

## THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY ACCORDING TO MAURICE BLONDEL

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**T**HE ONE-HUNDREDTH anniversary of the publication of *L'Action* offers a good occasion to reflect upon the thought of a philosopher who has had a great influence on Catholic theology in this century. Part of his influence has been at a philosophical level, mainly through the effect of his conception of the subjective dynamism of the human spirit on the study of the thought of Thomas Aquinas, beginning with Joseph Maréchal and Pierre Rousselot and continuing in the various forms of "transcendental" Thomism. At the same time, Blondel's thought has provided a great stimulus with regard to questions in the properly theological sphere, chiefly through his analysis of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural. His rejection of any description of the natural and the supernatural as two parallel, self-contained orders, with no intrinsic connection between them, and his corresponding affirmation of the natural necessity of the supernatural opened up new ground for reflection which has been extensively worked by several of the major theologians of the century, most notably Henri de Lubac and Karl Rahner.

A crucial aspect of Blondel's understanding of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural is his conception of the relationship between philosophy and religion, specifically the Christian religion. A central intention of Blondel's philosophical work was the formulation of a philosophy which would be truly adequate to the Christian faith, a philosophy which does not subsume religion under philosophy as Hegelian philosophy does, but one which recognizes both the unavoidable necessity of an infinite God for human life and its own limitations in fathoming the mystery of such an infinite God. For Blondel, philosophy can neither ignore religion nor substitute a philosophical solution for that offered by religion. Rather, in strictly philosophical terms, one can only discern a *natural* necessity for a *supernatural* religion. He argues that philosophy's recognition of this necessity has been prepared by "the secret presence of the Christian idea" within modern philosophy, beginning with Spinoza's appropriation of the Christian conception of beatitude. According to Blondel, the presence of the Christian idea at the very heart of modern philosophy has caused a fundamental restructuring of philosophy itself, so that mod-

ern philosophy has been in a certain crucial sense "Christianized." In this article we shall examine some of Blondel's early essays in order to see his understanding of the progress of the relationship between Christian faith and philosophy, an evolution which Blondel considered to have reached a qualitatively new stage with the appearance of his own philosophy of action.

#### THE MIDDLE AGES

In his famous "Letter on the Exigencies of Contemporary Thought in the Area of Apologetics and on the Method of Philosophy in the Study of the Religious Problem,"<sup>1</sup> Blondel explains that the decisive phase of the development of a philosophy adequate to Christian faith began with the encounter in the Middle Ages between ancient philosophy and what he calls "the Christian idea."<sup>2</sup> For Blondel, there are two essential attributes of ancient philosophy which are important for the later development of philosophy. First, this philosophy sees itself as sovereign and self-sufficient. Here we find the problem of what Blondel calls "intellectualism,"<sup>3</sup> with its assumption of the complete self-sufficiency of speculation, and with the replacement of all practice by speculation.

<sup>1</sup> "Lettre sur les exigences de la pensée contemporaine en matière d'apologétique et sur la méthode de la philosophie dans l'étude du problème religieux," *Annales de Philosophie chrétienne* 131-32 (janvier à juillet 1896); reprinted in *Les premiers écrits de Maurice Blondel* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1956); English translation by Alexander Dru and Illyd Trethowan, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964). References to the French text (hereafter: "Lettre") will be followed by references to that English translation; all translations which appear here, however, are my own.

<sup>2</sup> The brief overview of the development of philosophy in its relation to Christianity which Blondel offers in the "Lettre" (54-66; ET 171-82) is painted in very bold strokes and clearly lacks nuance and historical precision. Almost forty years later, when reviewing this early work, Blondel himself will characterize this passage as "too cavalier and rather artificial" (*Le problème de la philosophie catholique* [Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1932] 40 n. 1). While unsatisfactory as a historical account, this overview is nevertheless very revealing of what Blondel considered the contribution of his own philosophy of action as a philosophy of religion, particularly when linked to his much more thorough study of the evolution of Spinozism in modern thought, which we shall examine below, where he treats many of the same questions.

<sup>3</sup> Only in his early works does Blondel use the term "intellectualism" in a pejorative sense. Later on, having read Pierre Rousselot's *L'intellectualisme de Saint Thomas* (1908), Blondel will be more precise and use instead the term "rationalism" to describe the one-sided view which separates the life of the mind from the rest of life, reserving the term "intellectualism" for the position that takes into account the fullness of the role of the intelligence in human life; see "Le vrai et le faux intellectualisme," *Revue du Clergé français* 99 (1<sup>er</sup> sept. 1919) esp. 385-86 n. 1; "Le procès de l'intelligence," in *Le procès de l'intelligence* (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1922) esp. 228, n. 1.

Now, by its method, by all its aspiration, this anterior philosophy tended to envelop the entire order of thought and of reality in order to pronounce absolutely on the reality of the objects of every nature, in order to place theory above practice or to substitute theory for practice, and in order to find in itself a kind of divine sufficiency, with the first and last word about things.<sup>4</sup>

Second, this ancient philosophy claims a further self-sufficiency, in relation to the divine and to the solution of the question of human destiny, for this philosophy claims that philosophical contemplation is itself the highest thing to be attained in human life, since it is a participation in the divine life.

Yes, its tacit postulate is the divinity of Reason, not only in the sense that God is *Logos* or that the Word is God, but in the sense that our speculative knowledge contains the supreme virtue and of itself consummates in us the divine work. ὁ νοῦς δοκεῖ ἀρχειν καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι καὶ ἐννοίαν ἔχειν περὶ καλῶν καὶ θεῶν, εἴτε θεῖος ὢν καὶ αὐτός, εἴτε τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν τὸ θεϊότατον.<sup>5</sup>

As divine, then, this ancient philosophical speculation cannot but think itself self-sufficient on all levels.

It is this perfect self-sufficiency which made ancient philosophy such an unlikely partner for Christian theology. According to Blondel, the reason that the union was able to endure at least a short time was that philosophy did not at first recognize the nature of the limitation put upon it by theology. With Christian theology, a whole new domain opened up above the order of nature, the supernatural. Philosophy did not feel as if it were giving up anything, for it still reigned supreme in its accustomed realm of the natural. Moreover, its domain seemed enlarged by the opening of the realm of the supernatural.

And so, under the triumphant discipline of faith, not noticing even that its empire was divided, so much was it enlarged, reason had first of all submitted itself, without experiencing any constraint: reason had not withdrawn, it was even able to advance and to grow, without refusing to cede the first place, as

<sup>4</sup> "Or, par sa méthode, par toute son aspiration, cette philosophie antérieure tendait à envelopper l'ordre entier de la pensée et de la réalité, pour se prononcer absolument sur la vérité des objets de toute nature, pour préposer ou substituer la théorie à la pratique, et pour trouver en soi, avec le premier et le dernier mot des choses, une sorte de suffisance divine" ("Lettre" 55; ET 172).

<sup>5</sup> "Oui, son postulat tacite, c'est la divinité de la Raison, non pas seulement en ce sens que Dieu est Λόγος ou que le Verbe est Dieu, mais en ce sens que notre connaissance spéculative enferme la vertu suprême et d'elle-même consomme en nous l'œuvre divine" (ibid. 55; ET 172–73). "The intellect is thought to rule and to lead, and to have insight into things good and divine, being either itself divine, or the part of us that is the most divine" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7).

if in deference, a place which had never been occupied, never been coveted, never been suspected.<sup>6</sup>

Although philosophy advanced in gaining some idea of this previously unsuspected realm of the supernatural, it had to concede ultimate sovereignty in this realm to faith. Within the division of competences between philosophy and theology was implied "a secret principle of limitation, entirely contrary to the attitude of ancient thought, which naïvely had faith in its unique sovereignty and in its own sufficiency."<sup>7</sup>

According to Blondel, such a "hybrid marriage" could not last. On the one hand, Christian faith could not tolerate being subordinated to human reason; on the other hand, philosophy could not accept a denial of what it considered part of its essential nature, its omnicompetence and self-sufficiency. For philosophy, the highest human destiny, the relationship to the divine, was to be solved by philosophy and by philosophizing. The aim of ancient philosophy was to attain the divine life through contemplation.

It is the act of rational contemplation which constitutes this divine life in the human person, an act which has its origin and its term in ourselves; and it is metaphysics which is the full science of being, which encloses being, which procures being and, as one might say, salvation itself. So that, far from seeing here a kind of tooting stone for the supernatural, we must recognize that, in advance, it is its implicit exclusion, that there is, in this lofty and sublime doctrine, a kind of permanent candidacy of pure philosophy for the highest rank, however high one might set it.<sup>8</sup>

Blondel remarks that the Middle Ages were well named, for they represent "a provisional, but essentially unstable equilibrium."<sup>9</sup> The attempt at producing a grand synthesis was doomed to failure, as he saw

<sup>6</sup> "Aussi, sous la discipline triomphante de la foi, la raison ne remarquant même pas que son empire était partagé, tant il était agrandi, s'était-elle d'abord soumise, sans en éprouver aucune gêne: elle n'avait pas reculé, elle pouvait même avancer et croître, sans refuser de céder, comme par déférence, la première place, une place qui n'avait jamais été occupée, jamais été convoitée, jamais été soupçonnée" ("Lettre" 56; ET 173).

<sup>7</sup> "... un secret principe de limitation, tout contraire à l'attitude de la pensée antique, laquelle avait naïvement foi en son unique souveraineté et en sa propre suffisance" (ibid.).

<sup>8</sup> "C'est l'acte de la contemplation rationnelle qui constitue cette vie divine en l'homme, un acte qui a son origine et son terme en nous; et c'est la métaphysique qui est la pleine science de l'être, qui enferme l'être, qui procure l'être et, si l'on peut dire, le salut même. En sorte que, loin de voir ici comme une pierre d'attente pour le surnaturel, il faut reconnaître que, d'avance, c'en est l'exclusion implicite, qu'il y a, dans cette hautaine et sublime doctrine, comme la candidature permanente de la philosophie pure au rang suprême, quelque haut qu'on le mette" (ibid. 56-57; ET 173-74).

