even if it is by means of our free will-acts that we experience a fleeting and partial harmony, this experience also testifies that it is not by us alone that the union is effected. It is not from ourselves that we draw neither the light of our thoughts nor the efficacy of our acts; nor can we succeed by our thoughts and actions to produce a durable harmony. Even if one grants that all the rest, all phenomena, are resumed and founded in our thoughts and actions, yet it remains true that at the beginning we did not will to think or act. It is neither by abstraction nor by contrast that we discover the absolute, as if it were an ideal exterior to us and without roots in our own life. Far from being a projection or imaginary prolongation of our thought or action it is at the very center of all that we think or do. Precisely what is intuited here is the ideal nature of that necessary source of the real synthesis of the first argument.

Blondel feels justified at this point in identifying this source of our partial syntheses of thought and action as a subject or ego, because the primary trait which characterizes a subject as such is precisely the power to synthesize thought and action. And the absolute reveals itself to consciousness in this argument as “the pure act of the perfect thought.” Thus the absolute, which revealed itself as necessarily real, reveals itself in the second proof as the ideal source of all our syntheses and, itself, the perfect synthesis of thought and action. Yet, although it reveals itself as within me at the source of all my thoughts and actions, this absolute subject also reveals itself as necessarily distinct from me. The necessary reality of the finite syntheses, achieved by our own personal actions and established in the reflection of the first proof, prevents us from confusing ourselves with

the absolute. The failure of our free actions to arrive at their ideal goal prevents us from confusing the absolute with ourselves.

Although we find that the ideal of the perfect adequation of thought and action is an organic ideal operative within our will, it is impossible for us to call it our own. We must continue to search for that absolute in that which is within us, but also in something which transcends us and, so to speak, reduces us to our limits. But this ideal absolute, which our limited spirit cannot appropriate nor entirely absorb in itself and to which, as a result, it must oppose itself, becomes, by reason of that necessary opposition, the reality of the ideal, Being itself. This is the experience of the immanence of the transcendent which will determine “the inevitable transcendence of human action.”

The third and final argument corresponds to the traditional ontological argument. Here the argument is based on the synthetic act of the will precisely as a synthesis of the real and the ideal. In this proof, which itself represents the synthesis of the previous two arguments, Blondel attempts to analyze the basis in our will-activity for the necessary affirmation of the absolute as the perfection of being, “the existential ideal and the ideal existent.”

Blondel insists on the necessity of the order of the proofs in a dialectical exposition. The proofs, if they are to have phenomenological validity as a description of experience, must follow the movement of life itself. Consequently, the ontological argument necessarily presupposes the previous two. Just as action itself is the synthesis of the reality of its own being with the ideal of thought, so the ontological argument simulates and guides the supreme synthesis of the option. There is no question here of concluding coldly that the absolute exists; rather, in the face of the impossibility of absolute non-being, there is question of accepting or refusing without any possible evasion that which founds our action, of willing or refusing to will the very source and being of our own will.

What precisely does the ontological proof add, in Blondel’s opinion, to our knowledge of the absolute? In this argument we discover the idea of perfection as a living reality in our consciousness which borrows from our total action all there is of certitude in us. It is at this point and only here in the dialectical unfolding of the proof that we are justified in identifying the concept we have of the absolute with being. This conceptual identity of the absolute with being is justified at this point because we have placed within it beforehand the real identity of thought and action. The ideal is real because we have discovered the ideal synthesis of thought and action as the source from which the partial synthesis in our actions springs; and we have previously discovered that this partial synthesis of thought and action is necessarily real. Thus, the dialectical movement of thought, in imitation of the movement of living action, is obliged to affirm the absolute as being, that is, as the perfect substantial unity of the real and the ideal. But if the absolute is being, then it follows that the ego or subject which we have discovered at the source of our actions as immanent in us but distinct from us, is not a pure idea, a notional subject, but a subject in a hypostatic sense, a substantial subject endowed with intelligence and will. Just as Blondel first substitutes here the word *being* for the word *phenomenon*, so too on the level of phenomenological description of experience, he substitutes for the first time the word *God* for the word *absolute*. For the ontological argument, in his opinion, leads us into the presence of a person who is immanent in our action, but not identical with it; a person who is the living absolute identity of existence, knowledge and act: in a word, God.

