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The Dialectic of Action in Maurice Blondel's L'Action (1893)

Gerard. Egan

Loyola University Chicago

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THE DIALECTIC OF ACTION IN MAURICE BLONDEL'S L'ACTION (1893)

by

Gerard Egan

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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LIFE

Gerard Egan was born in Chicago, Illinois, June 17, 1930.

He was graduated from Loyola Academy, Chicago, Illinois, June, 1948, and from Loyola University, June, 1953, with the degree of Bachelor of Arts. He studied philosophy at West Baden College of Loyola University and received the Degree of Licentiate in Philosophy in June, 1955.

From September, 1955 to June, 1957, the author taught French and Spanish at St. Ignatius High School, Chicago, Illinois. He began teaching philosophy at Loyola University in September, 1958.
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CHAPTER I

ORIENTATION

Blondel's first great work was L'Action (1895), his Sorbonne dissertation, and even though he wrote rather extensively later, he never radically changed the viewpoint, method, or spirit of this work. The evolution of his thought has not been linear, for it has grown by a deepening from within rather than by addition from without. Since L'Action is the first major statement of Blondel's thought, it may well be studied apart as a key to the growth and maturity of his ideas. This thesis may be considered generically as an introduction to the thought and spirit of L'Action; the specific approach, however, will consist in a delineation and clarification of Blondel's conception of the dialectical character of the integrated spiritual activity of man in relation to his destiny. An understanding of this central theme of the dissertation will serve as a basis for insights into the rest of his thought.

In his enthusiasm, as Blondel himself admits,¹ he attempted too much in his first work. Yet, though he soon planned to rework and expand L'Action, it was not until 1934 that the first part of his trilogy, La Pensée, appeared. This was soon to be followed by L'Être et les êtres and a second L'Action in two volumes. The interim was by no means sterile in either a literary or a

¹See Maurice Blondel, "Projet de Préface pour L'Action," Etudes Blondéliennes, directeurs Jacques Paliard et Paul Archambault (Paris, 1951—), I, 12. Hereafter, Etudes Blondéliennes will be designated EB.
philosophical sense. Blondel wrote constantly, mostly articles that appeared in various philosophical and theological reviews.\textsuperscript{2} Many of these articles were of a theological nature, for Blondel was keenly interested in the relation of philosophy to faith. Six books appear during this period, two dealing with Leibnitz, two on his master, Ollé-Lapruné, a work on Oberammergau, and a work dealing with the problem of Catholic philosophy.

It was only after forty years of teaching and philosophizing that Blondel considered that his thought and system had expanded and matured enough to be restated. The fact that the five volumes of his trilogy appeared within four years accentuates his apparent dislike for piecemeal thinking and acting. He wanted to present his philosophy in its integrity just as, in this philosophy, he wanted to present an integral view of the nature and destiny of man.

The serious student might well be both attracted and repelled by his first contact with Maurice Blondel. The normal reaction is to be somewhat taken aback at Blondel's involved style and complexity of thought, and friend and enemy alike have reproached him on both accounts. One of the members of the board that presided at the defense of his doctoral dissertation at the Sorbonne was perhaps the first, but certainly not the last, to bring this complaint to the dynamic young philosopher's attention: "Your thought is obscure, and your manner of writing obscures it even more. I have spent an hour on one of your

\textsuperscript{2}For a complete listing of Blondel's writings and of the works of others on Blondel, see André Hayen's Bibliographie Blondélienne, published in 1953 under the auspices of the University of Louvain. This work, for all practical purposes exhaustive, includes all works up to the end of 1951. There is not only a chronological, but also an analytical, listing of Blondel's works.
Blondel has even been accused of reducing the number of his followers by exacting from them too much in the way of scientific preparation and penetration. In his defense, Blondel cites Descartes' remark that there is a certain clarity that is both deceptive and dangerous; he goes on to observe that meditation and exacting preparation are just as essential to philosophy as to any other science. While this is perfectly true, it does not always dispel what have been called the "darkness and need of mystery" that beset the student and even the philosopher attempting to delve into Blondel's thought. On the other hand, it must be remembered that Blondel is not a logician looking for "clear and distinct" concepts, but a philosopher searching the depths of a very complex problem, the destiny of man.

Needless to say, all is not "darkness" and "mystery." Blondel attracts by the sweep and penetration of his thought and by the clarity of his psychological insight. He must have sympathized with Dostoevsky's "disembodied heroes," who "do not desire wealth, comfort, social status or peaceful marital union. They do not want anything in this world, they want the infinite, certainty, God." Both Blondel and Dostoevsky considered man as paradoxically subjected to, yet creating, his destiny. The Russian emphasized man's subjection to

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3See Johannes Wehrle, "Une soutenance de these," EB, I, 87.

4See Amedée de Margerie, "Commentaire sur L'Action," EB, I, 112.

5See Wehrle, p. 88.


destiny; he saw men as "actors with a perfunctory make-up on their faces,"
playing "there parts amidst a mass of stone, in the icy, dead supernatural
light of the Day of Judgment."8 The Frenchman, however, thrilled to the fact
that man's spiritual activity was something creative and expansive, the key to
the world both about and beyond him.

Though Blondel may be obscure at time in L'Action, he is not so when tell-
ing us why he wrote his dissertation. Some years after its completion, he
wrote that in this work he had wanted "to justify the intellectual attitude of
the believing and practicing Catholic in a milieu penetrated by idealism, ra-
tionalism, and dilettantism. ..."9 Was it a professed apologist, then, who
wrote L'Action? Though he has been likened to Pascal and to Newman, Blondel in
L'Action is neither a moralist nor an apologist, but primarily a philosopher.
That is what dominates everything else. Therefore, in the interpretation of
Blondel's statement, the words "intellectual attitude" must be stressed. This
attitude was a datum of experience which inspired the philosopher to investigate
the nature and destiny of man. L'Action is a philosophical thesis, a highly
compact expression of a total philosophy, not a defense of Catholicism; it is
only after a painstaking analysis of the sources and implications of the spir-
itual activity of man that Blondel reaches the conclusion that the natural and
supernatural are not strangers.

The orientation of L'Action is intimately bound up with the philosophical
and moral climate of the close of the last century. It has been said that Kant

8Ibid., 39.
synthesizes all the principles of the modern age, and certainly a variety of philosophical currents, stemming directly or indirectly from Kant, persisted at the time Blondel was writing his dissertation. Blondel, however, was gifted with the ability to perceive and agree with an authentic insight found in a doctrine contrary to his own. He would then use this truth as a basis from which to reason to a quite different conclusion from that reached by his adversary.

Three currents, all Kantian in origin, had a special influence on the thinking of the men of Blondel's day. First of all, Kant's rejection of the thing-in-itself as knowable and his despair of ever establishing a metaphysics led some men, typified by Schopenhauer, to a pessimism in which the only value lay in destroying in oneself the will to live. Blondel, approaching the problem of the destiny of man without metaphysical prejudices, was struck precisely by this persistent will to live; this was a fact not to be ignored, but investigated. From where did it come? To what did it lead? Blondel, realizing that pessimism was not natural to man, undertook to investigate the optimism of action.

The second Kantian current was one that swept science into a position of eminence among Blondel's contemporaries. After metaphysics expired, as it were, at the hands of the Master of Königsburg, all that was left was the phenomenon. The phenomenon was enthroned, and science was restricted to mean the exact sciences. Comte called his philosophy a system of universal and scientific

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knowledge; metaphysics and psychology were banned from his system, the former for going beyond the sensible, the latter for dealing with subjective states. Blondel was scientific, too, but he sought a science totalo, not less, but more than Comte. Blondel maintained that science had no right to ignore any expression of reality. Science that denies in an aprioristic fashion the existence of anything beyond the sensible is a caricature of science. Blondel, following the inevitable logic of reality, was to discover the Unique necessaire; he would admit, as Spencer did, the necessity of God, but not the absurdity of making this God the great Unknowable.

Kant's awareness that the moral order was to be upheld led to his categorical imperative. This was the source of the third important current that influenced the men about Blondel--pragmatism. If the moral order is merely a subjective state, it certainly must vary from individual to individual. Truth must vary, too, for intellectual conceptions must have value only in so far as they favor the life and progress of the individual. Blondel, too, recognized the internal and "pragmatic" aspects of truth. Truth for him was something that encompassed the entire man, it was the integration of one's interior tendencies with life itself. Thus, without having read Newman, Blondel continued Newman. Real assent is an experienced adhesion to the truth, an experiencing of the doctrine proposed and a conviction according to which one has decided to live. L'Action is, in a sense, a demonstration of the fact that the fundamental truth that lies at the root of all of man's spiritual activity cannot be practically denied. The Truth that is the destiny of man can be suppressed only on the theoretical level, only verbally perhaps. In the practical order it will assert itself, and man must eventually face the option of
accepting or rejecting it. In his integral approach to truth, Blondel followed his teacher, Olle-Laprine, who had maintained the necessary collaboration of the will with reason in order to attain truth.

Given this background, it perhaps would have been surprising if Blondel's starting point had not been man in relation to his activity. It was not a question of substituting ethics for metaphysics; it was rather that the metaphysical approach to philosophy was neither consonant with the climate in which he lived nor adapted to his purpose of establishing a science totale of man. Fifty years after the composition of L'Action he defended the basic stand he took there:

If, in 1893, I avoided the more metaphysical aspect of the problem of action in order to place special emphasis on the development of volitional activity, the term of our destiny, and salvation by means of an equation between our fundamental aspiration and the plenum, I did not fail to recognize the extent of the question to be placed; from the beginning I had indicated that it is a question of realizing being in its entirety and that the ethical and religious character of the inquiry is the very means of arriving at the ontological question. Therefore, I never substituted a moralism for a metaphysics.

The traditional metaphysical approach to philosophy did not satisfy Blondel. He was so interested in man and his destiny that in his approach the theoretical aspects of philosophy were to be subordinated to the practical.

The term action will appear throughout this thesis. What is action? It is according to Blondel, the "opposite of dreaming and vagueness; it is the

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11 See Blondel, L'Action: Essai d'une critique de la vie et d'une science de la pratique (Paris, 1893), pp. 359-388. Blondel published two more volumes with the title L'Action, one in 1936, another in 1937. In this thesis, however, references to L'Action will indicate the work of 1893 unless specific mention is made to the contrary.

expression of the human composite, the pledge of complete and courageous sincerity, the cement of social life, the condition of national society, the school in which are learned the lessons of universal reality, the Ark of the Covenant, where tradition, revelation, and the spiritual magisterium deposit divine instruction, the living cell of the members to whom the Church gives life. 13

Such a description of action, though it could hardly be completely understood at this point, gives some indication of breadth and depth of the term when used in a Blondelian sense. It will be interesting at the end of the thesis to return to the above description and see in a more technical way how accurately it describes the nature and function of action. Though action is not easy to define, we need some sort of working definition in order to proceed. A search through L’Action yields a more technical definition. Action is the "passage-way as it were, through which the efficient cause, which still has but the idea of the final cause, move intellectu and appetitu to the final cause, the final cause becoming more and more a part of the efficient cause and communicating to it the perfection toward which it [the efficient cause] has tended... 14

But this definition is not completely satisfying either, perhaps because it is a bit too metaphysical for this point in the discussion. The comprehension of the term action includes the integral spiritual activity of man. It extends, therefore, to the "totality of human activities, from the simple work of the artisan, who incarnates an idea in some external matter, to the work of the moral agent upon himself as he integrates his organic and spiritual life, to the

13Ibid., pp. 7-8.

active passivity of the contemplative, who cooperates in the divine action itself."15

Man cannot avoid the real action that is implicit in his thinking and willing. Nor can he turn his back on the implications of such activity. He must choose whether he wants to or not; he must choose even if he explicitly refuses to recognize the fact that he is making a choice. In true action the powers of nature, the light of the intellect, the forces of the will, and even the aspirations of grace must all converge and, in their interaction, create the unity of one's destiny. In this sense, action is the "synthesis of our personal states ... in view of attaining the ultimate term of our destiny."16 Action is the "precise point where the world of thought, the moral world, and the world of science meet."17 Action is something integral and it is wrong to reduce it to one of its functions. Action is not Descartes' empty and abstract Cogito; nor is it an ambiguous reality torn between an illusory phenomenon and an unknowable thing-in-itself. Action is rather a Cogito filled with experience; it is both noumenon and phenomenon, both pure reason and practical reason.18 What Blondel means by action must be found in L'Action itself; to convey the Blondelian sense of the term is one of the purposes of this thesis.