<sup>9</sup> "... un équilibre provisoire, mais essentiellement instable" (ibid. 57; ET 174).

it, for Christian faith and ancient philosophy were ultimately incompatible.

In a word, therefore, the School admitted a matter which could not at all be assimilated by ancient reason, and a form which was not capable of containing its object: so that finally it was necessary either to save one from the other or to oppose one to the other.<sup>10</sup>

What had been brought together had to split apart again. Here Blondel points out that the Reformers, in rejecting philosophy, accepted philosophy's own self-definition; "in protesting against the intellectualism of Aristotle and the Scholastics, Luther authenticated the very form under which rationalist reason pretended to absolute empire, as if reason were all or nothing."<sup>11</sup>

Philosophy itself, however, was affected by this passing association with the Christian idea of the Middle Ages. When at the end of the Middle Ages philosophy regained its autonomy and its sovereignty with regard to religion, philosophy would not continue as it had before its encounter with Christianity. Having glimpsed this higher domain claimed by faith, philosophy would attempt to occupy this highest place itself.

And it is precisely because Scholasticism opened up to reason the immensity of the horizons of faith that, left to itself, this human reason was not able thereafter to forget the world which had been glimpsed nor to leave off finding the equivalent of it; there is, in the human person, a supreme place to be taken: Whose will it be?<sup>12</sup>

Philosophy will continue with the same basic conception which was present in Aristotle's view of philosophy, believing in its omnicompetence. Through this postmedieval attempt to provide a philosophical substitute for the Christian realm of the supernatural, however, the Christian idea is introduced into modern philosophy and the presence

<sup>10</sup> "En deux mots donc, l'École admettait une matière qui n'était point assimilable à la raison antique, et une forme qui n'était pas capable de contenir son objet: si bien qu'il fallait finalement ou soustraire ou opposer l'une à l'autre" (ibid.).

<sup>11</sup> "En s'indignant contre l'intellectualisme d'Aristote et des scolastiques, Luther authentiquait la forme même sous laquelle la raison rationaliste prétendait à l'empire absolu, comme si elle était tout ou rien" (ibid. 58; ET 175).

<sup>12</sup> "Et c'est justement parce que la scolastique a ouvert à la raison l'immensité des horizons de la foi que, livrée à elle-même, cette raison humaine ne saurait plus oublier le monde entrevu ni renoncer à en trouver l'équivalent; il y a, en l'homme, une place suprême à prendre: à qui sera-t-elle?" (ibid.).

of this idea within the development of philosophy will cause a fundamental restructuring of philosophy itself.<sup>13</sup>

So that, in claiming back its full independence and in transforming itself according to a law of autonomy, (philosophy) is in reality worked upon by the Christian idea against which it strives: in triumphing, it comes back to that Christian idea, but quite otherwise than it had gone out from it, vanquished in its apparent victory, victorious in its apparent defeat.<sup>14</sup>

The final result of this development will be a philosophy truly adequate to the Christian idea, i.e. one that can relate to it in its very necessity as supernatural.

#### SPINOZA

The origin of this incorporation of the Christian idea into the project of modern philosophy, according to Blondel, is in the thought of Spinoza. Prior to Spinoza, Descartes had kept the realms of faith and reason radically separate. The problem which Blondel saw in scholastic philosophy, the tendency to view faith and reason as representing parallel orders with no point of intersection,<sup>15</sup> he saw in Descartes as well.

The profound vice of *his* Christianity is to place on one side the absolute mystery which the will alone attains by grace and on the other side the absolute clarity of thought which rests within itself, wholly sovereign in its own domain; it is to suppress all rational preparation for faith, all work of reason in faith, all understanding of faith.<sup>16</sup>

While Descartes was content to leave faith and the question of destiny outside of philosophy, in its own separate and parallel realm, Spinoza,

<sup>13</sup> While Blondel will later acknowledge the inadequacy of this section of the "Lettre" as a historical summary, he will continue to maintain the basic idea that modern philosophy has been fundamentally restructured because of the secret presence of the Christian idea; see *Le problème de la philosophie catholique* 31 n. 1.

<sup>14</sup> "En sorte que, en revendiquant sa pleine indépendance et en se transformant selon une loi d'autonomie, [la philosophie] est en réalité travaillée par l'idée chrétienne contre laquelle elle lutte: en triomphant, elle y revient, mais tout autrement qu'elle n'en était partie, vaincue dans son apparente victoire, victorieuse dans son apparente défaite" ("Lettre" 59; ET 175-76).

<sup>15</sup> See *ibid.* 25, 27, 37; ET 144, 146, 154-55.

<sup>16</sup> "Le vice profond de son christianisme, c'est de mettre d'un côté le mystère absolu que la volonté seule atteint par grâce, et de l'autre la clarté absolue de la pensée qui se repose, pleinement souveraine chez elle; c'est de supprimer toute préparation rationnelle à la foi, tout travail de la raison dans la foi, toute intelligence de la foi" ("Le christianisme de Descartes," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 4 [1896]; reprinted in *Dialogues avec les philosophes* [Paris: Aubier, 1966] 57).

by bringing God and the human relationship to God within the realm of philosophy, introduces the possibility of an "integral philosophy."

By his manner of posing the problem, Spinoza, perhaps the first, embraces the field of integral philosophy, comprising not only the question of Science and that of the organization of the present life, but the question of destiny and of eternal life understood in the very precise sense of the Christian tradition.—By the method, by going all the way to the limit, as far as the height of reason, Spinoza introduced into the competence of philosophical examination ideas which, while having historically and theologically a character specifically and positively religious, nonetheless have a rational face, a reality immanent to the human person.<sup>17</sup>

Although Descartes was an intellectualist in Blondel's pejorative sense, his intellectualism was not as ambitious or as thoroughgoing as Spinoza's. "The first in modern times, Spinoza posed in a radical form this principle that the mind (*l'esprit*) can find in itself alone and by itself alone all the truth necessary for life."<sup>18</sup> Spinoza's intellectualism is more radical, and more consistent, than Descartes's, for it seeks to provide the answers to all human questions, leaving nothing outside its competence, including the question of human destiny. It is in encompassing the question of destiny that philosophy takes on the character of an ethics, as it did for Spinoza.

Blondel's understanding of the development of modern philosophy very closely parallels that of his friend Victor Delbos. In the article "One of the Sources of Modern Thought: The Evolution of Spinozism," Blondel weaves together a review of Delbos's book, *The Moral Problem in the Philosophy of Spinoza and in the History of Spinozism*, with an exposition of his own thoughts on the development of modern philosophy in a way that makes it difficult to see where Delbos's analysis

<sup>17</sup> "Par sa façon de poser le problème, Spinoza, le premier peut-être, embrasse le champ de la philosophie intégrale, comprenant non pas uniquement la question de la Science et celle de l'organisation de la vie présente, mais la question de la destinée et de la vie éternelle entendues au sens fort précis de la tradition chrétienne.—Par la méthode, Spinoza allant jusqu'au bout, jusqu'au haut de la raison, introduit dans la compétence de l'examen philosophique des idées qui, pour avoir historiquement et théologiquement un caractère spécifiquement et positivement religieux, n'en ont pas moins une face rationnelle, une réalité immanente à l'homme" ("Un interprète de Spinoza: Victor Delbos 1862–1916," *Chronicon Spinozanum* 1 [1921] 290–300; reprinted in *Dialogues avec les philosophes* [Paris: Aubier, 1966] 279).

<sup>18</sup> "Le premier dans les temps modernes, Spinoza posa sous une forme radicale ce principe que l'esprit peut trouver en lui seul et par lui seul toute la vérité nécessaire à la vie" ("Une des sources de la pensée moderne: L'évolution du Spinozisme," *Annales de Philosophie Chrétienne* 128 [juin et juillet 1894]; reprinted in *Dialogues avec les philosophes* [Paris: Aubier, 1966] 13). See Victor Delbos, *Le problème moral dans la philosophie de Spinoza et dans l'histoire du Spinozisme* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1893) 8.

ends and Blondel's own ideas begin.<sup>19</sup> In the book, Delbos points out that, in contrast to Descartes, Spinoza "did not have the refuge which Religion offered."<sup>20</sup> Spinoza's rigorous rational critique had led him to be excommunicated from the Jewish synagogue in Amsterdam. While Descartes had recourse to religion alongside his purely rational pursuits, Spinoza could only attempt to replace what religion had offered with something in the realm of philosophy.

With as much tranquillity as audacity, he asked thought to replace in him what thought had destroyed. It is by a natural transition that he passes from critique to research, and he was doubtless the first in modern times to pose in a radical form this principle, that the mind can find in itself alone and by itself alone all the truth necessary for life.<sup>21</sup>

The key to the transition here is that Spinoza takes the idea of human beatitude and makes it the center of philosophical investigation. Delbos refers to the beginning of Part 2 of the *Ethics*, where, having examined the nature of God or Substance in Part 1, Spinoza explains that he now intends to investigate not everything that results from the eternal and infinite being, for there would be an infinite number of such results, "but only those which are able to lead us, as it were by the hand, to the knowledge of the human mind and its highest blessedness."<sup>22</sup>

Blondel and Delbos both agree that Spinoza's focus on the idea of beatitude reflects his attempt to translate religious and particularly Christian concepts into rational philosophy. Delbos argues that Spinoza's philosophy "attempts to constitute by the power of free thought alone the equivalent of that which Christianity had brought to men; and in fact it often seeks to translate certain Christian conceptions into rationalist language, in order to appropriate them for itself."<sup>23</sup> Blondel similarly affirms that the fact that there is for Spinoza a problem of

<sup>19</sup> At some points Blondel repeats Delbos's analysis almost word for word.