As we have noted, Blondel insists that the idea of the absolute is a necessary idea. He does not contend, however, that this idea must always reach that degree of clarity and precision which it has at the end of his dialectical demonstration; on the contrary, the idea seldom reaches such a clear formulation. No matter under what form it presents itself to consciousness, the thought of an absolute or God is produced in us by a determinism which imposes that idea from within as a necessary result of the dynamism of our interior life; and this idea in turn produces a necessary effect and has a necessary influence on the organization of our conduct.

What necessarily rises up in every consciousness, what has in practice an inevitable efficacy, is not the concept of a speculative truth to be defined; rather, it is the conviction, perhaps vague but certain and imperious, of a destiny and an ulterior end to be attained. The vital source of this sense of destiny is, in fact, the presence within us of the absolute person. No matter under what form that presence reveals itself to consciousness, whether it is clear or confused, accepted or hidden, admitted or unnamed, the living truth of that presence has a certain efficacy. The fact remains that human action is a sort of *théergie*, as Blondel calls it; we cannot place a free human action without cooperating with the absolute subject in us and, at the same time, without causing him to cooperate with us. In order to insert the character of transcendence into our lives, it is not necessary that we must always perceive that presence or directly recognize the action of the absolute in us and on us. Even if we deny that presence and that action, we displace only the object of affirmation; but the reality of human action is not affected by this superficial play of ideas and words.

Since the idea of the absolute is necessarily projected as our destiny, it is equally necessary that we sense the need actually to achieve that destiny with the combined force of our thought and action. Human action has the inevitable ambition to realize in itself that idea of perfection. "We cannot know God without willing in some way to become God." Just as the idea of the absolute represents a paradoxical reality which is both immanent in us and transcendent to us, so too the choice and the action which inevitably follows on this idea takes on a paradoxical nature. The grounds on which our affirmation of God as absolute subject rests is the fact that He represents that which we cannot be by ourselves nor accomplish by our forces alone. Yet the fact remains that we have neither being, will, nor action except on condition of willing and somehow becoming him who is the source and being of our own will and action. The ultimate means of becoming one with ourselves, then, is by admitting another being within us, by the substitution of another will for ours. But this admission does not represent an intrusion from without. Rather, it is a free consent or recognition of that which is already within. "Sacrifice," Blondel wrote, "is the solution to the metaphysical problem by an experimental method."

FATHER WALTER E. STOKES (Loyola Seminary and Fordham University):

Would you care to show how the reflexive consciousness form of the ontological argument figures in Blondel's move to conscious knowledge of a transcendent God? This seems to me to be important, if a Blondelian reflection is to avoid being subjective idealism.

FATHER McNeill (Reply to Father Stokes):

Father Stokes is correct in indicating the fundamental importance of the ontological argument in Blondel's philosophy. In fact, the whole of Blondel's philosophy of action is

in one sense a spelling out of the implications of the ontological argument. In his recent work on Blondel, Jean Lacroix claims that this basic idea which Blondel derived from the Ethics of Spinoza, the idea that it is only by means of a total philosophy or metaphysics that morality can be founded, receives its justification in the ontological argument. "One seizes here in this argument the very condition of philosophy in its difficult progress and in the exercise of its most technical function; a philosophy which vivifies knowledge by action, and clarifies action by knowledge, which uncovers within the dialectical progress of knowledge the call of Being . . ." (*Maurice Blondel, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, pp. 72-83).