The term dialectic has led such a checkered career that André Lalande in

17 Blondel, L'Action, p. 28.
18 Ibid., p. 211. Blondel's principal criticism of Descartes and of Kant here is that they cut themselves off from segments of reality without justifying their procedure.
his study of philosophical vocabulary counsels avoiding its use, for, even though it may be so restricted as to mean only one thing, it nevertheless tends to evoke too many associations. But since Blondel himself uses the term, it will be helpful to determine its Blondelian meaning, and this may be done with the help of Fr. Taymans d'Eypernon, who has made a study of the terms used by Blondel. For Blondel there is a distinction between dialectic used in the sense of a logic of action and a dialectic used in the sense of a logic of real knowledge. The former meaning of the term implies the real progression and expansion of action seeking a term adequate to the principle which has engendered it. "The logic of action is not a partial discipline; it is really the General Logic, that in which all other disciplines find their basis and unity. In order to develop its total content, it would be necessary, by means of a profound analysis of the conditions under which the will functions, to determine the very wellsprings of human destiny. . . ." Used in the sense of a dialectic of real knowledge, the term refers to the activity of the intellect in its striving to become progressively coextensive with the real dialectic, to become as flexible as being itself in order to assimilate the real fully.

In a note to the text of Fr. d'Eypernon, Blondel comments that the two uses of the word are correctly indicated; they could, however, be distinguished and their interdependence brought out a little more clearly. On the one hand, this expression, borrowed from Plato and


20 See Taymans d'Eypernon, Le Blondelisme (Louvain, 1933), pp. 161-162. The definitions in this section received Blondel's comment and approval.

21Ibid., p. 161.
St. Augustine, carries an intellectual meaning; it expresses whatever is . . . intelligible and even necessary in the expansion . . . of the dynamism of the intellect and will. In this sense I raise the word dialectic from the unjustified degradation to which Aristotle has subjected it . . . out of an excessively unilateral exaltation of notional logic. On the other hand, the term dialectic, which includes the idea of a general logic, connotes the idea of a living bond and, even better, of ascending progress. . . .22

The dialectic is the real penetration of man's spirit into everything he does, his action becoming a "synthesis of willing, knowing, and being."25

Blondel's method is basically simple, for it is essentially a verbal exposition of the logic of action itself. Man, from the very fact that he is man, has a fundamental desire or will to become equal to his destiny. His volitional activity expands naturally towards its proper fulfilment and prevents him from ignoring the problem of action and from blinding himself to the nature of his destiny. Action also forces him ultimately to choose either the death or the life of action. L'Action traces the inevitable "logic" or expansion of action: from the emergence of freedom from the determinism of consciousness to the use or abuse of freedom in choosing or rejecting him who is the ultimate term of action. In his search for the fundamental will of man, Blondel starts with the least that man could possibly desire and, examining the desire for this minimum, discovers that it harbors an even more fundamental desire of man. Using this process of implication, he proceeds from desire to desire until he unearths the terminal desire which is the very principle of man's willing. His method has been called "metapsychological analysis" in that it consists "in examining not so much the contents of consciousness as the peculiar contents of the process of

22 Ibid.

23 Blondel, L'Action, p. 28.
willing, these contents being incarnated in the process of action itself. An attempt will be made in this thesis to render Blondel's conception of the structure and function of this dialectic understandable to the reader.

No orientation to the dialectic of action would be complete without a consideration of Blondel's own preview of L'Action. Man, he says, is condemned to life, to death, to eternity. He has nothing to say about this. Faced with being, he must discover what is hidden in his acts, for it is here that he actually experiences being. If he does not search into his activity, there is the danger that the present or the future will become his tyrant, that he will become the plaything of his actions rather than their master. Man's actions hold the answer to the question of destiny. Action is even deterministic in so far as action is a necessity, a demanding necessity, in that the consequences of action evolve necessarily, and in view of the fact that one course of action excludes many others. No one escapes what Blondel calls the "natural mortification" of being unable to choose many divergent courses of action (p. VIII).

If man refuses to act, something inside or outside will act, and he will fall into slavery. And yet, when he acts, the act in itself is defective; there is always a disproportion between what man wants and what he does. His decisions go beyond his thoughts and his acts go beyond what he intends. Sometimes he unwittingly does what he does not want to do. And then he finds himself the prisoner of his own acts. Though these acts are performed in the past,

25 From this point on, all references to L'Action will be incorporated into text of the thesis. Page numbers will appear in parentheses.
they weigh upon and influence the future. Man must act and yet he is not satisfied with his activity. If he refuses to act, he is enslaved for not having acted. If he acts, he is enslaved by what he does. No one avoids the practical side of the question of action.

Blondel maintains that man cannot live by speculative truths alone, for the practical situations in which he finds himself are themselves a source of light, a means of clarifying abstract principles. And man has a duty of following truth no matter where or how he may discover it. He cannot defer acting until the whole situation before him is crystal clear and complete; a finite mind cannot analyze a situation completely. Therefore, man must act in order to clarify the situation, and "in every act there is an act of faith" (p. IX), but this is often the only way to truth.

It is essential to justify the necessity of action. This will take the form of showing that action is the necessary expression of man's most intimate aspiration. The problem of action arises from the opposition that lies between all that dominates the will and the will to dominate everything and to subject everything to reason. Should the problem be solved positively or negatively? From the standpoint of the freedom of the will or from the standpoint of determinism? No one can avoid the practical solution of the problem. Blondel determines to investigate the problem as thoroughly as possible and to establish a "science of the practical" (p. XI).

Man experiments. He sees action as a necessity, and so he acts. He often sees action as an obligation, and he obeys. What difference does it make if this obligation is just an illusion, an hereditary prejudice, a leftover from Christianity? Man is interested in the truth. Just as the chemist cannot
expect to get water without combining hydrogen and oxygen, so man cannot expect
to grow in the knowledge of his destiny without pouring into the crucible of
life all that he has within him. Every man becomes a living laboratory of the
science of life and the experiment must go on despite doubt and difficulty.
The nature and progress of the experiment is controlled by conscience, a fact
which renders the whole process even more difficult. It is not that conscience
does not speak enough, but it is rather that it exacts too much when it does
speak. But the stakes are too high to bother about the cost. In the workshop
of nature man must go about the business of very serious verification of the
hypotheses, traditions, and precepts of life. Action is his method and his
laboratory.

Does this mean that man must try everything? Must every type of activity
be attempted in order to formulate a real science of life? No, it is enough to
be guided by the testimony of one's conscience, for conscience is a datum of
experience that must be given just as much consideration as any other. Ethical
experimentation requires both analysis and synthesis. For Blondel ethical
analysis consists in sacrificing the demands of the lower appetites in order to
bring into relief the higher will which exists only by resisting these demands.
Ethical synthesis is the integration of all man's activity in relation to his
destiny. Conscience offers man a provisional ethics which is needed in order
to carry on this type of experimentation, for he cannot suspend the practical
necessities of life under the pretext of studying them. Every departure from
the dictates of conscience is founded on a speculative prejudice; such incomplete
experience, however, cannot furnish the matter for a complete criticism of life.
What is to be done, then? Blondel answers that every man must remain as a
child, docile to the "empiricism of duty" (p. XIV) until action and thought, science and conscience, can be integrated and unified. This is the only way man can maintain accord between the necessity of acting and his own will. Action, therefore, contains its own method and opens the way to the solution of the problem it itself imposes.

The supremacy of action must be demonstrated. This, according to Blondel, is the supreme effort of speculation. All science, including the science of the destiny of man, must be universal, that is, one man's reasons, discovered in the crucible of daily existence, must be another man's reasons. If what one man learns from action is merely a matter of opinion or of faith to another, true science has not been achieved. Individual science must be raised to the level of science as such. Therefore, it is legitimate to propose the speculative problem of the practical.

True scientific procedure must eliminate every chance of error, every cause of illusion; all routes save one must be closed. Even the natural necessity of acting must be proved. This is precisely the way in which Blondel attacks the whole problem of man and his destiny. False solutions are systematically eliminated. But Blondel considers no solution so false as not to contain some core of truth. As false solutions are eliminated, he saves what truth he can and uses it as a new point of departure for his constantly ascending dialectic.

Man must search the depths of his being to see if there is a light there to clarify his destiny. He must investigate even the most important negations to see if there is not some initial movement underlying them which persists even when denied and abused. And this is precisely what Blondel does when he examines pessimism. Because of the diversity of consciences, the investigation
must be oriented from the extremities of the problem, as it were, to the central "truth essential to every conscience and to the movement common to every will" (p. XXI). L'Action is, in a sense, a search for this fundamental movement of the will. In this search there is no need of Descartes' doubt, Pascal's wager, Kant's imperative; no, every negation, every prejudice, every passion, every philosophical system is to be considered sympathetically. According to Blondel, the philosopher must somehow become the accomplice of every conscience in order to see if each carries with it its justification or its condemnation.

For the sake of clarity it will be helpful to hesitate a moment in order to get a synoptic view of what lies ahead. The rest of the thesis deals with the dialectic of action itself. The next chapter deals primarily with three points: (1) a demonstration that the problem of action and its relation to human destiny cannot be ignored, (2) a refutation of any negative or pessimistic solution to the problem of action, and (3) an examination of the subjective character of action. The third point, as will be seen involves a discussion of the nature of consciousness and the relation of consciousness to freedom.

Chapter III deals with Blondel's attempt at a positive solution of the problem of action. Here the expansive character of action is seen, first in the individual, secondly in the social milieu, and finally beyond the social milieu.

The ultimate term of action lies beyond the social milieu and is the topic of the final chapter. Action leads necessarily to the necessary Unique Being and here finds fulfillment or frustration. There is an inevitable option: action may either lend itself, as it were, to the Divine Action and live or refuse to do so and destroy itself.

This thesis is neither a criticism of Blondel's findings nor an attempt
to expand his thought. Blondel, the philosopher, considers the problem of action and human destiny not simply a question in philosophy but the philosophical question. If this thesis introduces the reader to Blondel and serves as a guide to and a clarification of his approach to this problem, it has achieved its purpose.
CHAPTER II

BASIS FOR A POSITIVE SOLUTION

TO THE PROBLEM OF ACTION

The first "solution" to the problem of action is not to confront the problem at all. This is the escape from life that the dilettante attempts to take. After a brilliant characterization of the dilettante, Blondel shows that such an escape is impossible, for, first of all, the expansive character of the process of willing can be denied but not suppressed; secondly, dilettantism cannot judge life since it merely dabbles in life and does not experience it fully; and finally, the dilettante does not suppress the absolutes he so much despises but merely replaces them with absolutes cut down to his own size.