<sup>20</sup> "... n'avait pas cet abri qu'offrait la Religion" (Delbos, *Le problème moral* 8).

<sup>21</sup> "Avec autant de tranquillité que d'audace, il demanda à la pensée de remplacer en lui ce que la pensée avait détruit. C'est par une transition naturelle qu'il passe de la critique à la recherche, et il fut sans doute le premier dans les temps modernes à poser sous une forme radicale ce principe, que l'esprit peut trouver en lui seul et par lui seul toute la vérité nécessaire à la vie" (ibid.).

<sup>22</sup> *Ethics*, Part II, Preface, trans. R. H. M. Elwes, *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1884) 2.82; *Opera quotquot reperta sunt*, ed. J. Van Vloten and J. P. N. Land (The Hague: Martin Nijhoff, 1913) 1.73.

<sup>23</sup> "... tâche de constituer par la seule force de la pensée libre l'équivalent de ce que le Christianisme avait apporté aux hommes; et de fait elle cherche souvent à traduire dans un langage rationaliste, pour se les approprier, certaines conceptions chrétiennes" (Delbos, *Le problème moral* 216).



human beatitude reveals the secret influence of the Christian idea. For Blondel, Spinoza had introduced into philosophy "the question of destiny and of eternal life understood in the very precise sense of the Christian tradition."<sup>24</sup>

Although Blondel never clearly spells out just what he means by the Christian idea, there seem to be two basic elements involved. First of all, there is the idea of beatitude as defined not only in terms of some kind of eternal life for the individual, but, what is more particularly Christian, in terms of a sharing in the very life of God, a participation in the infinite life by the finite individual.<sup>25</sup> For Spinoza, the union between the mind and the whole of nature is a union of the self with God, constituting beatitude and eternal life for the self.

The intellectual love of the mind towards God is that very love of God whereby God loves himself, not in so far as he is infinite, but in so far as he can be explained through the essence of the human mind regarded under the form of eternity; in other words, the intellectual love of the mind towards God is part of the infinite love wherewith God loves himself.<sup>26</sup>

Spinoza will describe this highest human good as "our salvation, or blessedness, or freedom." He clearly identifies this beatitude with that offered in religion. "This love or blessedness is, in the Bible, called Glory, and not undeservedly."<sup>27</sup> This idea of beatitude is thus the higher place which was unknown to ancient philosophy and which has been introduced by Christianity; with Spinoza it became the object of philosophical investigation after the breakup of the medieval synthesis.<sup>28</sup>

The question remains as to just what separates Aristotle's intellectualism from that of Spinoza, since Aristotle did describe contempla-

<sup>24</sup> "... la question de la destinée et de la vie éternelle entendues au sens fort précis de la tradition chrétienne" ("Un interprète de Spinoza" 279).

<sup>25</sup> Blondel considered the ultimate promise of Christian faith to be deification (*Les Exigences philosophiques du christianisme* [Presses Universitaires de France, 1950] 112). Correspondingly, he insisted that, in strictly philosophical terms, human perfection necessarily required a kind of deification, whether in terms of the equation of the willed will and the willing will (see *L'Action*) or in terms of the coincidence of the noetic and pneumatic aspects of thought (see *La Pensée*).

<sup>26</sup> *Ethics*, Part V, prop. xxxvi, 2.264-5; *Opera* 1.267.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Blondel argues that whereas the ancients had a strong sense of the limits of a human being, "the moderns kept from the Christian Revelation the idea of the divine transcendence of man" (*La Pensée* 1, 4th ed. [Paris; Presses Universitaires de France, 1948] 314-15). Similarly, Blondel asserts that "the Hellenic conceptions" have enclosed "the world and man in closed cycles and in this limited wisdom which forbids infinite hopes to an ephemeral and limited being" (*ibid* 172).

tion as a participation in the divine life as well. What traces of the Christian idea are found in Spinoza which are absent in Aristotle? Although Blondel himself never makes this clear, Delbos's comparison of Spinoza with Aristotle offers an important clue. Delbos's analysis implies that there is a central difference in the fact that Spinoza conceives of beatitude for the *individual*. Delbos argues that while Aristotle had an idea of beatitude in the sense that contemplation is a participation in the divine life, this was not beatitude for the individual as individual.

Aristotle says expressly that the pure intelligence comes to the human person from outside (*thyrathen*), which he distinguishes from the individual as the imperishable is distinguished from the perishable, that it is truly another kind of soul. Nothing therefore is eternal of that which is individual: this is indeed the sense which it is necessary to give, despite the diversity of the commentaries, to the theory of Aristotle. It is in remaining very close to this theory that Averroes considers that the active intellect, alone eternal, is in reality the common reason of humanity, that consequently humanity alone is eternal, while individuals perish.<sup>29</sup>

Spinoza, by contrast, means to uphold the eternal significance of the individual. While for Spinoza the soul is necessarily the soul of a body, the soul does not completely pass away because there is something of the body that cannot completely pass away: "the idea which expresses it in the divine thought."<sup>30</sup>

The body has not only an existence produced, developed, and destroyed by the power of exterior causes; it has also, as everything which is, an absolute reason for being (*raison d'être*), an eternal essence. And this eternal essence, from which derives its tendency to persevere in being, is not a universal notion in which all bodies are confounded without distinction: it is the essence which makes it such as it is, it is the essence of such and such a human body, *hujus*

<sup>29</sup> "Aristote dit expressément que le pur intellect vient à l'homme du dehors (θύραθεν), qu'il distingue de l'individu comme l'impérissable se distingue du périssable, qu'il est véritablement un autre genre d'âme. Rien donc n'est éternel de ce qui est individuel: c'est bien là le sens qu'il faut donner, en dépit de la diversité des commentaires, à la théorie d'Aristote. C'est en restant tout près de cette théorie qu'Averroès considère que l'intellect actif, seul éternel, est au fond la raison commune de l'humanité, que par conséquent l'humanité seule est éternelle, tandis que les individus périssent" (Delbos, *Le problème moral* 192). Aquinas rejected this idea both as untrue in itself and as unfaithful to the mind of Aristotle (*Summa theologiae* 1, q. 76, a. 2). In the absence of any discussion of this question, we can only conjecture how Blondel would respond. First of all, it is not certain that he would have been aware of Thomas's position, for he had very little direct knowledge of Thomas's works in the early part of his career. Secondly, he might well have disputed Thomas's opinion about the mind of Aristotle.

<sup>30</sup> "... l'idée qui l'exprime dans la pensée divine" (Delbos, *Le problème moral* 193).

*et illius corporis humani*. From which it follows that the essential of our individuality is truly and eternally founded in God; that which explains us and that which helps us to explain things is not separable from ourselves. We are from all eternity individual Reasons.<sup>31</sup>

While Aristotle had emphasized the unbridgeable gap between human and divine, denying the possibility of friendship between humans and God,<sup>32</sup> Spinoza posits a real participation of the finite individual in the eternal life of an infinite God.<sup>33</sup>

The second element of the Christian idea emphasized by Blondel follows from this idea of human beatitude. The question of beatitude is at the same time a question of destiny, in that it is something which must be achieved. There is an alternative, for we can also fail to attain our destiny, our blessedness. We must choose it. That this is what Blondel has in mind is corroborated by his agreement with Delbos, whom Blondel quotes approvingly:

In the very manner in which Spinoza poses the problem, in the manner in which he understands happiness, he introduces the idea of what religious consciousness calls salvation; and the destiny of the human person appears as an alternative between eternal death and eternal life.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> "Le corps n'a pas seulement une existence produite, développée et détruite par la puissance des causes extérieures; il a aussi, comme tout ce qui est, une raison d'être absolue, une essence éternelle. Et cette essence éternelle, d'où dérive sa tendance à persévérer dans l'être, n'est pas une notion universelle dans laquelle se confondent tous les corps: c'est l'essence qui le fait tel qu'il est, c'est l'essence de tel ou tel corps humain, *hujus et illius corporis humani*. D'où il suit que l'essentiel de notre individualité est véritablement et éternellement fondé en Dieu; ce qui nous explique et ce qui nous sert à expliquer les choses n'est pas séparable de nous-mêmes: nous sommes de toute éternité des Raisons individuelles" (ibid).

<sup>32</sup> *Magna Moralia* 2.11.6 1208b26–32; see *L'itinéraire philosophique de Maurice Blondel*, propos recueillis par Frédéric Lefèvre, 2d ed. (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1966) 163.

<sup>33</sup> That Blondel has in mind this idea of the individuality of beatitude as that which distinguishes Spinoza from Aristotle is further supported by the fact that Blondel sees the relation of the finite and the infinite as the central issue in the development of Spinozistic philosophy. As we shall see below, he argued that by absorbing the finite individual as such into infinite being, thereby introducing the finite into the infinite, Spinoza created an instability, a tension between the finite and the infinite, between being and becoming, which was not present in Aristotelian philosophy, an instability which would be the determining factor in the evolution of Spinozistic philosophy.

<sup>34</sup> "Dans la façon même dont Spinoza se pose le problème, dans la façon dont il entend le bonheur, il fait entrer l'idée de ce que la conscience religieuse appelle le salut; et la destinée de l'homme apparaît comme une alternative entre la mort éternelle et la vie éternelle" ("Un interprète de Spinoza" 274–75). In this article Blondel quotes some unpublished papers of Delbos, particularly a conference which Delbos gave at the École Normale d'Auteuil in 1916.

There is thus a definite practical dimension to the Christian idea which Spinoza has incorporated into philosophy.

Delbos argues that this practical ethical concern stands at the center of Spinoza's entire philosophical effort. In support of this view, Delbos quotes from *De intellectus emendatione*, where Spinoza maintains that his object is to produce the highest human *natura* or "character," a perfection to which all philosophy, indeed all the sciences, must ultimately be directed.