Granting, then, the importance of the ontological argument in Blondel's philosophy, it is very important to grasp precisely what he understood by that argument. Blondel frequently insisted that the dialectical and synthetic nature of his deduction of the absolute, based in the movement of living action as it reveals itself in consciousness, eliminates effectively the grounds of Kant's objection that the probative force of the argument rests on an illegitimate use of the pure a priori transcendental concept of the absolute:

It is not a matter of indifference which order we follow in the dialectical exposition of the arguments. If it were, one would be exposed to the charge that the idea of perfection is a fabrication, artificially constructed without any real foundation; while the fact is that it is a living reality in our consciousness which borrows from our total action all there is of positive certitude in us. (Confer *L'Action* [1893], p. 348.)

What Blondel arrives at in the ontological argument is less an abstract vision than a consciousness of life. This consciousness does not result from a process of pure speculation but is joined to all the movement of thought and action in us. Thus, what we arrive at is not an abstraction from which one can draw an abstract of idea of existence, but a principle of action leading to action.

The movement of Blondel's argument is actually the complete reversal of the movement Kant ascribes to the defenders of the ontological argument. Assuming that the ontological argument begins in the purely speculative order, where the idea of perfection is only an abstraction, Kant objects that to assert that the absolute exists implies either that one identifies one's idea with the absolute or that one has introduced a priori the idea of existence into one's concept. For Blondel, the only truly ultimate a priori is existence itself. And it is impossible to give an account of any existence apart from the absolute existence itself. As we have seen, the first moment of the Blondelian dialectic on the plane of existence or action moves from existence towards essence, from the real toward the ideal. The second moment on the plane of reflection moves from essence to existence, from the ideal toward the real. It is the function of option to synthesize these two moments, fusing existence with essence, the real with the ideal. Consequently, the real basis for a "proof" of the existence of God is a reflexive awareness that the very activity of our mind, which

necessarily elaborates a proof and arrives at an affirmation of the existence of God as an identity of existence and essence, the real and the ideal, was put into motion a priori by the absolute subject and not originally by an idea which one proposes freely to thought. By means of this reflection on the combined dialectic of thought and action embracing the totality of our being, we are led into the presence of a person and not, as would be the case at the term of a pure speculation, to the possession of an abstract idea.

This affirmation of the absolute, however, is by no means possession of the absolute; our idea of the absolute is by no means that idea in itself and for itself.

Without doubt the ontological proof never has all the value for us that it has in itself. For it (the idea of the absolute) is never absolute except there where there is perfect idea of perfection itself, there where the essence is real and the existence ideal. (Confer *L'Action* [1893], p. 348.)

Precisely this difference, which Thomas notes, between the idea of the absolute which is in us and the idea the absolute has of itself, in Blondel's opinion provides the stimulus for that further action which is the function and the value of the idea. The affirmation of the existence of the absolute represents, then, only the beginning of a new dialectic of thought and action which has as its purpose "to penetrate the very mystery of perfection."

What Blondel sought from the beginning by means of his principle of immanence was "an opening by means of which a transcendent could enter into our subjectivity without in any way destroying our freedom and existential uniqueness." He was certain that he found that opening in terms of the ontological argument. The only subjectivism which he can be accused of is an absolute subjectivism: "That which disconcerts us in ourselves is the fact that we cannot be one with ourselves; that which disconcerts us in it (the absolute) is the absolute unity of being, knowing, and acting. It is a subject in which everything is subject." (Confer *L'Action* [1893], p. 349.)

FATHER WALTER E. STOKES (Loyola Seminary and Fordham University):

You stirred up new interest in Blondel—some are surprised to see the similarities between Blondel's thought and the classical American Philosophers. Would you suggest a comparison between the major themes of American philosophy and Blondel's thought? And if there are similarities, as I believe there are, what do you think accounts for them?

FATHER McNeill (Reply to Father Stokes):

Many people have called my attention to the similarity that exists between Blondel's thought as expressed in my paper and the thought of the classical American philosophers. I was already familiar with the direct contact that William James established with Blondel, the use that James made of Action in his own works, and the correspondence between them. (Confer "William James and M. Blondel by F. Scott in *New Scholasticism*, No. 32 [Jan. 1958], pp. 32-44.) Father Stokes' own recent lectures and writings on the philosophy of Whitehead have led me to believe that there is a close correspondence in many essential

insights there. Father Vincent Potter has called my attention to the startling similarity between the logic of moral life proposed by Blondel and that of Peirce. However, due to my lack of familiarity at any depth with the thought of these philosophers, the best I can do is make some probable suggestions as to what these similarities are and what accounts for them.