Dilettantism rejected, it becomes necessary to pose the problem of action and of destiny. There are only to generic solutions to the problem, the positive and the negative solutions. Blondel identifies the negative solution with philosophical pessimism and undertakes to expose the inconsistency of such a solution. He points out that no pessimist practically chooses the death of the will to live and the void as final solutions to the problem of life, and this for a number of reasons. First of all, he questions the possibility of willing the void at all. Secondly, he points out that the process of willing remains even when it it centered on the void. Finally, he examines the nature of such a pessimistic desire and finds that it really springs from the need of a deeper satisfaction and of a reality different from what is actually being experienced.
What is desired is not the void but infinite being.

The problem of action and of destiny must, therefore, be solved and it must be solved positively. But does this mean that it must be solved positivistically? Sensible reality as an object of sense gratification has already been rejected as a solution with the rejection of dilettantism. But perhaps the knowledge and control of sensible reality through science is the ultimate meaning of action and man's ultimate destiny. Blondel carefully examines the nature of science and finds that it, too, is insufficient; it neither gives complete satisfaction nor is it even able to explain itself. Yet if reviewing science as a possible solution, Blondel does not come away empty handed. Though science itself is rejected as a solution, something remains to be explained—the very process of the human spirit in the construction and adaptation of scientific theories. What remains to be examined is the very meaning of scientific research.

In order to examine the process of the spirit as an avenue leading to the solution of his problem, Blondel finds it necessary to defend the validity of subjectivity and to examine and explain fully the nature and function of consciousness, for both of these notions have been attacked and rejected as "un-scientific." He goes into a thorough analysis of consciousness and sees in it the very basis of the freedom of the will. Since freedom is the basis of action, Blondel takes up the problems of freedom versus the determining factors within man, the nature and function of the motive, and the fundamental desire of the free will when it wills what it really wants.

This first chapter, therefore, shows Blondel clearing the way for the progression of the real dialectic of action toward a solution of the meaning of
life and of destiny. What has been outlined in the above three paragraphs will
now be taken up point by point.

The Impossibility of Suppressing the Problem of Action. To pretend that
a problem does not exist is one way of suppressing it, but it does not take
much thought to realize that any such solution would be fictitious. Reality is
neither created nor annihilated by man's whims. The person who does not want
to "get involved" in the problem of action finds himself forced continually to
action. "Not to act is too difficult a task" (p. 2); no one really succeeds at
it. Inaction, after all, is self-annihilation. Blondel characterizes the man
who would run away from life as the "dilettante." He does not really life, he
merely dabbles in life. Eroticism and mysticism can be mixed in one state of
consciousness, for the dilettante is an esthete and personal pleasure in its
most exquisite forms is the goal to be achieved in life. All of this is not
running away from the problems of life, action, and destiny, for one cannot run
away from what does not exist. Life becomes a game, sometimes to be taken
seriously, for this adds more zest to the game. "Irony and good will become
one, the universal passport, the universal solvent" (p. 6).

The totality of the dilettante's emotions and sensations is his ego and
his god. The more he can multiply and vary satisfying sensations, the more
thoroughly does he control his life, the more fully does he "live." He is a
born optimist, for pessimism would imply taking the world seriously. His joy
lies in mixing the contradictions of life, even holiness and perversion. Such
a person has nothing to fear, for he has respected, despised, filled, emptied,
blasphemed, divinized, and destroyed everything, including himself. After all,
there can be no examination of conscience without a conscience, no judgment
without a judge. This Blondel admits, is an extreme state, but all those who claim that life poses no question are tinged with it.

The dilettante cannot run away from life. First of all, in his unwillingness to will there is a voluntary duplicity. To will nothing is not a simple state, for nolo velle implies volo nole. But such negative voluntariness is just as culpable as positive voluntariness. Yet the dilettante delights in his deliberate ignorance, for it partakes of the vagueness that characterizes his life. The very feeling of absence of will in which the dilettante glories and takes refuge implies the idea of a will which has made a specious attempt to abdicate.

Secondly, the basically blasé attitude on life taken by the dilettante in view of his "experience" of life is unjustified, for his experience is neither complete nor conclusive. He cannot know the "vanity" of all things, as he claims, without experiencing all things completely. For instance, he rejects the testimony of his conscience although conscience is just as much a part of reality as anything else. "To accept and follow the dictates of one's conscience needs no special postulate . . . but one is needed to contradict conscience and attempt experiences of which it disapproves, whether one knows or does not know why the disapproval originates. . . ." (p. 14). Anyone who pretends to experience the vanity of what he has not actually experienced prejudges the question for the purpose of suppressing it. Without investigation no one may arbitrarily conclude that there is neither reality nor truth.

Finally, action forces even the dilettante to face absolutes which he has always abhorred, such as conscience, destiny, and the responsibility implied in the freedom of action. When he sees his will opposed in this way, his forces,
which have been artificially dispersed, coalesce and he makes a stand. Absolutes of his own spring, fully armed, as it were, from the depths of his being. "Autolatry" (p. 16), his worship of himself becomes an absolute. His wanting nothing and his turning away from the "vanity" of all things are merely indications of a radical egoism. He really wants to destroy everything in order to become the only being, like a god. He becomes the all, truth, and reality. His denial of doctrine is his doctrine; he substitutes esthetic anarchy for intellectual dogmitism. This contradiction is a sign of a more basic contradiction of will; it is a sign of moral failure.

In discussing dilettantism, Blondel brings out the distinction between the fundamental will and the actual or operative will of man, the volonta volontaire and the volonte voulu (p. 19). When these two are incompatible, when what is actually willed is not compatible with man's innermost aspiration, the act in which they clash is an vitiated as a conclusion drawn from two premises, one of which is false. It is more vitiated, for such a combination cannot accidentally lead to truth as in the case of a defective syllogism. The dilettante loves himself enough to sacrifice everything to his egoism, and yet loves himself poorly enough to scatter, sacrifice, and lose himself in what is outside himself. When this primitive love of being for being is flouted, being takes its own revenge.

Having disposed of dilettantism in its various degrees and manifestations, Blondel has also established the legitimacy of proposing the problem of action for solution. One of his primary aims at this point is to narrow the list of possible solutions. He indicates, therefore, that the solution must be either positive or negative and goes on immediately to show the impossibility of a
negative solution.

The Impossibility of a Negative Solution to the Problem of Action. Perhaps the solution to the problem of action is negative. Action, motivated by some need, idea, or dream, seeks its own interest or pleasure and then fades away into nothingness. Death is king, and it is the function of science and metaphysical criticism to do away with the desire to live forever. The destiny of man is no more and no less than the void. Some desire the void, others fear it, but both desire and fear testify to the existence of what is desired or feared. Blondel states the position of the pessimist accurately: "Life will be as good as it can be when man, freed from every deceptive pretension and persuaded that life is never the cause of bankruptcy since it neither gives nor takes anything, looks upon life as it is. There is nothing in our acts and nothing beyond. There is only the void" (p. 25). Science is harmful in that it places man in contact with the mysterious and awakens in him inexplicable desires; yet science is to be commended for showing man that there is nothing beyond death, that the void is the terminal point of his life. The oppression of heart felt by the sufferer does not arise from his existence, but from the desire to exist when this is impossible. The will, therefore, must die to its egoism and find fulfillment in voluntary destruction.

Schopenhauer had proclaimed such a doctrine some fifty years before Blondel wrote L'Action, and his influence still persisted. It is little wonder that Blondel wrote L'Action for the purpose of re-examining the nature and function of the human will in view of such a devastating doctrine. It would be impossible for Blondel to remain silent as long as any remnant of such pessimism persisted. What was this doctrine that Blondel undertook to combat?
Cosmic conflicts among the grades of being are only an objective transcription of the will's own internal hostilities. It is a force essentially at variance with itself. Because it is a will-to-live, it must give phenomenal expression to its conflicting impulses. Hence temporal existence is essentially marked by aggression, pain, and death. The moments of happiness are accidental, negative, and fugitive, since they only signify a breathing space, before will again takes up the struggle with itself, on another plane. Pain and ennui are of life's positive essence, for they are the truest mirroring of insatiable will.

... The will's thirst for phenomenal realization can never be quenched; it becomes surfeited with what it has achieved, destroys its product, and moves restlessly onward to new conflicts.26

Here again Blondel agreed with the essential insight of the pessimist: conflict in a certain sense, is of the essence of life, the will of man is of tremendous importance. But Blondel saw in the will the way to life and refused to envisage the will as the instrument of its own destruction.

The answer to the pessimist is simple: man neither conceives nor desires the void. The impossibility of conceiving nothingness is a translation in the intellectual order of a sincere and sovereign decision of the will. The void cannot be conceived within the framework of human thought without the denial of something; the very conception of the void, therefore, is a testimony to existence. But if it is impossible to desire the void because of its inability to be conceived, what is actually willed by those who claim to desire it?

This desire for the void translates itself for some into a life of sense gratification and exaltation of the age. They do not realize the basic contradiction of their position. Such a desire should manifest itself in the renunciation, sacrifice, and suppression of the spontaneous energies of life. It means dying bit by bit and experiencing non-being in such mortification. In

fact, the only real experiment open to those who aspire to the void is death itself, but few translate theory into practice enough to undergo this experiment willingly.27 The insincere use the void to cover up their self-indulgence. It is true that there are those who think that they find in life and science proof of the void, but their sincerity is one of theory, not practice. It is this practical aspect of the question that serves as a wedge between a veneer of verbal logic and the underlying true logic of action.

What the pessimist feels is really a need of a deeper satisfaction and of a reality different from that which he tastes. He uses this feeling as an instrument against being, not realizing that he cannot be aware of the insufficiency of mere sensible reality without first being penetrated by the grandeur of being. The so-called desire for the void, therefore, contains an act of faith which surpasses science, the feeling that "being in its fulness escapes duration and destruction" (p. 34). Blondel considers the pessimist's materialism as a kind of mysticism in which worship is rendered to being under the species of sensible reality.

Pessimism is, for Blondel, a kind of metaphysical suicide, and just as actual suicide is motivated by a deep-seated desire for happiness, so any attempt to commit metaphysical suicide involves an ardent love for being. Pessimism has immense confidence in the omnipotence of the will to create and destroy being. This desire not to exist must go beyond mortal life and embrace infinity itself. In fact, the desire not to exist "needs to exist infinitely

27Schopenhauer himself certainly did not attempt such an experiment, but rather spent his life seeking something as ephemeral as the praise of one's contemporaries. See Collins, pp. 663-664.
in order not to exist any longer . . . " (pp. 36-37). To-will-to-be, to-will-not-to-be, and to-will-not-to-will all have to-will in common; to-will dominates all forms of existence and annihilation. The pessimist is faced with a dilemma: either his suffering is an illusion, springing as it does from an illusory desire to live, or it is quite real, the consequence of a real desire, a desire which has succeeded in being. If suffering exists, then it proceeds from a basic love of being.

A Step towards the Positive Solution of the Problem of Action. Since the solution of the problem of action is not negative, Blondel undertakes a systematic investigation of the positive approaches to the problem. Man cannot will the void, and since he is forced to will, the minimum that can be asserted and willed is sensible reality in some form. Man does not want nothingness; he wants something and he wants this something to suffice. Something exists—that is his starting point, for he realizes that "in my acts, in the world, in me, outside me, I don't know where or what, something exists" (p. 41). "Since the will . . . is ordinarily oriented toward the object of sensation or knowledge, we must find out if action can be sufficiently defined in function of the object which it proposes to itself as end, and if action is really limited to phenomena; if, in a word, it is only a fact like any other and if, in the strict sense of the word, the problem of life calls for a positive solution" (p. 41), that is, a positivistic solution.