I wish to direct all sciences to one end and aim, so that we may attain to the supreme human perfection which we have named; and therefore, whatsoever in the sciences does not serve to promote our object will have to be rejected as useless.<sup>35</sup>

Philosophy has a purpose, which is to resolve the question of human beatitude and of human destiny.

Spinoza thus declares several times: the knowledge of the true interests him much less by its procedures and its theoretical results than by its practical consequences; he even affirms that it is the problem of human beatitude which is to impose upon the diverse sciences their unity.<sup>36</sup>

Blondel accepts this judgment that ethical concern stands at the center of Spinoza's thought, describing the *primum movens* of Spinoza's work as "the intention of resolving the problem of human beatitude, and of resolving it by the resources of thought alone."<sup>37</sup> Both aspects of the question, the intention to solve the question of human beatitude and the claim to do so on the basis of thought alone, are important to Blondel. If we recognize that ethical concern stands at the center of Spinoza's philosophy, we must also recognize that the ethical problem is ultimately to be resolved by philosophy itself, in thought, by understanding Being and one's position in it. The desired highest human character or *natura* which is to be the aim of all science is marked by "the knowledge of the union existing between the mind and the whole of nature."<sup>38</sup>

As to Spinoza's project to resolve "the problem of human beatitude,

<sup>35</sup> *On the Improvement of the Understanding*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes, in *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza* 2.7; *Opera* 1.6.

<sup>36</sup> "Spinoza le déclare donc à plusieurs reprises: la connaissance du vrai l'intéresse beaucoup moins par ses procédés et ses résultats théoriques que par ses conséquences pratiques; il affirme même que c'est le problème de la béatitude humaine qui doit imposer aux sciences diverses leur unité" (Delbos, *Le problème moral* 3).

<sup>37</sup> "... le dessein de résoudre le problème de la béatitude humaine, et de le résoudre par les seules ressources de la pensée" ("Une des sources de la pensée moderne" 14).

<sup>38</sup> *On the Improvement of the Understanding* 2.6; *Opera* 1.6.

and to resolve it by the resources of thought alone," Blondel sees two major principles implicit in this conception of philosophy. First, a "radical anthropomorphism." Here Blondel quotes the aforementioned passage at the beginning of Part 2 of the *Ethics*, where, of an infinite number of things necessarily resulting from the divine nature, Spinoza restricts his investigation to "only those which are able to lead us, as it were by the hand, to the knowledge of the human mind and its highest blessedness."<sup>39</sup> Secondly, an "absolute monism":

[Spinoza] admits not only that the moral problem is to impose upon the diverse sciences their unity, but also that the science thus constituted suffices for life; that the truth known, without any exterior addition, furnishes the whole solution; that adequate thought embraces beatitude. Thus is posed the principle of an absolute monism.<sup>40</sup>

Blondel points out that by attempting to solve the problem of human destiny, which is his prime motivation, within the realm of philosophy, Spinoza contracts the moral problem, that of human destiny, and the metaphysical problem, that of knowledge of being, into a single problem, one that is to be solved by philosophy. "Indeed, since everything is subordinated to the moral problem, it follows from that, by an inevitable reciprocity, that this problem itself becomes everything, and that the ethics takes on an ontological character."<sup>41</sup>

While the moral problem seems to dominate everything else, in fact the moral problem is effectively swallowed up by the metaphysical problem. "The moral problem has so well absorbed the metaphysical problem that, remaining the sole question, it answers the entire speculative curiosity of the mind; so that finally the metaphysical problem absorbs the moral problem."<sup>42</sup> The moral problem thus moves out of the practical sphere altogether.

It is not a practical solution, but an intellectual one, that the practical problem requires: the understanding [*l'entendement*] is the instrument of salvation; the

<sup>39</sup> *Ethics*, Part II, Preface, 2.82; *Opera* 1.73.

<sup>40</sup> "[Spinoza] admet non seulement que le problème moral doit imposer aux sciences diverses leur unité, mais que la science ainsi constituée suffit à la vie; que la vérité connue apporte, sans addition extérieure, toute la solution; que la pensée adéquate enveloppe la béatitude. Ainsi est posé le principe d'un monisme absolu" ("Une des sources de la pensée moderne" 15).

<sup>41</sup> "En effet, puisque tout est subordonné au problème moral, il suit de là, par une inévitable réciprocity, que ce problème même devient tout, et que l'*éthique* revêt un caractère ontologique" (ibid.).

<sup>42</sup> "Le problème moral a si bien absorbé le problème métaphysique que, resté l'unique question, il répond à toute la curiosité spéculative de l'esprit; en sorte que finalement le problème métaphysique absorbe le problème moral" (ibid.).

truth known by itself alone makes up happiness in its entirety, and this truth man finds in himself and by himself as the adequate expression of his own individual essence. The only morality is to reintegrate ourselves into the universal unity which embraces all the forms of thought and of life.<sup>43</sup>

This is radical intellectualism, for here the human intellect is truly omnissufficient.

Blondel maintains that there are two hidden presuppositions which form the basis of this radically intellectualist formulation of the problem of human destiny, two concepts which will eventually have to be rejected in order to move from a doctrine of immanence to his own doctrine of transcendence through a method of immanence. First, the idea that the solution is found within the purely human realm: "we carry in our life the whole secret of the unique enigma." Second, the idea that the solution is purely intellectual: "this secret is, in us, entirely contained and comprehended by the understanding alone."<sup>44</sup>

#### THROUGH KANT TO HEGEL

The next crucial stage in the evolution of modern philosophy, which for Blondel means above all the development of Spinozism, will be prepared by the encounter of Spinozism with the Kantian critique. In a sense, Kant represents the exact opposite of Spinoza's philosophy. For Spinoza, the action of finite individuals is mere appearance and our knowledge of Substance is the essential; for Kant, our knowledge of being is only at the phenomenal level, and the moral duty of the freely acting subject is the essential. "For the former, it is the free movement and the synthetic progress of action; for the latter, it is the development of analytic thought and the determinism of science which is appearance or phenomenon."<sup>45</sup> Whereas Spinoza had the moral problem swallowed up in the metaphysical problem, Kant upholds the moral problem at the expense of metaphysical knowledge. With Spinoza, we have "the reintegration of the human person in the whole, the enveloping of morality in the universal determinism where it can

<sup>43</sup> "Ce n'est pas une solution pratique, mais intellectuelle, que comporte le problème pratique: l'entendement est l'instrument du salut; la vérité connue fait à elle seule tout le bonheur, et cette vérité, l'homme la trouve en soi et par soi comme l'expression adéquate de sa propre essence individuelle. La seule morale, c'est de nous réintégrer dans l'unité universelle qui enveloppe également toutes les formes de la pensée et de la vie" (ibid. 16).

<sup>44</sup> "Nous portons dans notre vie tout le secret de l'énigme unique"; "ce secret est, en nous, contenu tout entier et compris par le seul entendement" (ibid. 30).

<sup>45</sup> "Pour le premier, c'est la marche libre et le progrès synthétique de l'action; pour le second, c'est le développement de la pensée analytique et le déterminisme de la science qui est l'apparence ou le phénomène" (ibid. 24).

be a result, never a principle of action"; with Kant, we have "the concern not of that which is, but of that which we ought to be, the moral absolute of freedom, the autonomy of the person, the conviction that that which is, is not the *thing*, but that which makes itself, that which acts."<sup>46</sup>

There is, however, a fundamental unity in this opposition between Spinoza and Kant. Each system turns out to be the inverse image of the other, each remaining incomplete in itself while borrowing from the other, "the one sustaining itself only by invisible borrowings from the other."<sup>47</sup> In moving from the metaphysical to the moral, Kant was only reinstating an element which was also inherent, yet suppressed, in Spinoza's project.

In considering duty as an absolute, in affirming the autonomy of the will, in erecting above the analytic procedures of the understanding the synthetic workings of practical reason, Kant does nothing other than take as the principle of an original system the postulate which remained hidden at the heart of Spinozism.<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, Spinoza had emphasized an element which Kant could only suppress, but not eliminate, from his own system: "Spinoza had made manifest, from the origin of his *Ethics*, this absolute of the object which Kant left to subsist invincibly."<sup>49</sup> While Kant was preoccupied with the *fieri* of moral practice, he could not eliminate all consideration of Being. At the same, while Spinoza focussed on the problem of Being, since he saw this as an *ethical* problem, he could not dispense with the *fieri* of moral practice. For Blondel, this essential ethical concern stands at the root of both systems: "that is to say that their intention is to explain, to reduce or to produce in us this *becoming* which manifestly constitutes our role as human and our moral destiny."<sup>50</sup> The

<sup>46</sup> "... la réintégration de l'homme dans le tout, l'enveloppement de la moralité dans l'universel déterminisme où elle peut être un résultat, jamais un principe d'action"; "... le souci non de ce qui est, mais de ce que nous devons être, l'absolu moral de la liberté, l'autonomie de la personne, la conviction que ce qui est, ce n'est pas la *chose*, mais ce qui se fait, ce qui agit" (ibid.).

<sup>47</sup> "... l'un ne se soutenant que par d'invisibles emprunts à l'autre" (ibid. 25).

<sup>48</sup> "En considérant le devoir comme un absolu, en affirmant l'autonomie de la volonté, en érigeant au-dessus des procédés analytiques de l'entendement les démarches synthétiques de la raison pratique, Kant ne fait que prendre pour principe d'un système original le postulat qui restait caché au cœur du Spinozisme" (ibid. 24-25).

<sup>49</sup> "Spinoza avait mis en évidence, dès l'origine de son *Ethique*, cet absolu de l'objet que Kant laissait invinciblement subsister" (ibid.).