Blondel continually insisted that his philosophy of action was part of an intellectual evolution and in definite continuity with a tradition. He identified that tradition in the field of moral philosophy as beginning with Spinoza's *Ethics*, passing through Kant's *Critic of Practical Reason*, Fichte's *Theory of Science*, the early Schelling's *Transcendental Idealism*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* and ending in the positive philosophy of the final Schelling's *Philosophy of Revelation*. It was a dialectical process of meditating on these works, assimilating what they had to contribute, and trying to carry on that evolution one step further, that led Blondel to the insights of his philosophy of action. His statements give the impression that he felt that his search was merely a part of a universal movement of thought beyond the limits reached by Schelling and Hegel:

Two centuries are called to witness that the method and the conclusions of the thesis *L'Action*, far from being an isolated effort against the tides, had been prepared and even demanded by a speculative effort which was thoroughly in accord with the exigencies of reason. (Confer "L'Evolution du Spinozisme et l'Accès qu'elle ouvre à la Transcendance," *L'Archivo di Filosofia*, Vol. XI, No. IV [December, 1932], 1-2.)

Most of the classical American philosophers, I believe, arrived at their insights in the same intellectual tradition and climate as Blondel. Although it seems to me that, in general, Blondel put a stronger stress on continuity, the Americans on reaction.

Most obviously the central feature of Blondel's philosophy, which relates him to the American philosophical tradition in general, was his pragmatism, that is to say, his reaction against the exaggerated rationalism of German idealism and his insistence that action itself has the power to synthesize in the real order what remains incompatible and even contradictory in purely abstract thought. In this sense it can be said that Blondel accepted the pragmatic norm that the true and the good is what works. In fact, at one point Blondel even toyed with the idea of naming his philosophy of action pragmatism. (Confer "Action," *Vocabulaire Technique et Critique de la Philosophie*, Andre Lalande Ed., I [1927] p. 17; I [1947] p. 21.)

However, when Blondel became more familiar with American style pragmatism, he explicitly rejected that title in order to avoid confusion of what he considered radically different philosophies. The reason for this reaction lay in what Blondel understood was an exaggerated anti-rationalism and anti-metaphysical spirit in American pragmatism with a resulting failure to give thought as such an organic role in the dialectic of human life. Blondel was aware that there was a similarity to his philosophy in the stress American pragmatism placed on the concrete individual. But he felt that what was understood as the nature of that concrete individual was radically different in both systems. He felt that the individual in pragmatism was understood in a material sense with a resulting stress on relativism. Pragmatism lacked, in his opinion, the insight into the role the existential and

spiritual subject plays in the dialectic of life. In Blondel's philosophy that existential individual is paradoxically the "concrete universal," and it is by his moral commitments that man achieves his existential individuality precisely in achieving his universality. In fact, the entire stress on the moral self-creativity of man, which Blondel felt was the distinctive mark of his philosophy of action, seemed to him to be missing in American pragmatism. Finally, as a consequence of missing the existential individual, Blondel felt that on the plane of methodology pragmatism failed to see "that there is only one way to seize the existing individual subject as such and deal with it in a legitimate philosophical manner, that is to refuse to try to make it an object or content of consciousness and be content to seize it immediately in self-consciousness in the progressive unfolding of life."

It was for these reasons that Blondel judged that beneath the apparent similarities of his philosophy with American pragmatism laid a deeper and far-reaching divergence both in method and conclusions. Whether or not his reasons in this judgment were justified I must leave to the judgment of the reader.