The investigation of sensible reality leads from sensitive life to the highest of man's social activities. In this investigation Blondel takes pains to view every question from what might be called the point of view of the "opposition." His method is not one of rejection, but expansion, that is, he
analyzes and expands whatever is true in a position, showing how truth implies
truth until truth is seen as an integrated whole. Sensible reality, therefore,
is to be endowed with as much as possible; it must be given every possibility to
prove itself as the unique solution to the problem of life. If this should fail, a solution beyond sensible reality must be sought.

Sensible reality play an important role in the life of man. But he is not
satisfied merely with the simple data of sense; science satisfied a still fur­
ther need, a need which Blondel implies is twofold. Man has a basic desire to
know. An awareness of this desire arises from the duality or opposition be­
tween subject and object perceived in sense cognition. "There is, in the most
simple intuition, an unmistakable duality and opposition; this is the origin of
every need to know" (p. 47). It is also through sense cognition that man becomes
aware that part of what he experiences is all his and that part is outside him,
foreign to his own action. Science, then, is born both of the fact that man is
aware that what is sensed is not the only, true, and total reality of what is
sensed and of the desire to subject to himself what is foreign to his own
action. Blondel's complaint is that men accept science blindly and fail to in­
vestigate the source of scientific investigation.

Those who consider science as a value in itself and as the terminal point
of action misconceive both the nature and function of science. Blondel, true
to his method, tries to search out the authentic insight of the one who would
propose science as the solution to the problem of action and of destiny. And
so he goes into a profound and somewhat involved analysis of the nature of the
exact sciences in order to see if they have the intrinsic value attributed to
them. After a careful analysis, he concludes that the exact sciences leave too
many problems unsolved to be considered the terminal point of human activity. Science cannot explain the basic opposition that lies between the mathematical and experimental sciences nor why these sciences nevertheless work when united. Nor does science even put man into immediate contact with reality, although many consider this its primary achievement. A closer look with Blondel at the positive sciences will help clarify his meaning.

Mathematics, for instance, is built on postulates that do not correspond completely to what is known about nature, or at least these postulates go beyond what is known of nature: for instance, the unit implies the indivisible atom in nature. Mathematics supposes the analysis of nature completed, while the experimental sciences on the other hand consider the phenomena of nature as unique and original. The mathematical sciences tend to unify everything, but the experimental sciences recognize and define heterogeneity everywhere. But despite this basic opposition, when the mathematical sciences are applied to the experimental, progress inexplicably results. What allows the fiction of calculus, for instance, to be adapted to the real order? Where does the very idea of this synthetic procedure come from? The mathematical and the experimental sciences unite in order to explain reality better, but their very union remains a problem. Blondel claims that the very idea of synthesis is founded on a real experience, on a "feeling" of a complex unity such as a state of consciousness. And thus the very process of science is based on a reality (consciousness) that the scientist rejects as unscientific.

The exact sciences, then, render an account neither of the way in which they proceed from reality nor of the way in which they are adjusted to reality. Though they seem to be founded on reality, they are actually strangers to it.
and in no sense do they put man in immediate contact with reality. The basis of all experimental knowledge seems to be the complex simplicity of the immediate perception and the irreducible intuition of the senses. Yet no experimental knowledge is conceivable without an initial abstraction which artificially delimits the matter of observation. Without being a mathematics of nature, the experimental sciences are still a mathematization of experience. To know is to measure. At the beginning of every science, no matter how well masked the procedure may be, there is an unexplained passage from the order of quality to the order of measure. Therefore, it is an error to consider the symbolism of science as a faithful image of reality; much less may it be considered reality itself. Neither the mathematical nor the experimental sciences exhaust the most simple datum of experience. Quality as such is beyond their scope, and what they make known is not made known as man knows it.

Although the incompatibility of the sciences is resolved in practice—practically speaking, science works—Blondel claims that science works because the action from which the sciences proceed is never exhausted. This action, in sustaining all the sciences, surpasses them all; in permitting their growth and success, it proves that it possesses more than the sciences do. Man's power always goes farther than his science, for his science has need of this power. It is impossible for science to limit itself to what it knows, for as a process of the spirit of man, science already is more than it knows.

With the rejection of pessimism and the void it proposed, man was forced to turn to reality, if only to sensible reality, to find a solution to the problem of action. He was forced to admit some minimal object of action exists, perhaps in expectation that positive knowledge would exhaust this "something." But in
this something there subsists an irreducible element, which, from the point of view of the positive sciences, transcends science without coaxing to be immanent to it. There is the constant need of action to furnish to one science what it needs from another. Such action furnishes both the mathematical and the experimental sciences what they need from each other. But if action resolves the antinomy of the positive sciences, it proposes a problem of another order.

Action, if it is to be understood fully, must, it would seem, become the object of its own science.

If Blondel's evaluation of science as the terminal point of man's activity is reviewed, the following summary may be made. The positive sciences result from the association of two irreducible orders—the synthetic or intuitive experimental order and the analytic order of mathematics. When united they constitute a symbolism, arbitrary in its origin, but verified in its application. The natural sciences and mathematics have no necessary relation to each other, nor do they have any such relation to a third term. They are truer insofar as they are more adaptable to each other, but in themselves one is not truer than the other. But since they are not preoccupied with explaining the ultimate basis of reality, they cannot be subjected to the fictitious necessity of piecing together an objective world. Science, then, does not have to pretend to be philosophy, for "the necessity of the truths it establishes does not imply any ontological necessity . . ." (p. 83). The arbitrary character of its initial definitions and conventions limits the necessity of scientific relations to these relations themselves.

This does not mean that there is a complete break from philosophy. What remains is the process of the spirit in the construction and adaptation of these
theories; what remains is the very meaning of scientific research. Science in itself will grow indefinitely, but without revealing the mystery which surrounds, sustains, and surpasses it. The next step is to find out whether there is matter for a true science in what surpasses the positive sciences and serves as their basis, a science that will possibly be sufficient in itself.

Any examination of the process of the human spirit demands an examination of the subjective nature of man. Blondel, in order to explain the unity of the positive sciences must study their unifying principle. And, since, the "something" that exists outside man cannot provide a solution to the problem of action, it is only fitting to turn within man. Such an investigation can only proceed by a reflection of consciousness upon itself, for it is through consciousness that the human spirit operates and this process is made manifest. Therefore, at this stage of the investigation a consideration of the subjectivity of man—the principle which unifies his experience, the "within" that is as real as sensible reality, his consciousness that has been damned as "unscientific"—is philosophically valid.

One of the first things Blondel does is to relate the subjectivity he is about to discuss to human life. He considers life to be the organization of a small world which reflects the large and manifests the lack of symmetry and the variety of the universe. It supposes a double exchange, from without to within, from within to without. It is nourished by the whole universe, and each perception is accompanied by an increase of energy. The living human being does not respond passively to the influence it undergoes, but progressively adapts himself to his milieu. Reason develops in so far as the living being becomes more adequate to the universe; thus civilization tends to equal, enrich, and
surpass nature from which it emerges. Man is a microcosm, a summary of all the experience and investments of nature. The universe gathers itself within him.

Internal phenomena themselves are like the concentration of the universe in a point; from here proceeds every concrete operation of thought or nature. Here lies the unity of man's knowledge which surpasses the plurality of its representations. Knowledge is possible only because of the unperceived presence of this internal principle of unification in every sensible intuition and in every scientific affirmation. On the other hand, man's knowing is dependent upon these same phenomena. The subject, therefore, is scientifically bound to the object, contains it, and surpasses it. And so, neither the subjective nor the objective can be banned from science without the destruction of science itself. It is wrong to stress the function of the object in knowledge unduly, for the fact of consciousness is as real as any other.

The scientific character of internal phenomena is beyond question. Consciousness cannot be subjected to mathematical analysis or to sensible observation, for it is the principle which introduces unity in multiplicity. The fact of consciousness is perceived only from within; it is this "within." Viewed from within, the subjective fact is the determining, active, singular factor—the source of mental dynamism. The true science of consciousness, therefore, must be a science of action. Care must be taken not to represent the phenomena of consciousness in the same way as objective phenomena; action must not be reduced to a static fact. There is nothing in subjective life that is not individual initiative, nothing that is not an act. And the least internal act has a dignity, a reality, an importance infinitely superior to the fact of the entire universe. This is clearly seen in the act by which man gains some new insight into re-
ality. He is intoxicated with his new knowledge, for the most fleeting interior light has more worth and charm than all the radiance of what is outside.

It is easy to say that a science of consciousness, a science of action, must be established, but, as Blondel points out, how can one make a "science of what is singular and indeterminable, of what escapes all measure and representation, of what is in the process of becoming?" (p. 100). Blondel answers this question by an indication of the method he is to follow.

The method of the positive sciences is not the only method. Distinct sciences demand distinct methods. If the subjective is considered a fact and not an act, psychology becomes a pseudo-science; it distorts the act under pretext of studying it. Action must be studied, not from the static viewpoint of the understanding, but from the dynamic viewpoint of the will. In order to establish a true science of the subject, it is necessary to study the act of consciousness in its inevitable expansion. This science, though it may seem at first glance to lack the "objectivity" of the positive sciences, is actually more universal and precise. Action cannot be partial and abstract; of its very nature it is complete, systematic, precise, vital, and pregnant with consequences. Through action everyone submits to the necessity of practical experimentation; action is a manifestation of human life. If the minimum is admitted, that is, if it is admitted that something exists, a subject is necessarily posited. In this sense, the necessity of the positive sciences leads to the necessity of the science of action.

The Relationship between Consciousness and Freedom. The need for a positive solution to the problem of action led to the consideration of a positivistic solution. The question was asked: Does sensible reality satisfy man's basic
desires, that is, does man's knowledge and control of sensible reality through science satisfy the basic cravings of his spirit? An answer to the problem of action was sought in the object of action. After careful investigation Blondel concludes that science is dependent upon the spirit of man for its existence and therefore could hardly be considered the terminal point of the process of the spirit. With the failure of sensible reality and science to solve the problem, Blondel turns logically to the subject of action, affirms the validity of subjectivity, and takes up the consideration of the subjective character of man as a possible way to the solution of the problem of action. Consciousness, which has been so abused by the scientist, and the dynamic elements within consciousness become objects of special study.

Consciousness includes the power of reflection, which is basically a differentiating and inhibitory power, the power that prevents any single motive from being completely determining. Freedom, Blondel concludes, has its origin in consciousness. These considerations are so fundamental and important that they merit more detailed study.

What is a motive? If this question is to be given a complete answer, it must first be noted that only what is subjective acts on man. If something is to influence him, it must first be digested, vivified, and organized. Suggestions must be transformed and assimilated into the current of life before they are followed; ideas must be coupled with feeling or remain dead. A motive is really an intellectual light that exploits the vital force within man. Its efficaciousness comes from its expressing and representing what it moves. Diffused energies do not form a principle of action; they must first be gathered into a mental synthesis and represented under the unique form of an end to be
realized. In turn, the moving forces in man derive their power from the motive which they prepare and propose.

Blondel points out that any true motive contains an element of mystery. If a motive is to be efficacious, it must afford some new perspective, the promise of an unknown to be conquered. "When we act without knowing completely why—and it is always like that—... the reason is that... the known motive dominates and exploits all antecedent energies for an ulterior end which always goes beyond experience and exceeds expectation" (p. 108). The motive present at the moment of the act is never the same as it was at the time of the choice which inclined toward the act; at the decisive moment something unforeseen always carries the day.