<sup>50</sup> "... c'est-à-dire que leur dessein est d'expliquer, de réduire ou de produire en nous ce *devenir* qui constitue manifestement notre rôle d'homme et notre destinée morale" (ibid. 24).

systems born out of this single concern, however, take opposite and equally incomplete forms, leaving them both fundamentally unstable.

After Kant, Spinozistic philosophy in Germany as seen by Blondel attempts to work out the proper relationship between the two poles of being and becoming. The problem was inherent in Spinoza's philosophy from the beginning, for he had implicitly introduced becoming into Being by his ethical concern. For Spinoza, what is morally necessary is that we recognize that we as individuals do not have an independent or isolated existence, but are rather modes of the one infinite and eternal Substance. Yet the very fact that we, as part of Being, move from nonrecognition to recognition of this truth, itself introduces becoming into Being. According to Blondel, "the movement which dissipates error and suppresses passion, is itself also the effect of a necessity, that of a development or of a *fieri* in being."<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, the existence of the individual becomes crucial to the life of being, for Being only knows itself through the knowledge of individuals; the divine Thought is only able to think itself through the thought of individuals. Noting that Spinoza attributes to God no knowledge of universals, but only that of individual things, Blondel points out how

Spinoza considers the function of the Divine Thought to be to constitute individuals in itself; and it knows itself only in them. According to the penetrating interpretation which M. Delbos gives to the thought of Spinoza, there is therefore, consubstantial with the God who *is* from all eternity, a God who from all eternity *becomes*.<sup>52</sup>

Since Substance exists and knows and loves itself through its infinite modifications, "not only is our morality our life in God, it is furthermore the very life of God."<sup>53</sup> Here we see the intrinsic relation between Spinoza's anthropomorphism and his monism.

The human problem, to which, at the origin, the total problem seemed to be subordinated, appears thenceforth as a capital element in the solution of the divine problem. And thus the anthropomorphism of Spinoza becomes the very essence of his monism.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> "Le mouvement qui dissipe l'erreur et supprime la passion, est, lui aussi, l'effet d'une nécessité, celle d'un développement ou d'un *fieri* dans l'être" (ibid. 16).

<sup>52</sup> "Spinoza considère que la fonction de la Pensée divine est de constituer en elle des individus; et elle ne se connaît qu'en eux. Selon l'interprétation pénétrante que donne M. Delbos de la pensée de Spinoza, il y a donc, consubstantiel au Dieu qui *est* de toute éternité, un Dieu qui de toute éternité *devient*" (ibid. 17).

<sup>53</sup> "... non seulement notre moralité c'est notre vie en Dieu, mais encore c'est la vie même de Dieu" (ibid.).

<sup>54</sup> "Le problème humain auquel, à l'origine, semblait être subordonné le problème



For Blondel, this weakness created a fundamental instability in Spinozism, yet one which permitted "the long and rich evolution of thought of which it was the point of departure."<sup>55</sup>

Given the inherent anthropomorphism in Spinoza's thought, the move to subjective idealism after Kant was a natural one. This allowed the complete working out of a philosophy based on Spinoza's original conception. The movement culminates in Hegel. By trying to absorb becoming into Being, Spinoza introduced becoming into Being itself. Hegel solves this problem by making becoming itself absolute Being. While, on the one hand, "Spinoza had, in summary, limited himself to making finite being, evil, and free choice vanish as so many illusions into the unity which he conceived in its abstract form," Hegel pushes "this Spinozistic notion of immanence" to its logical conclusion:

Because, according to him, even though the relations of things among themselves or with the mind which thinks them are accidental and exterior to them, it is these connections which, in their systematic ensemble, constitute all the true and all the real; this universal relativity is the absolute itself.<sup>56</sup>

This conclusion by Hegel was implicit in the way Spinoza had posed the philosophical problem at the start.

One could not, indeed, suppress first of all or reduce the being of the relative except by posing implicitly the becoming of the absolute; but, from the moment when one has put the relative of becoming in the absolute of being, it is necessary to put the absolute in the relative of becoming. Spinoza had absorbed our being and all being in Being; this was, in the final account, to resolve Being into our being, and, under the pretext of rendering us immanent to it, to render it immanent to us.<sup>57</sup>

In Hegel, the consequences of Spinoza's conception of philosophy, including its combination of radical anthropomorphism and monism,

total, apparaît dès lors comme un élément capital dans la solution du problème divin. Et ainsi l'anthropomorphisme de Spinoza devient l'essence même de son monisme" (ibid.).

<sup>55</sup> ". . . la longue et riche évolution de pensée dont il a été le point de départ" (ibid.).

<sup>56</sup> "Spinoza s'était, en somme, borné à faire évanouir l'être fini, le mal, le libre arbitre, comme autant d'illusions, dans l'unité qu'il concevait sous sa forme abstraite. . . . Car, selon lui, bien que les relations des choses entre elles ou avec l'esprit qui les pense leur soient accidentelles et extérieures, ce sont ces rapports qui, dans leur ensemble systématique, constituent tout le vrai et tout le réel; cette relativité universelle, voilà l'absolu même" (ibid. 29).

<sup>57</sup> "On ne pouvait, en effet, supprimer d'abord ou réduire l'être du relatif qu'en posant implicitement le devenir de l'absolu; mais, du moment où l'on a mis le relatif du devenir dans l'absolu de l'être, c'est une nécessité de mettre l'absolu dans le relatif du devenir. Spinoza avait absorbé notre être et tout être dans l'Être; c'était, en définitive, résoudre l'Être dans notre être, et, sous prétexte de nous rendre immanent à lui, le rendre immanent à nous" (ibid.).

were finally worked out. "Spinoza had sublimated the human into God; Hegel conferred on the human person the role of constituting God with the human itself."<sup>58</sup> As the culmination of Spinozism, Hegel's system, however, still had the defects of Spinoza's original conception and its radical intellectualism. "Under the guise of developing all the grandeur of the moral destiny of the human person by implicating it in the unity of the total question, this is to restrain doubly the universal problem to the conditions of knowledge, and of human knowledge."<sup>59</sup> The speculative solution is still for Hegel the answer to the moral problem. The solution is also purely human.

#### PHENOMENISM AND *LA CRITIQUE IMMANENTE*

Although Spinozism had in a sense come to its logical term in Hegel, its influence continued to bear fruit in other forms. In the next stage of the evolution of philosophy bearing the Spinozistic stamp, the *phénoménisme* of Hippolyte Taine, we see the influence of Spinoza in a quarter well outside the mainstream of German idealism. While Taine was in many ways a positivist in the tradition of Comte or of the English empiricists, he was also influenced by Spinoza and Hegel, and he sought to effect a sort of mediation between the two extremes of English empiricism and German idealism. For Blondel, the crucial link with Spinozistic philosophy is in the fact that the explanation of phenomena is sought *immanently*, within the system of phenomena.

The master idea of Spinozism, the very one which seems to outlive all the defunct forms of the system, is the notion of immanence: things carry in themselves their explanation and their justification, by the sole fact that there is a reintegration of them in the whole which comprehends them; man carries in himself the law of his destiny, without it being necessary to seek the judgment of his thoughts and of his actions in that which they are not, because it is in that which they are in fact.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> "Spinoza avait sublimé l'humain en Dieu; Hegel confie à l'homme le rôle de constituer Dieu avec l'humain même" (ibid. 30).

<sup>59</sup> "Souvent coureur de développer toute la grandeur de la destinée morale de l'homme en l'impliquant dans l'unité de la question totale, c'est restreindre doublement le problème universel aux conditions de la connaissance, et de la connaissance humaine" (ibid. 29-30).

<sup>60</sup> "L'idée maîtresse du Spinozisme, celle même qui semble survivre à toutes les formes caduques du système, c'est la notion d'immanence: les choses portent en elles leur explication et leur justification, par cela seul qu'il y en a réintégration dans le tout qui les comprend; l'homme porte en soi la loi de sa destinée, sans qu'il faille chercher le jugement de ses pensées et de ses actions dans ce qu'elles ne sont pas, car il est dans ce qu'elles sont en effet" (ibid. 31).

Phenomenism, for its part, leaves aside questions of ontology. Herein lies the essential contribution of Phenomenism, for that which had an ontological status as a *doctrine* of immanence now becomes only a *method* of immanence.

While Phenomenism takes as its object the phenomenon with its laws as defined by science, Blondel argues that the way for this move to the phenomenon was opened by the development of Hegelian philosophy itself with its insistence on the absolute importance of the concrete particular, the phenomenon. "The phenomenon, if one really reflects on it, is precisely the true object to which, in the final analysis, the Hegelian dialectic applies itself; that is the true scientific notion which this philosophy of the absolute has elaborated."<sup>61</sup> Taine's phenomenism continues this focus on the phenomenon, but now the phenomenon is taken as no more than that defined by the natural sciences.

It is of the phenomenon, it is of the scientific law that it is true to say that being and knowledge coincide: the *a posteriori* data are penetrated and, so to speak, reconstituted by the rational initiative which renders them intelligible. Thus that which was still ontology or cosmology for Hegel, becomes, in the thought of Taine for example, a study of scientific psychology or a concern of the natural and social sciences.<sup>62</sup>

Such phenomenism represents a method rather than a doctrine of immanence, for it treats phenomena as a system to be understood with regard to their internal relations, without any ontological affirmation.

Using Delbos's phrase,<sup>63</sup> Blondel speaks of this method as *la critique immanente*, because "it limits itself to comprehending the internal organization of things and works without relating them to an exterior type or to a preconceived criterion."<sup>64</sup> Blondel stresses that this rejection of dogmatism does not have its origins in Kantianism. "No doubt Kant contributed to detaching reason from the pretension of imposing upon the objects of knowledge an absolute rule, a judgment founded in

<sup>61</sup> "Le phénomène, voilà, si l'on y réfléchit bien, le véritable objet auquel, en dernière analyse, s'applique la dialectique hégélienne, voilà la véritable notion scientifique qu'a élaborée cette philosophie de l'absolu" (ibid.).