FATHER EDWARD V. STEVENS (Canisius College):

Blondel alleges that the consequences of an option against transcendence are that man's will resolves itself into the real contradiction of error, along with the privation of self, the world, and God. How would you show this to a naturalist such as, for example, John Dewey? He explicitly opts against transcendence and yet he is quite successfully devoted to the achievement of finite truths by methodic inquiry in the context of a philosophy centered around the enrichment of the quality of human experience in every dimension including the moral, the aesthetic and the religious. Where, in such a naturalistic approach, are these consequences alleged by Blondel: the contradiction of error or the privation of self and the world?

FATHER McNeill (Reply to Father Stevens):

The best I can do in answer to Father Steven's question is to suggest possible answers to the difficulty he points out and leave the problem of the applicability of these answers to John Dewey's philosophy to those who are more cognizant of his thought.

First of all, I should call attention to a possible ambiguity in the use of the word 'transcendence' itself. If John Dewey understood by transcendence, man's submission to a truth, a value, or a being which lies totally outside himself and has no foundation in his own existential reality, then Blondel is totally in agreement with him in opting against such a transcendence. In fact, it was what he considered to be the legitimate objections of the humanistic naturalists of his acquaintance against such an understanding of God as transcendent which led Blondel to adopt his principle of immanence, and led to his understanding of God as "immanent transcendent."

If, however, Dewey can be said to have been fully aware of that concept of transcendence and to have rejected it also, in that case a second possibility arises. Father Stevens speaks of Dewey's successful devotion to finite truths by methodic inquiry even in

the area of religious experience. Now the central insight of Blondel is that there are certain types of subjective experiential knowledge which can only be had through commitment. To quote Saint John: “No one has ever seen God. But if a man loves, he knows God.” The philosopher working on the reflective plane has to be systematically a detached and objective observer of the influence of religious beliefs on the “quality of human experience.” This Blondel himself does within the framework of his phenomenological investigation of religious experience in the second stage of the dialectic of life.

However, to live that experience on the plane of action and be existentially fulfilled by it necessarily means in *some way* to “opt for transcendence.” The only other possible alternative would be some sort of cynical detachment and amused superior observation as to “how the masses are rendered content by their illusions.” I say it is necessary *in some way* to opt for transcendence. Blondel was quite aware that it is a matter of frequent occurrence that those who deny transcendence on the reflective philosophical level for various reasons are living it implicitly on the level of action and commitment; whereas, all too frequently those who affirm it intellectually, do not live it.

This reflection leads to a third possibility. One could perhaps maintain the unlikely thesis that Dewey opted against transcendence, not only on the reflective philosophical level, but also on the level of action and commitment. As I have tried to point out in the preceding article, the transcendental implication of the necessary dynamism of the human will cannot be known explicitly on the experiential level except on condition that the will objectify it by freely ratifying it. Consequently, those who freely choose on the level of commitment to refuse all transcendence, by reason of that refusal itself, can never recognize it as refusal. For to acknowledge refusal is already in some sense to have transcended it in an act of fidelity to the call of truth immanent in the will. Such a free choice, then, would necessarily lead the one who made it to a denial, *de facto* but not *de jure*, of all transcendence.

It remains incomprehensible to me, however, how anyone who has effectively opted against all transcendence, even the transcendence of self in an act of love for another, can possibly escape the Sartrean conclusion that human life is ultimately meaningless and absurd, all human life is poised on an abyss of nothingness. How such a conclusion can be said to “enrich the quality of human experience” is beyond me.

Blondel is well aware that the simple assertion “God is,”—implying that man experiences his oneness with transcendent life—goes beyond the realm of reflective philosophy as such. This is the gist of the text quoted above: “Philosophy (as reflection) has as its function to determine the content of thought and the postulates of action without ever trying to furnish the reality which it studies, or enclosing the life whose ultimate conditions it determines, or attempting to realize that which it necessarily understands as real.” It was for this reason that Blondel added the famous last line to his thesis:

However, if it is permitted to add one last word, which goes beyond the domain of all human sciences and the competence of philosophy, that unique word capable of expressing perfect certitude, which cannot be communicated to another because it can only rise up from the intimacy of a completely personal action, a word which is itself an action, then it is necessary to say it: “C’est.”