A motive is not a real motive if it stands alone. If it is alone, it is an animal desire, an instinctive urge or image, not an idea. Every true idea implies a contrast, an internal opposition. The clear conception of an act implies the conception of at least the vague possibility of different acts. Thus every conception is only a part, a part that makes sense only if related to the total unity. The function of relating part to part and part to whole in consciousness is called reflection. Reflection itself results from the partial character of opposing states. This plurality of simultaneously unified and opposed states is possible through the immanent action of a power capable of embracing a multiplicity of contraries in a higher unity. This power is called reason. Reason is none of the rival reasons; it contains all of them, but it is distinguished from all of them. Reason poses a balance among them, for it sees each as one among many. In order really to understand the determining force of a motive, man must be aware of its partial character; thus he understands
determinism, that is, the determining force of the motive, only in so far as he finds within himself the power of surpassing it. The recognition of the partial character of the motive is the power to surpass it. Reflection proceeds from determinism in the sense that it is the ability to relate part to part, that is, moving force to moving force, and part to whole, that is, moving force to reason itself. Reflection also surpasses determinism in that it recognizes the partial character of the moving forces it differentiates.

Reflection is the differentiating and inhibitory power of consciousness. It borrows its power from the antagonistic forces it inhibits and it is consequently superior to all of them. And so from the determinism of motivational forces there arises a power which holds this very determinism in check. In the light of reflection no suggestion of nature can lay claim to any kind of absolute sovereignty. Nothing has a completely decisive influence, an absolute value.

What effect does inhibition have on action? The act that proceeds from the reflective inhibitory power of man is called the human act, reasonable act, voluntary act, free act, or simply action. The idea of freedom appears necessarily in man. It is the function of the dialectic to explore its origin and nature.

Consciousness of a motive implies consciousness of other motives; consciousness of a multiplicity of motives implies at least a confused view of their opposition and of the system they form. By action the subject "inserts and adds something of himself in the determinism which encloses the whole complexity of phenomena" (p. 118) To the multiplicity of motives is added something that goes beyond distinct representations and determined motives.
Reflection is the force of forces, and, as a lever braced upon the idea of the infinite that appears in action, it can raise the universe. Reflection dominates physical energies, appetites, tendencies, motives, the determinism of nature and of the spirit; the decisive reason for an act resides in this power.

Freedom, in that it implies an inhibition of moving forces within man, does not exclude determinism, but rather proceeds from and uses it; determinism, far from excluding freedom, prepares for and produces it. When man does act, he leaps beyond determined motives because of his participation in some unlimited power. *L'Action* is an examination into the meaning and necessity of this power. In the act of reason there is a synthesis of the power and of the idea of the unlimited or infinite, as Blondel calls it. This synthesis is called freedom. And so freedom, the scandal of science, is asserted by science itself, for the existence of science demand the existence not only of the object but of the subject of science, and the very power that enables this subject to formulate science at all is the same power that produces freedom.

Blondel goes on to note that nothing in the determinism of thought or of nature, nothing in sensible reality or in the science of sensible reality contradicts the consciousness of a force exempt from necessity. The spontaneous movement of the determining forces in consciousness and the awareness this determinism produce the necessary consciousness of freedom.

Since freedom is necessary, Blondel asks if it is absorbed in a universal determinism. He concludes that it is not, for determinism ends in the consciousness of freedom and, in its self-consciousness, freedom ratifies whatever precedes the act of the will and wants whatever permits it to place this act. Man dominates all that precedes his act without necessarily knowing these ante-
cedents directly. It is enough for him to know where he is going in order to utilize the antecedents of his action. In what he knows man understands and goes beyond what he does not know.

Freedom never escapes the necessity of being and remaining the rationals of action. Once reflection has aroused in man the feeling of a free power, he must use it. The will cannot remain neutral, for in wanting to remain neutral, it becomes the accomplice of the tendencies which sweep it along. The man who refuses to will must face the "complicity of abstention" (p. 125). Nor can the will merely "make use" of passing motives without giving itself to them. The will can become the slave of its motives instead of dominating them. This servitude can be quite alarming in view of the fact that every efficacious motive is more than just this motive. It is part of a system.

Free will is necessarily involved in all acts that proceed from reflection; it approves all the consequences of its intervention or abstention. On the other hand, determinism seems to precede, accompany, and follow the act of the will, for the will consents both to the necessity of willing and acting and to the necessity of the consequences of willing and acting. Since it finds the sufficient reason for its conduct only in itself, it can blame only itself for the consequences which proceed directly from what is willed or excluded. Determinism enters into the very freedom of the act. When a man does what he really wants to do in all sincerity, he actually obeys an obligation which does not depend upon his decision; this obligation is an imperative end. It would almost seem that freedom is a different kind of determinism, a simple spiritual automatism springing not from a blind force, but from the strongest of forces, an idea. The dialectic of action must move forward to the resolution of the
antinomy of the complete arbitrariness and the complete determinism of action, of freedom. On the one hand, man is conscious of an interior power which alone gives reason to his decisions. On the other, this power appears to be absolutely indifferent, a blind and arbitrary force.

In action the will feels both the attraction of a motive and its own power; it can allow the weakest motive to triumph if for no other reason than to assert its own power; it can also allow the strongest motive to win out. It finds in every motive the means of placing itself in each, and it necessarily places itself in one of them. It bestows upon the object of its preference a transcendent character; to what is insufficient to determine it, it adds its own sufficiency. Yet, although the will seems to know what it really wants and realizes that here alone lies the efficaciousness of any decision, it is not always victorious. Why is man not as free in fact as he is in potency? Why does man freely enslave himself?

Freedom, when it is subjected to reflection, is like any other motive; it is one among many. It is man's, not man. Freedom exacts more effort of man than other ends. Choosing freedom entails sacrifice. Within the subject freedom seems all powerful, but when it is considered as an object, it seems to be nothing. Freedom is real only in the act of willing its own being; it remains itself only if it reproduces itself, that is, only if it is faithful to its own fundamental desire in its choices. This is why Blondel considers it so necessary to determine just what this fundamental desire of man is. How is man to discover an end adequate to the integrity of the primal movement of the will? Just as fundamental is the question: What is the meaning of free will itself, that is, why does man possess free will at all?
Freedom is a means for man to obtain the plenitude of what he wants. Man's basic duty is to become equal to this basic desire of his will. What he really wants is not something in him already realized, but rather something that surpasses and controls him. A heteronomy continually imposes itself on man's consciousness, and his sincerest will exacts from him what he as yet is not. Blondel senses that this something is in some way identified with the deepest aspirations of his fundamental will. For this reason a new reality—a synthesis of the voluntarium or basic desire of man and the volitum or what is actually willed—appears and becomes the transcendent and of man's freedom. Once man conceptualizes this new ideal in some way, he realizes not only his own imperfection but also his obligation to do everything necessary to achieve this synthesis.

And so we find again the instability which forbids us to step at anything; it is impossible to fixate the continuous movement which leads us across the domain of sense, science, and consciousness. At each stage we discover we must go farther on, no farther than we want, but farther than was foreseen. At each stage there is a new synthesis, a higher end to attain. . . . Thus, in the interior dynamics of man there has been noted a heterogeneity of motive and of true end, for if the intention is both the term toward which one tends and the effort one makes to attain it, if the final cause is the complete expression of the efficient cause, it is nevertheless something original and new. It is thus that liberty becomes a transcendent end for itself. If freedom pretends to keep completely to itself and become complacent in its power, this very pretension . . . begins to pervert it, so that moral heteronomy is the necessary complement of the will. For all does not lie in willing what we are, but in being what we will even though we are separated from ourselves, as it were, by an immense abyss. And it is necessary to cross this abyss before finally being what we absolutely demand of ourselves (p. 135).

This is one of the great steps in Blondel's tracing of the logic of action. The recognition by man of the reason for freedom, that is, his need to become equal to a desire that he cannot despotically control and which cannot despoti-
ally control him, is at the same time his recognition of moral obligation.

The moral law is a non-compelling necessity to seek an end; it is what gives meaning to freedom. The presence of duty in man is a principle of internal antagonism; it is, therefore, a principle of force and a point of departure for a new set of dynamics. The consciousness of practical obligation involves an extensive concatenation of necessary consequences. In freely willing a practical obligation man submits to a latent determinism which permits the development of a true science of action.

Freedom, as conceived by Blondel, is conserved and perfected only in so far as it objectifies itself, that is, it must become the object of its own choice. Man must choose both freedom and the reason for the existence of freedom. Born of action, nourished by action, consciousness of freedom and of moral obligation tends to action. The content of formal law is not discovered by deduction alone. The moral law insinuates itself into man's members by means of action; by action it returns to consciousness fuller, clearer, and victorious. It seems, therefore, that there is a correlation between the necessity or obligation of acting and the sincerity of man's fundamental will.

By now the concept of action has taken on greater intelligibility, and so Blondel stops a moment to examine it. Action has itself become a means of knowing; it is a carrying a light into darkness. A philosophy—and this is even truer of a moral philosophy—is narrow and deceptive if it does not penetrate into the darkness that precedes, accompanies, and follows all subjective knowledge. Action is a living germ endowed with an evolutionary power. It is action that separates the real from the possible. Through action man restores to the universe whatever he has seemed to borrow from it. He gives more than he takes,
for he raises his animal nature to a moral level through the operative power of duty. Through action he learns what he must do; through action he succeeds in uniting his fundamental and his actual will.

Briefly, then, what are the steps that have been covered in this chapter? Once something has been posited, there is no stopping. This something leads to positive science, and positive science demands subjectivity for its very existence. In recognizing the scientific reality of consciousness and in studying the laws of psychological automatism, man becomes conscious of internal determinism. But his very awareness of this determinism through the power of reflection leads to freedom. But man cannot will freedom without willing duty, which is the meaning of freedom. Therefore, the internal dynamism of man necessarily implies the concept of the moral law, which is discovered, expanded, and nourished in action.
CHAPTER III

THE EXPANSIVE CHARACTER OF ACTION

The study of the natural and necessary expansion of the will is necessarily the study of action. Action goes beyond all of man's activities—individual, social, and superstitious—and becomes the unifying principle of all of them. In considering the emergence of action in the individual, Blondel first explains the function of the body and of the psychological factors within man. Once he has considered the "psychological" character of the body, he goes into a consideration of the true character of action, emphasizing its most dynamic aspects. Action of its nature must break through the bonds of individual life and interest itself in the whole universe. All the time, however, the will is seeking itself, that is, it is attempting to equate what is actually desired here and now with its own fundamental desire.

Action is necessarily social, not to the point where it becomes inextricably immersed in what is foreign to it, however. Man goes out of himself because of his insufficiency and draws to himself what he needs for his own completion. If action is to exist and expand, there must be interaction, and so Blondel calls action a "social function par excellence" (p. 239). By his action man lives in others and his action becomes an educational force.

But action cannot be contained, not even by human society itself. It is

28The exact sense of "superstitious" action in the Blondelian sense will be considered later in this chapter.
true that man finds some completion in the intimate and closed union with a life foreign to his own, but more is sought than can be gained in this union, that is, man of his nature seeks perfect unity and exclusive, indissoluble perpetuity. Man finds further completion by immersing himself in the life of the state, but the same problem recurs; the state is by no means enough to absorb man's vital energies completely. By the force that bears it along action breaks through even the boundaries of human federation and seeks completion in the whole system of existence that nourishes it. With each step forward man realizes that he really desires more than he has actually desired. Action is essentially superstitious in the sense that **aliquid semper superest**, there is always a further term of action which is not only desirable, but necessary. It has already been seen how the concept of infinity is related to man's freedom, but now the function of the infinite in action is seen more clearly. Action cannot be contained; it will be infinitely in whatever way it can. Each of the points above needs expansion and explanation.