<sup>62</sup> "C'est du phénomène, c'est de la loi scientifique qu'il est vrai de dire que l'être et le connaître coïncident: les données *a posteriori* y sont pénétrées et, pour ainsi dire, reconstituées par l'initiative rationnelle qui les rend intelligibles. Ainsi ce qui, chez Hegel encore, était ontologie ou cosmologie, devient, chez Taine par exemple, étude de psychologie scientifique ou préoccupation des sciences naturelles et sociales" (ibid. 32).

<sup>63</sup> See Delbos, *Le problème moral* 520–27.

<sup>64</sup> "Elle se borne à comprendre l'organisation interne des choses et des œuvres sans les rapporter à un type extérieur ni à un critérium préconçu" ("Une des sources de la pensée moderne" 33).

being. But the essence of the immanent critique does not consist in this negative reserve."<sup>65</sup> The source is rather in Spinoza.

The idea which constitutes the foundation is that every act, every product of a human being or of nature has its value, as well as its reality, determined by the ensemble of which it is a part: to claim to relate works or things to a higher exemplar is fundamentally, according to Spinoza, to subordinate them to our empirical individuality.<sup>66</sup>

The key to this critique is in its *immanence*. "There is but one manner of judging, and that is to comprehend; and to comprehend everything, to explain everything, is to introduce the contingent and the irrational itself into the mesh of the necessity of reason; it is, in a sense, to justify everything."<sup>67</sup> While remaining a purely immanent critique, however, refusing to make any judgments on the basis of external criteria, *la critique immanente* ultimately cannot make judgments at all. It seeks only to explain rather than to judge. Blondel quotes Edmond Schérer, according to whom, "in the eyes of the learned, everything is true, everything is well in its place; nothing, for the learned, is any longer either truth or error."<sup>68</sup> Blondel argues that this position represents a critique only in an incomplete and superficial sense. "The understanding (*intelligence*) of everything, it seems, supposes and engenders sympathy for everything; and the severe duty of comprehending culminates in the refined art of enjoying."<sup>69</sup>

For Blondel, this idea of immanent critique as a method rather than a doctrine is the essential contribution of Phenomenism to modern philosophy. Phenomenism itself, however, represents only a provisional and inadequate start at a full-blown method of immanent cri-

<sup>65</sup> "Kant, sans doute, a contribué à dépendre la raison de la prétention d'imposer aux objets de la connaissance une règle absolue, un jugement fondé dans l'être. Mais ce n'est point dans cette réserve négative que consiste l'essence de la critique immanente" (*ibid.*).

<sup>66</sup> "L'idée qui en fait le fond, c'est que tout acte, tout produit de l'homme ou de la nature a sa valeur, comme sa réalité, déterminée par l'ensemble dont il fait partie: prétendre ramener œuvres ou choses à un exemplaire supérieur, c'est au fond, selon Spinoza, les subordonner à notre individualité empirique" (*ibid.*); see Delbos, *Le problème moral* 521.

<sup>67</sup> "Il n'y a qu'une manière de juger, c'est de comprendre; et tout comprendre, tout expliquer, c'est faire entrer le contingent et l'irrationnel même dans la trame de la nécessité et de la raison; c'est, en un sens, tout justifier" (*ibid.*).

<sup>68</sup> "Aux yeux du savant, tout est vrai, tout est bien à sa place; rien, pour lui, n'est plus ni vérité ni erreur" (*ibid.* 34). The full quote, drawn from "Hégel et l'Hégélianisme," *Mélanges d'histoire religieuse*, 2d ed., 369-75, is found in Delbos, *Le problème moral* 524-5.

<sup>69</sup> "L'intelligence de tout suppose, semble-t-il, et engendre la sympathie pour tout; et le devoir sévère de comprendre s'achève dans l'art raffiné de jouir" (*ibid.*); see Delbos, *Le problème moral* 525.

tique. The critique must be rigorously pushed further to the realization that there is, "immanent to the fact or to the act, not only that which explains it, but that which judges it."<sup>70</sup> By progressing further along the lines of the immanent critique, one is able to make absolute judgments, for there is an absolute, an infinite, to be found everywhere immanent to the phenomena. The true and complete immanent critique "is founded on this idea that, in each state of nature and of the spirit, the infinite is present, which is to say that without departing from the fact we must determine in it the internal relations which constitute the truth of it and which are its law."<sup>71</sup>

According to Blondel, the progress of immanent critique has led to the possibility of a different solution to the Spinozistic problem of the relationship between being and becoming, the absolute and the relative, the infinite and the finite. Spinoza and Hegel represent two opposite possibilities. "To comprehend, for Spinoza, was to exclude everything that does not enter into Being. To comprehend, for Hegel, is to include in Being everything which, while appearing to deviate from it, does nothing but develop it."<sup>72</sup> In neither case is there a principle of judgment.

For the first, the truth is one; there is no way to judge that which is outside of it. For the other, the truth is never one; there is no way to judge what it is in itself, since it becomes, and since in making itself it is the measure of its own right to be (*droit à être*).<sup>73</sup>

Pushed to its conclusion, however, immanent critique reveals a third possibility, namely, that the absolute is present in the relative, being in becoming, without eliminating the difference between the two by reducing one to the other or suppressing one of the terms.

In summary, Spinoza posited an absolute difference between that which is and that which is not; Hegel posited an identity of contraries. But, by its natural evolution, the critique is led to bring together these two conceptions into a new

<sup>70</sup> "... immanent au fait ou à l'acte, non seulement ce qui l'explique, mais ce qui le juge" (ibid. 34).

<sup>71</sup> "... se fonde sur cette idée que, dans chaque état de la nature et de l'esprit, l'infini est présent, c'est-à-dire que sans sortir du fait nous devons déterminer en lui les relations internes qui en constituent la vérité et qui en sont la loi" (ibid.).

<sup>72</sup> "Comprendre, pour Spinoza, c'était exclure tout ce qui n'entre pas dans l'Être. Comprendre, pour Hegel, c'est inclure dans l'Être tout ce qui, paraissant en sortir, ne fait que le développer" (ibid. 35).

<sup>73</sup> "Pour le premier, la vérité est une; il n'y a pas lieu de juger ce qui est en dehors d'elle. Pour l'autre, la vérité n'est jamais une; il n'y a pas lieu de juger ce qu'elle est en elle-même, puisqu'elle devient, et puisqu'en se faisant elle est la mesure de son propre droit à être" (ibid.).

form of thought: instead of believing that to comprehend everything is to include everything, either in the relative, or else in the absolute, we come to see that to comprehend completely is to discern absolute differences in the relative itself.<sup>74</sup>

Since there is an absolute immanent in the relative which is not ultimately identical with the relative, there is a principle of judgment immanent to the relative. "The critique discovers, immanent to the relative of thoughts and of human actions, a principle of absolute differentiation which judges them and separates them radically."<sup>75</sup>

#### THE PHILOSOPHY OF ACTION

At this point the philosophy of action appears, for the key to discerning the infinite within the phenomenal is for Blondel a turn to the study of action. In conscious action the idea of the transcendent, of an infinite, necessarily appears, as a necessary presupposition of our very consciousness. With the idea of the infinite comes awareness of the inevitable disproportion between the willing will and the willed will. It is the willing will, giving rise to the necessary idea of the infinite, which provides that absolute yet immanent norm present in all action. "In the transcendent of immanent thought and action [philosophy] finds an internal principle of absolute judgment."<sup>76</sup> Because of this immanent norm, Blondel discerns a "logic" inherent in all actions:

In our general and profound will, there is a logic of which we have only to discern the present exigencies implied in what we think and posited by what we do in fact, in order to draw out the complete laws of thought and of action, and in order to recover, in the fragmentary appearances of a life in the process of becoming, that which it ought to be, thanks to the clearer understanding of that which it cannot not be.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> "Spinoza posait, en somme, une différence absolue entre ce qui est et ce qui n'est pas; Hegel posait une identité des contraires. Or, par son évolution naturelle, la critique est amenée à rapprocher ces deux conceptions dans une forme nouvelle de pensée: au lieu de croire que tout comprendre c'est tout inclure soit dans le relatif, soit dans l'absolu, on en vient à voir que comprendre tout à fait c'est marquer dans le relatif même des différences absolues" (ibid.).

<sup>75</sup> "La critique découvre, immanent au relatif des pensées et des actions humaines, un principe d'absolue différenciation qui les juge et les sépare radicalement" (ibid. 36).

<sup>76</sup> "Dans le transcendant de la pensée et de l'action immanentes [la philosophie] trouve un principe interne de jugement absolu" ("Lettre" 67; ET 183). This principle, presented very schematically here, is elaborated at great length in *L'Action*.

<sup>77</sup> "Il y a, en notre volonté générale et profonde, une logique dont nous n'avons qu'à discerner les actuelles exigences impliquées dans ce que nous pensons et posées par ce que nous faisons en effet, pour dégager les lois complètes de la pensée et de l'action, et pour retrouver, sous les apparences fragmentaires d'une vie en voie de devenir, ce qu'elle

Knowing what action cannot fail to be, we know better what action ought to be.

The turn to the study of action at this point is crucial, for a one-sidedly intellectualist philosophy could never find this immanent norm, since it is not present simply in speculation.

For, if it is possible and necessary to judge, to approve or to condemn, it is because it is not sufficient to comprehend: although capable of penetrating everything, the understanding is not everything; it does not take the place of action in the very moment in which it renders action intelligible.<sup>78</sup>

The absolute principle of judgment, the infinite, is found immanently, but in the conscious *action* of the finite subject.