The lack of proportion between what man is and the goal towards which he tends does not mean that he must submit to a perpetual and intolerable contradiction. This merely indicates that he must deal with himself as an instrument of conquest, not an end. In its efforts to expand and develop itself, the will exiles itself into a domain where it seems to be a stranger to itself, and this domain is man's own body, for, in a sense, man's body is a strange and unknown domain which serves as a field for the activity of the will. The resistance of the body is the first resistance that man meets, and this bodily resistance plays an important role in the growth of the will. It seems strange that progress should begin in contradiction and constraint, and yet this is the only way
it can.

Blondel states the problem of the interaction of the body and the will and studies it closely because the first expansion of the will lies within the individual himself. Here, as it were, is the root of the real dialectic of action. Viewed from within, the body is a consequence and a prolongation, as it were, of man's subjective nature. The body is a veil which hides man from himself and an obstacle which reduces him to the necessity of conquering himself, for his body separates him from what he wants. The body is also man's instrument, a means of conquest, the way leading from the initial to the perfect will; it is the very field of victory. The body is the subject's, not the subject himself. It is something he must attach to himself more and more closely. This requires effort, and all effort reveals the fundamental disparity between the voluntarium, the basic will of man, what is really and fundamentally desired, and the volitum, what man actually chooses here and now. This disparity takes the form of an organic resistance or passivity to be conquered.

Bodily resistance does not present itself as an inert mass reacting to sudden shock, but acts through the mediation of an image which operates within consciousness. And yet the very consciousness of the organism and the feeling or foreseeing of material resistance is a new course of inner dynamism, for there is a closer relationship between a man's body and his spiritual faculties than is usually thought to exist. Often the subject's movement are only a way of thinking and willing; they are not merely manifestations of ideas he already has, but they are actually signs which arouse new ideas. Another manifestation of the interaction of spirit and body is in the mediation of the mediate image in bodily activity; the representation of the body becomes a spontaneous force
which operates secretly in the members of a man without his knowing the details of the operation. The continuous resistance which the body presents remains mobile and accessible to action, though impenetrable to the subject's interior view and irreducible to his present will. This is what serves to distinguish the ego from the meum in man.

Blondel does not intend to reduce the problem of action to a discussion of the obscure question of muscular sensation. As important a factor as bodily resistance is in itself, it must be noted that the organic obstacle is only the symbol and expression of psychological opposition. There is even a sense in which the body partakes of the psychological life of man, for the body would escape the subject completely if it did not contain something of the subject himself. This is one of the instructive features of action: it manifests to the subject a subjective life that belongs to him more than he realizes. The subject does not possess this life fully yet; it is a life that escapes him more often than he realizes, but it is a life which he conquers by degrees. The process is something like this: In voluntary action the subject draws from himself what he needs to move and determine himself. In an unconscious way the feeling of effort and organic reactions feed unconscious life. This new consciousness acts in turn on the conditions from which it arises. The subject assimilates the forces scattered within him in order to mould them into ideas and into new motives of action. Thus, organic activity has an ambiguous character, for in its very passivity it tends towards a higher form of activity; in the unconsciousness that surrounds it, it seeks a way to surpass itself.

Organic resistance is not, of course, the only obstacle to action. Man can force his members, but he cannot always master his feelings, thought, and be-
lies. It seems that there is nothing as difficult as action; it is a super-human task to conform one's conduct to one's convictions and best resolutions. This intimate division in man reveals to him the painful feeling of fatigue and the consciousness of work. Action involves labor.

In order to discipline his forces, man needs more than a simple act of the will; discipline involves pain. The directing intention in a certain course of action might be right and complete in its own way, but it does not include the totality of possible resolutions nor the universality of tendencies present at the time of the act, and so, whenever the subject acts, he crushes a part of himself, as it were. But what is thus mortified is not suppressed. Conscious suffering, therefore, supposes unconscious energies, energies that are mutually contradictory. This is why the true man of action may appear to some a bit insensible and perhaps even narrow-minded, for, as he strives towards his end, he necessarily relinquishes ends that are not consonant with the principal end he has chosen. "It is a great deal to know what we really want, nosse; it is even more to will what we want, volle; it is still infinitely more to execute this, perfectare" (p. 162). The rebel forces within man and the sufferings these forces impose upon him can serve him in so far as they clarify his deepest desires and reveal to him secrets which he would perhaps even like to conceal from himself. Nothing is really known unless it is known through action, just as nothing enters into the deepest part of man's being unless it enter there by means of suffering. The pattern is something like this. A will to be realized engenders the consciousness of organic effort. Opposed energies, both physical and psychological, present a front of resistance, and the internal opposition of these tendencies, stimulated by every resolution, explains both the pains of
work and the painful failures of action.

When an action is sown in the midst of consciousness; it seems to arouse against itself a new determinism. But if the will is to find fulfillment, it must impose upon itself an intimate struggle which is the proof of its sincerity and the condition of its development. Man does not receive from the will the same docility he receives from the body in commanded acts such as the voluntary movement of the members. It is far more difficult to conquer a feeling, avoid an occasion, submit to a sacrifice. The subject wants to will, but at the instant of execution he does not will. When the spirit commands the body, the body obeys; when the spirit commands itself, there is resistance.

Blondel believes that the reason for all this is that the will is divided in itself; it is not integral. Every initial effort is a declaration of war against the softness and dissipation of vital forces. A life, one that many would call psychological, is diffused in the body, and when voluntary effort causes these hostile forces to group together, then these dormant powers arise and secret desires are revealed. Action, like a sharp sword, opens to view the murky depths where flow the great currents of life. The confusion that results from the struggle man has with the forces opposed to him causes such confusion that it is often difficult for a man to discern what he really wants. And so, although the will can find satisfaction only in action, the very thought of action at times repulses the will. Yet, though man experiences his failures daily, he can never believe in his failure, nor can he foresee or cure it. Man is the eternal dreamer who thinks that he has accomplished something when he has as yet scarcely outlined it in his mind. He uses his own ideals as a standard by which others are measured, but practically (and paradoxically) speaking, he
does not live up to these ideals himself. He never does what he wants just as he wants to do it. Man is a creature of desires, so much so that he even allows his apparent desires to conceal his real desires.

The problem does not stop here. Man often does even what he does not want to do. Little things catch him unaware and he falls, and these falls menace his intimate will. At such times his knowledge fails him, for mere reflection on the absurdity of a passion does not subdue the passion. It is impossible to live by moral theory alone; knowledge can never be identified with virtue. The most alarming fact is that he failures are not mere negative, mere passive, things. Every act has necessary consequences, every act is a new point of departure. How is it that man who is preeminently rational can become a slave to his own internal forces?

The reason why these rebel forces can influence the will lies in the fact that they possess an energy analogous to that of the will itself, a rational character, as it were. Man's animal life is penetrated by a kind of rational power. His subalternate powers are capable of participating in and of supplanting reason itself. The fact that the rational soul is the form of the organized body has the deepest implications. Other powers take the place of reason and will, and these powers have all the characteristics, needs, and efficaciousness of reason and will. The action that proceeds against the will, this unreasonable action which becomes a new reason, is properly called passion. The mark of a truly voluntary action, voluntary in the deepest sense of the work, is its integrity; it is not partial, it is a synthesis which uses the forces of all other tendencies to realize one of them. A beast has no passion; the "bestial" desires of men conform to the pattern of reason and will, they demand infinite
satisfaction. The reason of passion supplants reasonable reason, usurps its infinite aspirations and its inexhaustible resources of thought. This is why man neither does all that he wills nor wills all that he does.

Having explained the relationship of action to the internal physical and psychological forces of man, Blondel feels that he can state with fuller meaning the nature of action. In a sense, action appears most vivid before a background of confusion, disparity, and determinism. It is the force that cuts across all these factors in man's life and strikes at the very meaning of his destiny. Action for Blondel holds a pre- eminent position in man's life; it is the very stuff from which man, as man, is fashioned. The fiat of the will is the decisive stroke that cuts away the uncertainty of thought. It gives the multiple representation unity and precision; it separates the present from the past and the real from the possible. True action cannot be partial and divided. It is a question of all or nothing. There is only one way for man to contain, regulate, and use even the rebellious energies diffused within him; these tendencies must be absorbed into a system of general activity. They must be forced to cooperate in order to achieve the integrity of individual life. United presides over action; action produces unity. Man is a unit, and he cannot compartmentalize himself; action is integral and knows no boundaries in him. In so far as voluntary activity penetrates and dominates the powers of the body, it grows and is echoed in that immanent reason which can arouse the infinite demands of passion, but which can also answer the call of heroism with inexhaustible generosity. Man repairs and amplifies his energy by using it, by seemingly sacrificing and mortifying it. Caro operando deficit; spiritus operando proficit. There is no limit to the p oral power of the body, for action raises it to the plans of
reason and freedom. It is by action that the soul assumes flesh and the flesh assumes a soul. Action, is in a sense, the substantial bond.

Action is the guarantee of sincerity, for it cuts away incertitude, manifests the most intimate secrets that man hides within himself, and makes him realize the diverse currents that sweep him along without his being aware of it. It reveals to the agent, to him who acts, what is stronger than he and what is strongest in himself. Action springs from action and leads to action. "How many times do we will only after having acted and because we have acted" (p. 189). Action manifests, fixes, strengthens, and even produces the will. The slightest action can be used as a means of achieving liberation. Supported by the solid character of what is done, man can pass from the defensive to the offensive. "Action is a conquest" (ibid.). Actually man does not will to will, for he could then be said to will to will to will and so on to infinity. He wills to act, that is, the will offers itself to itself under the image of a determined task.

The limitation of an act to a single outcome is designed to achieve peace, concord, and unity. Action unites opposed tendencies into a new synthesis; these tendencies are all represented, reformed, and transformed in the accomplished act. Action restrains certain desires and mortifies certain organs in order to satisfy and unify others. Action is a systematic concentration of the life diffused in man; through action man takes possession of himself.

What is it that brings the will to action? It is man's eagerness to re-discover himself amidst the obstacles which separate him from what he wants to be. The tendencies contrary to his will represent a barrier he wants to rid himself of. Action converts rebellious movements into useful tendencies. The
will nourishes itself, as it were, on the substance of its conquered adversaries. In this sense, action might be called a kind of transubstantiation. Progress, therefore, often goes unnoticed, for it becomes a part of man.

But action is still incomplete, for it is still individual action, while true action involves itself in the universe. When the will finds new strength, it not only wants to remain master of the ground it has gained, but it wants to widen the scope of its conquest. Not to advance is to go back. The substance of man lies in action, in what he does. Action is the very principle of growth in man; it is the power that does not allow him to remain within himself, but forces him to go beyond the limits of his own individuality. The law of the progress of the will places the center of gravity outside individual life. The will always seeks itself, but this does not mean that it must seek itself and its own fulfilment within individual life. Man does not suffice unto himself; he must act for, with, and through others. If man is to be completely one, he must not, cannot, remain alone. Complete love of self must not be drowned in the ocean of the I. Egoism is blind; in order to see, man must go out of himself. And yet in this seeming abdication, the will actually triumphs, for true action demands collaboration with the universe. The will alienates itself only to enrich itself.

The Nature and Function of Social Action. Action does not contain itself within the boundaries of individual life. There is no active force in man that does not tend to a final cause, for every active force in man is an implicit avowal of insufficiency and a request for help. Because of his insufficiency man must receive. But if he is to receive, he cannot remain passive. He must by action go out of himself and first give of himself. And so man's insuffi-
ciency becomes a cause of his social action.

Blondel begins his study of the social character of action with an analysis of the continual interaction between man and his environment. Action for him is a kind of dynamic communication between man and his environment. Nor is environment to be considered passive and inert, for it reacts upon man. Blondel examines each term of this interaction and explains how and why such a process leaves neither term the same.

Every act of man is an expressive symbol of subjective life and a natural consequence of the interior operation of the individual. The act is an expression of the continual necessity of the agent to community, signs, language, and symbolism answering a deep need in the nature of man. Every act man places constitutes outside him a fragile but organized and expressive network, a complex system of movements, an animated creature, as it were. Each act is a sign which implies a relationship between the agent and something outside the agent, a new synthesis of the individual with the environment in which he acts. Every sign is already a work. It is a secondary subject, an intention which has taken on a body and another life. A sign is an idea living in nature.

Through its act the will begins to penetrate the world as it has already penetrated the organism. It aspires to become the soul of everything which surrounds it and serves it. It seeks to win over the universe and to dominate it by absorbing it. Therefore, the sign which expresses exteriorly a movement of the will, is, at least in germ, a conquering invasion of and an absorption of the universe by the will. The will spends itself only in order to concentrate itself in and gain its object, as if the whole world were to become immanent to it. The sensible expression of the act indicates a tendency of the will towards
an ulterior end. That is the reason why action always appears transitive, in a perpetual state of becoming. Its growth and consequences are virtually unlimited, for each end, once achieved, becomes a new point of departure.

The environment of man has much to do with the success of action, for man's environment acts upon him. The rhythm of vital expansion is not only centrifugal, from the individual out to his environment, but also centripetal, from the environment into the subject. Action, therefore, must not only influence the life of the individual, but it must also interest the surrounding universe in its work. Action succeeds because around man there are subjects virtually conformed to his designs and accessible to the influence of the natural signs of his acts. Through the mediation of the sign, the intention descends to the level of brute phenomena and there finds echo, complicity, and cooperation.

Every act demands collaboration. Man's intentions are moulded by the object toward which they tend. Therefore, his action is never just his action, but a "co-action." And so an act is more than the passage of potency to act under the influence of a potency already in act; it is the progressive synthesis of two concurring powers under the mediation of and by means of the exchange between an efficient and a final cause. Just as knowledge transforms its subject into the object, so action transports the agent into the end which he pursues.

In whatever man intends there is always a hidden superfluity which is manifested in the result of the operation. Man collaborates with his environment in order to produce a work, but in the production of this work he no longer remains interested in just the work. He now desires the intimacy of the collaborator. In action the desired end becomes successively the preferred motive, then the
decision to execute the voluntary intention, then the object with which the operation deals, next the collaboration of the final cause, and finally the product of this co-action.

Every work produced reproduces itself and becomes a kind of propaganda in act. Anyone who believes that he can restrain or diffuse the consequences of his action at will is laboring under a delusion. A work, once detached from the agent who produced it, lives and grows; it carries within itself the spark of a thought that seeks to communicate itself. A work is not only the product or the effect of an agent, but it is also the instrument and bond of union between naturally solitary consciousnesses. Every action in which man places a portion of thought is a living idea. These ideas have a universal value and are, therefore, communicable; they are capable of finding new life in other consciousnesses, of growing in a different soil. Action, because of its dynamic character and social consequences, is a turning point of universal history. Blondel concludes, therefore, that one must always act as if he ruled the world (see pp. 227-232).

It is interesting to note here a striking similarity between Blondel and Kant. The Kantian man, too, is advised that his "obligation" toward humanity in that his acts should be such that would make fitting norms for the rest of mankind to follow. But the Kantian man remains only theoretically related to mankind while standing practically aloof not only from man but even from God. The action of the Blondelian man, on the other hand, far from merely having some tenuous exemplary relationship to the action of other men, penetrates into the life of others for good or evil. For Blondel action is not merely an idealized norm; it is a force shaping the destiny of mankind.
Therefore, Blondel can well say that "action is a social function par excellence" (p. 239). But precisely because it is done for another, it receives from another a new coefficient. To act is to call forth other individual natures. When man acts on brute forces, he expects a basic modification of his act from their operation. When he acts on other minds, he aspires to place his own thought there. He raises up another self. This need of man to live again in others is natural; he is seeking a complement to himself. It is not only natural for man to hope that others will conform to him, but in this conformity of souls, it is natural that each wish that the other keep his own initiative. In co-action each acts as if he were acting for himself alone, but this is possible only because each is acting in and for the other. Blondel takes the example of the adolescent who thinks he loves much because he aspires to be much loved. He suffers from not being loved precisely because he is not loving and disinterested enough. Co-action is necessary for action, but impossible without sacrifice.

Blondel ends his consideration of the general nature of social action by relating action to education, for education is an example of the force and expansive character of action. Truth is something to be known, loved, sought, and lived; but one's desire to know, love, seek, and live the truth cannot exist without co-action, for it is the same to know truth and to desire to communicate it, to love truth and to love intellects that harbor truth, to seek truth oneself and to arouse it in others, to live by truth and to have others live by it.

From Social to Superstitious Action. Individual life, as has been seen, must open and diffuse itself; it must seek a complement outside itself. Since the individual neither can nor wants to shut himself up within himself, he as-
pires to live again in others. His center of action is not the external work
nor the cooperation that permits him to extend his power and influence, but the
intimate union he contracts with another self. Action does not diffuse itself
without seeking a return and a further concentration. Actions and reactions es-

establish an exchange between life and life. This is the way in which society is
formed. Through the give and take within society man hopes to attain to those
elements of his individuality that escape him.

The individual needs others—their affection, their will, their devoted and
loving action. In this need resides the secret of friendship. In every man
there is something unique that deserves to be uniquely loved. The heart cries
out for complete love and prefers one who loves completely to a million who
love much. But union with another self is never absolutely complete; the will
ever feels the need of extending itself into others, of increasing its life.
This expansive movement has three principal terms—the family, country, and hu-
man society itself. Each of these terms must be examined and evaluated as a
possible term for action itself.

First, man finds completion in the intimate and closed union with a life
foreign to his own. He naively loves to be loved and loves to love. Love that
is given prepares the heart to realize the joy of love received, and in love re-
ceived is discovered an abundance far beyond what was thought to be sacrificed
to the beloved. Lovers seem to turn their backs to the rest of the world; they
seem at times ridiculous. Even one person who loves finds it difficult to
understand love in another. Perfect unity is sought by the lover because of his
immense need of love. Love both respects the distinction of consciousness and
mingles the substance of the lovers. And yet, the will does not find completion
in the full possession of another. Two beings become one, and it is when they are one that they become three. Thus action, which seems to be an end in itself is always the origin of a new world. The perpetuity demanded of love is found in the child. Thus, the end of love is not love itself, but the family. The will goes beyond self-satisfaction; it seeks the beloved in order that there might be a new life. The child, through the education it receives from its parents, remains for them a permanent means of moving toward their destiny.

Blondel goes on to show that the second term of the will's social expansion—one's country—cannot be the final term of this expansion. For the infant, only his family exists. It is, therefore, a decisive moment when the child realizes that the group to which he belongs is not unique in the world. Yet the child's country is not just a larger family; it is an organic unity in which the will finds completion and satisfaction. Patriotism precedes the feeling of humanity and goes beyond the affection of the family. What the individual cannot gain or retain through his own power is gained, held, and assimilated through the powerful organism of the state. The charm of the conjugal bond is that it excludes the universe. The nation partakes of the same charm. Just as man wills that there be other wills outside his own, so he wills that there be a state, that this state be limited, and that there exist outside its frontiers a foreign world. This singular character of life, therefore, must be found in the social sciences if they are to be true sciences. Omne individuum ineffabile. Each nation, as an organ of the great body of humanity, absorbs the thought of other nations according to its own genius and then returns it with a new richness. This is another step in man's journey toward self-realization.
Here it might be asked how it is possible for some men to stop with the individual, the family, or the state and consider one or the other as the terminal point of action. Blondel answers that this is possible because of the nature of the will. Because its tendency is infinite it seems endowed with the power of bestowing the character of infinity upon objects which are otherwise only finite stages toward the possession of the infinite. "There is a sort of spontaneous mysticism which permits the will to stop at each successive step as if each were the end, for in each it places, as least provisionally, the illusion of the infinite..." (p. 268).

The third term of the action of the will is humanity itself. The will of man and his action do not stop at the frontiers of his country. Man aspires to espouse humanity itself, as if he were to form with it one single will. Man must learn to be more than a citizen; he must learn to love man with no other title than man. Man comes to the realization that if he fails to achieve this goal, he fails in his striving to become equal to the fundamental desire of the will, which is the driving force behind all progress. Human action implies the solidarity of humanity, it expresses the unity of the species. One cannot, one does not want to live only for oneself, one's own, one's fellow citizens. Action, by the force that bears it along, breaks through even the boundaries of human federation. Voluntary action, if it is to be integral, must interest the whole system of existence that nourishes it.

Beyond Society: The Superstitious Character of Action. Blondel asserts that action cannot be contained within the bounds of society. Of its nature the will demands completion even if this entails the risk of giving in order to receive. Action, therefore, has a theoretical, a speculative, side, and Blondel
pauses a moment to consider the metaphysics of action. For Blondel metaphysics is more than just the regulative science of the understanding. In so far as it manifests the fact that given reality neither explains nor sustains itself, it exacts a new form of action. It has been seen how the will places its term in an ever widening circle of reality. Once the will places the center of equilibrium outside all given reality, it becomes essential to examine the ultimate reason behind the expansive character of action. The "superstitious" character of action must be examined as a final step toward the discovery of the real term of action.

In acting the will spontaneously seeks itself; this is the reason behind the expansion of action. In tending toward an end, action is forced to abandon itself to the immense and impenetrable power of the universe. Thus, in order to seek itself, the will is constrained to become free of itself. Yet this necessary disinterestedness supposes a movement of self-love and of growth. Self-love moves the agent to act, but in order to act the agent must give of himself. In this way all action, even self-centered action, is a speculation and a risk. In order to conspire completely with the mysterious force of nature, man must assimilate, become, and make himself equal to the determinism of moral life. In his action man is really seeking the definition of his own interest. What is most important is the fact that he traverses the universe without finding it.

In the most insignificant action, there is something that goes beyond experience itself. The metaphysics of action studies this phenomenon. The clearer the idea man has of his action and the more complete his possession of his acts, the greater his tendency to relate what he does to a more universal principle. The expansive character of action forces every man into contact
with at least some type of metaphysics. Since action is universal, the thought that governs it must also be universal. Action constantly feeds thought; thought constantly clarifies action, but the synthesis of the two is something beyond both of them. The metaphysical order is not something beyond or outside the will; it is in the will as a means of progress, it is in the will as the expression of the universal aspiration of the particular will. Each thought is a metaphysics, a singular, unique metaphysics, for it recapitulates being in some way. It is an expression of man's fundamental desire for the truth, which is a desire for being, for the fulness of being wherein lies man's destiny.

Speculative thought, therefore, is but a form of transition in the progress of voluntary life, for it originates in action and proceeds to action. As soon as man realizes that there is something behind the phenomena in and about him, he sees his whole life influences by the explanation of things. Every great philosophy has its beginning and its end in a conception of human destiny. The function of metaphysics is to prepare man for his destiny by preparing action to draw its motivation outside what is already realized in nature and in man. What the metaphysical order proposes is more real than the real itself, for it deals with what ought to be the object of action, what is already contained in man's most fundamental will.