It is through action that the fundamental differences in our destinies are justified, the absolute qualifications of good and evil in our works; in a word, it is through action that a principle of transcendental truth becomes immanent in us without the thought which discovers this immanence obviating the need for action or changing in any way the character of this transcendent.<sup>79</sup>

The true immanent critique must therefore be necessarily a philosophy of action.

The progress of modern philosophy, which has been essentially a progress of intellectualism, thus leads beyond intellectualism. In the study of action, Blondel finds the necessary correction for the two intellectualist assumptions present in Spinozism from the beginning: (1) that the solution to the problem of human destiny is purely speculative, and (2) that it lies within the human realm. With regard to the first point, Blondel notes that from Spinoza, through Kant and Hegel, to Taine, the solution was always formulated as being within the realm of human knowing.

If there is in fact a radical vice in all modern philosophy, it is to believe, without even becoming aware of it, that the speculative solution to the problem of life, in whatever form this solution is presented, is equivalent or supe-

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doit être, grâce à l'intelligence plus claire de ce qu'elle ne peut pas ne pas être" (ibid. 67-68; ET 183).

<sup>78</sup> "Car, s'il est possible et nécessaire de juger, d'approuver ou de condamner, c'est parce qu'il ne suffit pas de comprendre: quoique capable de tout pénétrer, l'entendement n'est pas tout; il ne supplée pas à l'action, au moment même où il la rend intelligible" ("Une des sources de la pensée moderne" 36).

<sup>79</sup> "C'est par l'action que se justifient les différences foncières dans nos destinées, des qualifications absolues de bien ou de mal dans nos œuvres; par elle, en un mot, qu'un principe de vérité transcendante devient immanent en nous sans que la pensée qui découvre cette immanence supplée à la nécessité ou change rien au caractère de ce transcendant" (ibid. 36-37).

rior to the actual solution; to the point that, even when one opposes practice to theory, one is still speaking of the theory of practice.<sup>80</sup>

Blondel sees the basic reason for this substitution of speculation for practice in the second point.

That which makes up the foundation of the whole enterprise is the desire, the need to see the problem of life absolutely resolved by the effort of the human person alone. But, of that which does not belong to us, of that which does not depend on us, it seems that thought, and thought alone, gives us a representation which itself does belong to us. If therefore it is necessary that the problem be resolved by the effort of the human person alone, it is also necessary that this be by the effort of thought alone, by free thought.<sup>81</sup>

The root of the problem of intellectualism thus lies in the way it relates philosophy to the infinite, to the supernatural.

Jean Lacroix judges that Blondel "was a philosopher of action, in the first place, only because he essentially wanted to be a philosopher of religion."<sup>82</sup> For Blondel the question of action and the question of religion are inextricably intertwined, for one cannot be a philosopher of action, cannot escape a one-sided intellectualism, without being a philosopher of religion. The key in both cases is for philosophy to recognize its limits. Blondel argues that "every doctrine of immanence implies a solution which is exclusively speculative."<sup>83</sup> As long as the solution is seen to be immanent to the human world, attainable by human capacities, philosophy will consider its speculation to be self-sufficient. While critical of Spinoza, and radically distinguishing phenomenon from noumenon, Kant merely created another form of immanence. Although Kant's philosophy recognizes "the irreducibility of the

<sup>80</sup> "S'il y a, en effet, dans toute la philosophie moderne, un vice radical, c'est de croire, sans même le remarquer, que la solution spéculative du problème de la vie, sous quelque forme qu'elle se présente, est équivalente ou supérieure à la solution effective; au point que, lors même qu'on oppose la pratique à la théorie, c'est encore de la théorie de la pratique qu'on parle" (ibid. 37).

<sup>81</sup> "Ce qui fait le fond de toute l'entreprise, c'est le désir, c'est le besoin de voir le problème de la vie absolument résolu par le seul effort de l'homme. Or, de ce qui ne nous appartient pas, de ce qui ne dépend pas de nous, il semble que la pensée, et la pensée seule, nous donne une représentation qui, elle, nous appartient. Si donc il faut que le problème soit résolu par le seul effort de l'homme, il faut aussi que ce soit par le seul effort de la pensée, par la libre pensée" (ibid. 37-38).

<sup>82</sup> Jean Lacroix, *Maurice Blondel: Sa vie, son oeuvre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963) 10; Engl. trans. by John C. Guinness, *Maurice Blondel: An Introduction to the Man and His Philosophy* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968) 22. See *L'itinéraire philosophique* 21-22; and the letter of Blondel to André Lalande for the article on "Action," in *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie* (4th ed., 1932) 19.

<sup>83</sup> "Toute doctrine de l'immanence implique une solution exclusivement spéculative" ("Une des sources de la pensée moderne 38).



two aspects of this dualism, it implies that this dualism itself is the *hen kai pan* [one and all] and that it contains the total solution.—It ends up being a new monism," this time beginning from the subject rather than from the object.<sup>84</sup> In Blondel's view, modern philosophy in its various forms is necessarily intellectualist because it remains committed to the idea of human self-sufficiency.

Because, if there is an idea common to the idealism of Kant and to the pantheism of Spinoza, an idea which is as the *prōton pseudos* [primary falsehood] of every exclusive rationalism, it is that man succeeds all by himself to reintegrate himself into the absolute and to make himself fully equal to his being or to his duty: that is precisely the point on which it is necessary to redress modern thought.<sup>85</sup>

While at one level intellectualism means the assertion of the self-sufficiency of speculation, the fundamental problem is its assertion of human self-sufficiency.

According to Blondel, only with the philosophy of action does philosophy truly come to recognize its limits, and those of human sufficiency in general. In this regard, he points to the change in philosophy over the centuries.

In the sixteenth century less than ever, philosophy in no way considers restraining itself or questioning itself: diffuse and indeterminate, it is all in all: it naïvely has faith in its competence, in its value, in its absolute capacity; it claims to attain objects even, and to apprehend the truth: to the point that between it and being, between life and knowledge, there is an identity whose questionableness is not even noticed.<sup>86</sup>

Now that the Christian idea has been at work within philosophy for centuries, however, the situation is different.

We see philosophy now tending more and more to specify itself, to criticize

<sup>84</sup> "... l'irréductibilité des deux aspects de ce dualisme, elle implique toujours que ce dualisme même est l'*έν και πάν* et qu'il enveloppe la solution totale.— Elle revient donc à un monisme nouveau" ("Lettre" 62; ET 178).

<sup>85</sup> "Car, s'il y a une idée commune à l'idéalisme de Kant et au panthéisme de Spinoza, une idée qui soit comme le *πρώτον ψεύδος* de tout rationalisme exclusif, c'est que l'homme réussit tout seul à se réintégrer dans l'absolu et à s'égaliser pleinement à son être ou à son devoir: voilà le point sur lequel il est urgent de redresser la pensée moderne" ("Une des sources de la pensée moderne" 38).

<sup>86</sup> "Moins que jamais au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, la philosophie ne songe nullement à se restreindre ou à se discuter elle-même: diffuse et indéterminée, elle est tout dans tout: elle a naïvement foi dans sa compétence, dans sa valeur, dans sa portée absolue; elle prétend atteindre les objets même et appréhender la vérité: au point qu'entre elle et l'être, qu'entre la vie et la connaissance il y a une identité dont on ne remarque même pas qu'elle fait question" ("Lettre" 59; ET 176).

itself and to limit itself. That is to say that it no longer takes knowledge as the complete substitute for actual existence; that by its own admission, thought, be it as thought which is adequate to reality or identical to being, does not suffice to make us equal either to ourselves or to things; that, if every speculative system can be surpassed by a progress of speculation, the only doctrine which is going to contain, in its center, a definitive truth, is that which does not seek its sufficiency in itself.<sup>87</sup>

When we come to the philosophy of action, we see that philosophy has finally come to limit *itself*. "The ancient conception of hegemony, or, more precisely, of the *autarkeia* of reason is thus destroyed by the progress of reason itself."<sup>88</sup> In the philosophy of action, philosophy itself comes to recognize that "the fundamental principle from which philosophy hangs as a science specifically defined, is that knowledge, even integral knowledge of thought and of life, does not take the place of nor suffice for the action of thinking and of living."<sup>89</sup>

Far from assuring human self-sufficiency, the philosophy of action comes to recognize in human action a perpetual self-dissatisfaction, which Blondel describes in terms of a disproportion between the willing will and the willed will. The life of action is marked by the constant struggle to equal ourselves caused by the presence of the infinite within us, not the serenity of an emancipation through speculation.

Vainly would we attempt with Spinoza to attain beatitude through an emancipation without struggle, through joy without sadness, through freedom without sacrifice, excluding mortification and suffering from the very idea of morality; it will never be true that the equation could be obtained by ourselves without having a rending produced between the actual and the ideal, without our undergoing in our personal development the painful intrusion of an infinite which dilates us and seems to make us burst open: it is thus under the form of duality and of contradiction that the progress of life is accomplished in

<sup>87</sup> "On voit à présent la philosophie tendre de plus en plus à se spécifier, à se critiquer et à se limiter elle-même. C'est-à-dire qu'elle ne prend plus la connaissance pour le substitut complet de l'existence effective; que, de son aveu, la pensée, fût-elle en tant que pensée adéquate à la réalité ou identique à l'être, ne suffit à nous égarer ni à nous-même ni aux choses; que, si tout système spéculatif peut être dépassé par un progrès de la spéculation, la seule doctrine qui doit contenir, en son centre, une vérité définitive, c'est celle qui ne cherche point sa suffisance en elle-même" (ibid.).

<sup>88</sup> "La conception antique de l'hégémonie ou, plus précisément, de l'*αὐτάρκεια* de la raison philosophique est ainsi détruite par le progrès de la raison même" (ibid. 66; ET 182).

<sup>89</sup> "Le principe fondamental auquel est suspendue la philosophie comme science spécifiquement définie, c'est que la connaissance même intégrale de la pensée et de la vie ne supplée ni ne suffit à l'action de penser et de vivre" (ibid. 64; ET 180).

us; there is a heterogeneity between that which we are and that which we will: humility is the path of glory; death and trial that of life.<sup>90</sup>

There is no purely human solution to this struggle, as Blondel argues in *L'Action*. In recognizing this lack of self-sufficiency, philosophy can at last become adequate to the Christian idea. The solution to the problem of human destiny is not speculative; it is practical. The solution is not human or natural; it is supernatural. Philosophy is autonomous, yet in its autonomy it recognizes its own lack of self-sufficiency, for philosophy shows us the necessary attitude of passivity in our need for the supernatural.

Absolutely impossible and absolutely necessary for man, that is properly the notion of the supernatural. Man's action goes beyond man; and all the effort of his reason is to see that he cannot, that he must not restrict himself to it. A deeply felt expectation of an unknown messiah; a baptism of desire, which human science lacks the power to evoke, because this need itself is a gift. Science can show its necessity, it cannot give it birth.<sup>91</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

According to Blondel, therefore, the presence of the Christian idea within philosophy has led to a fundamental advance of philosophy. With the philosophy of action, philosophy has come to recognize both (1) the necessity of action, renouncing the idea of the self-sufficiency of speculation, and (2) the necessity of a truly supernatural religion, giving up the idea of the self-sufficiency of natural human powers in general. It is important to remember here that this advance is an advance of philosophy itself, a philosophy which retains its proper distinction from theology and its proper autonomy with respect to the-

<sup>90</sup> "Vainement on essaierait, avec Spinoza, de nous faire atteindre la béatitude par l'affranchissement sans lutte, par la joie sans tristesse, par la liberté sans sacrifice, en excluant la mortification et la souffrance de l'idée même de la moralité; jamais il ne sera vrai que l'équation puisse être obtenue de nous-même sans qu'un déchirement se produise entre l'actuel et l'idéal, sans que nous subissions dans notre développement personnel l'intrusion douloureuse d'un infini qui nous dilate et semble nous faire éclater: c'est donc sous la forme de la dualité et de la contradiction que s'accomplit le progrès de la vie en nous; il y a hétérogénéité entre ce que nous sommes et ce que nous voulons: l'humilité est le chemin de la gloire; la mort et l'épreuve, celui de la vie" ("Une des sources de la pensée moderne" 38).

<sup>91</sup> "Absolument impossible et absolument nécessaire à l'homme, c'est là proprement la notion du surnaturel: l'action de l'homme passe l'homme; et tout l'effort de sa raison, c'est de voir qu'il ne peut, qu'il ne doit pas s'y tenir. Attente cordiale du messie inconnu; baptême de désir, que la science humaine est impuissante à provoquer, parce que ce besoin même est un don. Elle en peut montrer la nécessité, elle ne peut le faire naître" (*L'Action* [1893], 3d. ed. [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973] 388); Eng. trans.: *Action*, trans. Oliva Blanchette (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1984) 357.

ology. It is not an imposition upon philosophy from outside. According to Blondel, Christian theology has not imposed a solution upon philosophy, but rather the presence of the Christian idea within philosophy as an object of philosophical investigation has provided an occasion for philosophy to discover what is *de jure*, if not *de facto*, attainable by human reason without any special dependence upon grace.

The question remains as to whether the only philosophy which fulfills Blondel's criteria for a philosophy adequate to the Christian idea is his own philosophy of action. In the "Lettre," written three years after the publication of *L'Action*, Blondel asserts: "There has never yet been, strictly speaking, Christian philosophy: this name does not completely fit that which carries this name now, neither in philosophical terms, nor in Christian terms. If there can be one which fully merits this name, this philosophy remains to be constituted."<sup>92</sup> While Blondel will later apologize for the "the juvenile intrepidity" of such a statement,<sup>93</sup> recognizing that there are many complicated issues to be dealt with in determining whether or in what sense a philosophy can be called "Christian" or "Catholic,"<sup>94</sup> the fact remains that his idea that modern philosophy has been fundamentally restructured by the presence of the Christian idea implies that there is a special compatibility between modern philosophy and Christianity, so that prior to this development a philosophy which would be truly adequate to Christianity would not be possible.

Yet if one applies Blondel's own criteria to classical philosophy as appropriated by the great medieval thinkers, it is clear that modern philosophy is not the only philosophy which fulfills the basic requirements for a philosophy which is to be adequate to the Christian idea. First of all, the split between thinking and acting and the exaltation of speculation at the expense of practice which is prevalent in modern rationalism is not present in classical philosophy, particularly that of Aristotle, at least not as the radical separation which appears in modern philosophy. In fact, Blondel's own idea of action was heavily influenced by Aristotle,<sup>95</sup> a fact which helps to explain both Blondel's own

<sup>92</sup> "Il n'y a point eu encore, à la rigueur des termes, de philosophie chrétienne: à celle qui porte ce nom il ne convient tout à fait, ni philosophiquement, ni chrétiennement; s'il peut y en avoir une qui le mérite pleinement, elle est à constituer" ("Lettre" 54; ET 171).

<sup>93</sup> "Y a-t-il une philosophie chrétienne?" *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 38 (1931) 605; see *Le problème de la philosophie catholique* 128.

<sup>94</sup> In the early 1930s Blondel became involved in a major debate involving figures such as Émile Bréhier, Fernand Van Steenberghe, Étienne Gilson, and Jacques Maritain on the suitability and the meaning of the term "Christian philosophy."

<sup>95</sup> At several points in *L'Action*, Blondel explains his own idea of action with a Greek quote from Aristotle (139, 182, 197). Referring to the influence of the thought of Blon-

considerable *rapprochement* with Scholastic philosophy in his later works and the fact that his most enduring philosophical influence has been on thinkers in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition such as Maréchal and the succeeding generation of "transcendental" Thomists, who integrated many of Blondel's insights within a Thomistic framework. His critique of the split between speculation and practice would thus seem more pertinent to modern rationalism than to ancient philosophy.

Secondly, while it is true that ancient philosophy did have a sense of its own self-sufficiency with regard to religion, in the sense that the wise man could achieve happiness through contemplation, or *theoria*, this did not absolutely preclude the possibility of a destiny higher than that which had previously been considered possible. Aquinas discerned an opening to supernatural religion in Aristotle's philosophy, accepting the idea that the highest human happiness consists in contemplation, yet arguing that Christian faith allowed one to speak not only of the imperfect happiness which comes through the contemplation of being in this life, but also of the perfect contemplation of the First Cause and the direct vision of the Divine Essence which is made possible through union with Christ.<sup>96</sup> In this sense ancient philosophy is neither completely closed to supernatural religion nor necessarily committed to the idea of the absolute self-sufficiency of philosophy. Blondel wanted to bring out the danger of any facile appropriation of a ready-made philosophy which would be tacked onto the gospel as something which is ultimately heterogeneous and alien,<sup>97</sup> yet he underestimated the transformation which classical philosophy had undergone in the work of the Fathers and particularly of the medieval Scholastics.

While Blondel's claim that there is a special compatibility of modern philosophy with Christianity which is without parallel in classical philosophy may be overstated, and his idea of what counts as a philosophy adequate to Christianity may be more important than his historical judgment of how adequate certain philosophical systems have in fact been, his critique of what presented itself as Thomism in the 19th century revealed a real failing in the rationalistic scholastic philosophy and theology of the manuals. Just as his critique of the separation of thinking and acting applies most directly to modern ra-

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del's mentor, Émile Boutroux, Joseph Maréchal points out that the philosophy of Blondel grew out of "a soil prepared under the aegis of the Aristotelian spirit" (*L'Action de Maurice Blondel*, ed. André Hayen, *Convivium* 2 [juil.-déc. 1957] 8). In this study, Maréchal emphasizes the continuity of Blondel's thought with the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition.

<sup>96</sup> *Summa theologiae* 1-2, q. 3, a. 2, ad 4; a. 6, ad 1.

<sup>97</sup> *Le problème de la philosophie catholique* 39 n. 1.

tionalism rather than to ancient philosophy, his critique of the separation of philosophy and theology does not apply so much to Aquinas as to the rationalist Scholasticism of the 19th century,<sup>98</sup> where the natural and the supernatural seem to be two parallel orders with no intrinsic relation between them.<sup>99</sup> In fact, by asserting the natural necessity of the supernatural, Blondel had to a large extent reinvented Aquinas's idea of the natural desire to know God, a notion which had been forgotten or even denied by the Scholasticism of the manuals. Rather than introducing something entirely novel, in many ways Blondel rediscovered something which had been in Catholic tradition, but which had been misunderstood or forgotten.

At the same time, while Blondel was in substantial continuity with the tradition of Aquinas, the real novelty of his contribution is unmistakable, for Blondel worked out his notion of the natural necessity of the supernatural in the context of modern philosophy. Whereas for Aquinas, following ancient philosophy's focus on wisdom, the insertion point for the supernatural is the drive to know, for Blondel, following the modern preoccupation with freedom, the insertion point is the drive to realize one's will.<sup>100</sup> Thus by starting outside the narrow confines of 19th-century Scholasticism, but making the connection to Catholic tradition, Blondel was able to open up new perspectives on a traditional question, one which Aquinas had dealt with in terms of the natural desire to know God. While not an utter novelty, Blondel's conception of the natural necessity of the supernatural brings to Catholic tradition an expansion and an *approfondissement*.

<sup>98</sup> Blondel himself will later acknowledge this explicitly (ibid. 19, 27, 47).

<sup>99</sup> "Lettre" 25, 27; ET 144, 146.

<sup>100</sup> Although discernible in the early works, the ultimate congruence of these two positions is evident in the full context of Blondel's later trilogy on thought, being, and action: *La Pensée*, *L'Être et les êtres*, and *L'Action*.