Beyond the farthest horizon of thought there lie unknown lands. Man's ideas always fall short of the fulness of reality, but action goes on where vision stops. Action enters into darkness in order to find light; in this sense obscurity itself in a principle of movement. This is one of Blondel's favorite themes. It can perhaps best be illustrated with an example. Man recognizes within himself a moral tendency to make judgments as to whether he, as man,
should or should not follow a certain course of action. At the time, he does not fully realize why he judges so or even where conformity to such judgments will lead him. Nevertheless, he acts in conformity with these judgments and in so acting finds reasons for acting in this way. His action, therefore, is a source of light and a point of departure for further action. Action ever tends toward the plenitude of life intimately desired by every man. Its goal is union of the basic or real will in man with his actual will, "mentis et vitae, intelligentis et agentis, volentis et voliti aequatio" (p. 303). Action tends toward an absolute, something outside the totality of sensible phenomena, a real outside the real.

Whenever the will finds partial satisfaction, it is goaded on to seek more. "Aliquid semper superest." Action finds completion only in an infinite reality. Worship is an expression of this basic desire of the will; it may be defined as a supreme effort to cross the abyss which separates the will from what it wants to be. Yet man continually falls before the temptation to assign a finite object to the overflow found in the human act, and in doing so satisfies a need to create and master his god. His god must be too great to be a mere object of sense, and yet it must be something which his senses can feed upon. This explains why superstition has always been part and parcel of man; superstition seeks to close the circle of action. When men reflect on his powers, he realizes that he is not master of all of them, for they often achieve more than he intended. This inexplicable overflow of action accounts for his deep-seated need for the occult and the marvelous. Historically man has reduced the object of his worship in order to lessen his own obligations to it; he has even taken his place on the altar himself. There has been the messianic arrival of Reason
and an attempt at a positive religion of Humanity. No matter what man does, a subtle and indirect superstition insinuates itself into all forms of his practical life, his thought, his science, his metaphysics, his art, and his morality. Superstition is ubiquitous and necessarily so, for it satisfies man's need to reconcile himself to the mysterious power upon which he depends.

The will has such a tremendous urge to perfect itself that it often ends by seeking its complement in various types of incomplete action. The metaphysician desires to subject the infinite object he pursues to thought; he thinks he can "put his hand" on this transcendent being through his concepts. In his own way he becomes an idolator in his very desire to free himself from superstition. He wants the absolute to lie beyond action in order to be its consummation, but at the same time it must lie within action in order that action may suffice. But man can neither place the divine in what he does nor can he omit it. All his idols fall—universal solidarity, the social organism, country, love, art, and science—as soon as he thinks that ultimate satisfaction is to be found in any of them.

Every conviction and every form of free thought is a superstition. To act in order to act becomes the superstition of those who do not want to have any other. Each act is weak and imperfect, but its very inadequacy reveals the infinite aspiration of the human heart. Action leads to one inevitable conclusion: it is impossible not to recognize the insufficiency of the whole natural order and not feel some further need; it is impossible to find in oneself what is needed to satisfy this religious need. These are the brutal conclusions of the determinism of human action. Instead of admitting that man cannot find satisfaction in his thirst for the divine by whatever means he pleases, many
conclude that all religious satisfaction is impossible because the need itself for religious satisfaction is mythical. Those who think this way pretend to be satisfied with not being able to satisfy themselves. But the very notion of impossibility exists only through a complementary notion of possibility. The pretention of man to limit himself to sensible reality and to be self-sufficient is radically inconsistent. The order of phenomena neither contradicts nor excludes anything, it demonstrates neither possibility nor impossibility. Phenomena are simply determined facts. As soon as someone claims to draw a negation from these facts, a negation that bears on the possibility of impossibility of other facts, he leaves the field of science, the field of facts.

By his voluntary action man goes beyond phenomena. On the one hand, he finds it impossible to become equal to his own needs; on the other, he finds within himself greater forces than he alone can use. For some reason he cannot make his action equal to the principle from which it springs. Whether he claims to do without religion or makes one up to suit himself, he neither exceeds his right nor does he satisfy his needs. He finds himself forever facing the same dilemma: all attempts at perfecting human action fail, and yet it is impossible for human action not to seek to perfect itself and become self-sufficient. As long as man attempts to limit his action to what he can immediately perceive and sense, he will have to face this dilemma. But there must be a solution to this dilemma if the death and frustration of action is to be avoided. Blondel now turns to the unique solution to the problem of action. Action must break through to a reality beyond the reality which constrains it. The unique solution to the problem of action is a unique reality.
CHAPTER IV

THE NECESSARY BEING OF ACTION

The steps leading to the necessary being of action are basically simple and inescapable. The dabbler in life merely overlooks the problem of action; his "solution" to the problem of life must be rejected as unscientific and incomplete. Man is practically committed to life and its problems; no one can avoid the practical problem of action. The pessimist admits the problem but despairs at finding a solution. His sincerity is at most one of theory, for he makes no attempt at metaphysical experimentation with the elements he calls upon to solve the riddle of destiny—mortality, sacrifice, the void itself.

If the problem of action could be solved not only positively but positivistically, science would be the terminal point of man's action. But the positive sciences cannot explain themselves, much less the scientific spirit of man in which they find their synthesis. And so the spirit of man must become the principal object of investigation. An examination of consciousness, that unscientific phenomenon that is essential to all science, reveals not only deterministic factors within man, but also what is needed to surpass such determinism, that is, the power of reflection.

Freedom itself cannot be merely accepted; it, too, has to be subjected to the same scrutiny as any other phenomenon of life. Freedom for Blondel takes on meaning only in so far as it is related to the moral forces in man; the moral law is the meaning of freedom. Morality may be defined as man's need to
become equal to the fundamental desire of his will. Blondel then follows the natural expansion of the will—in the individual himself, in a complement outside the individual, in the family, in the state, and in human society itself. None of these may be considered more than stages on the way to a further term because action does not exhaust itself, does not find absolute completion, in any of them, or even in all of them combined. The *aliquid-semper-supersest* quality of action indicates that the fundamental desire of the will is somehow unlimited. And so Blondel, following the inevitable logic of action, goes beyond all sensible reality to the being that is in itself the meaning of all action.

It is vain to restrict voluntary action to what depends on the will itself. The pretension of the will to be self-sufficient fails because what wills and acts always remains superior to what is willed and done. Man never succeeds in curtailing the desire of his fundamental will; nor can he alone bring them to fulfilment. Therefore, in every human consciousness there necessarily arises the feeling that the will is not its own principle, rule, or end. Man cannot sit back and passively accept the beautiful order of the universe and submit to the determinism of his actions. He must actively accept himself; he must no longer will what he wills, he must no longer merely will life and the use he makes of it, but he must will what produces, criticizes, and judges this life in him.

It is banal to remark that man daily submits to the intolerable paradox of aspiring to be fully what he wants to be while at the same time realizing that of himself he cannot achieve this desire. In everything that he wills there seems to be something that he does not will. A determinism—higher than
the determinism of the motivational forces, both sensible and psychological, within him—precedes, encompasses, and goes beyond his personal initiative. It is a question of what in whom is the principle of his own will.

Even if man were to achieve everything he desired, the fact would remain that the very faculty with which he wills lies beyond him. He has neither created nor determined it nor has he fashioned its fundamental desires. He wills, but he has not willed the power to will. That the crossing is favorable is one thing, that he has embarked in another. This predetermination can seem to some an inexplicable constraint, enough to corrupt every human action. But most men, lacking either pride or penetration, do not even feel the strangeness of the problem. Men not only accept the power of willing without reflection but deceive themselves into thinking that an accumulation of things that fail to give complete satisfaction individually will, in the end, bring complete satisfaction conjointly. A hundred thousand nothings seem to make something.

Suffering and satiety play a very important role in man's moral life. They force him to reflect on the nature of the will, they force him to reevaluate his concept of satisfaction. The lesson of satiety is a most compelling one: once man thinks that he holds the universe in his hands he finds himself face to face with an unfathomable void. All that he has achieved is as nothing, for it has not given him the kind of satisfaction he was seeking. Suffering offers an even more brutal lesson: suffering runs endlessly from the very substance of man, forcing him to raise his hands instinctively toward a liberator. Many obstacles can be overcome, many can be adapted to the individual's plan for a happy life, but sorrow and pain make man regret that he was ever born. Suffering is the scandal of reason. Evil and suffering set will in conflict
with reality, for the first movement of the will is to hate and revolt. Still worse, all of man's suffering is not inflicted on him from without; many enemies lie within man. Even when he tries to do good, he is often deceived and conquered. Man never entirely escapes the humiliating and painful fatality of not doing everything he wants, of doing what he does not want to do and ending by wanting it. The fatality of satiety, suffering, and evil constrains him to take note of what must be willed if he is to will the will itself.

The feeling of the apparent frustration of action in satiety and suffering is real only in so far as it implies in man a will superior to the contradictions of life. The presence in man of what is not willed manifests his fundamental will in all its purity. The agent is brought to will the very being of the will, not merely its object.

Evil, death, and suffering are facts only by contrast, by the internal opposition between the fundamental will, the volonté voulue, and the will that is actually operative, the volonté voulante. When man is forced to admit the insufficiency of every object offered to the will, when he stands free from these objects face to face with death, he must betray a higher aspiration. Man cannot help posing the problem of being and immortality, for they are part and parcel of his existence. Death, not immortality, is contrary to nature; death, not immortality, needs explanation. Death is intelligible only because of an implicit certitude of survival.

This indestructible hold on life is the effect of a fundamental adherence of the will to its own nature. The will cannot stop, it cannot go back, it must go on. The nothingness of sensible reality, the frustration and insignificance of human actions must be translated into a need for something else, of
something that makes sensible reality seem as nothing. Without this something, sensible reality would not exist.

The determinism of action has led to these conclusions: it is impossible not to pose the problem of action, impossible to give it a negative solution, impossible to find the completion of oneself in oneself or in others, impossible to stop, impossible to go back, impossible to go on alone. Man of himself can neither suppress or attain what he wills. This conflict explains the necessary presence in consciousness of a new affirmation; and it is the reality of this necessary presence that renders possible the consciousness of the conflict itself. There exists a necessary Unique Being, a unique nécessaire (p. 339). This Being is the term of the real expansion of the will, not merely the term of a mental dialectic; this Being is an enrichment of active life rather than a sterile satisfaction of the mind. The necessity of this Being results from the total movement of life.

The proof of the existence of this necessary Being springs from the insufficiency of phenomena. Per se quae non sunt aet apparent ad se quae non apparent et sunt (p. 343). The necessary Unique Being stands at the beginning or at the end of all the avenues open to man; the inquisitiveness of the mind and science lead to this Being, sincere and mortified passion, joy, thanksgiving lead to Him. Everywhere, whether one descends into himself or rises to the limit of metaphysical speculation, the same need persists and is renewed. Blondel holds that the argument a contingentia does not show the necessary as something beyond the contingent, outside the contingent as a further term, but as a reality already present to what is contingent. This argument does not merely prove the impossibility of affirming the contingent alone, it proves the impossibility of
denying the necessary which is the foundation of the contingent. The relative necessity of the contingent reveals to man the absolute necessity of the necessary.

In man's activity the ideal conceived is constantly surpassed by the reality of what is achieved; this reality is, in turn, surpassed by an ever renewed ideal. Thought goes beyond the practical, the practical goes beyond thought. But man draws from himself neither the light of his thought nor the efficaciousness of his action. A truth that is more intimate to him than his own consciousness, a power that is the source of all his activity--these exist in him though they are not identified with him. The wisdom of things is not in things; the wisdom of man is not in man. The order, harmony, and wisdom man discovers in himself and in things are not merely effects in view of which reason forces him to rise to a cause absent from its works, for this harmony and this beauty is not constituted and subsistent in itself. Man does not seek in things premises in order to formulate a deduction; he does not invoke any principle of causality. But in the imperfect wisdom of things and of his own thought and power he finds the necessary presence and action of a perfect thought and power. And though this presence and this action are in him, he cannot say that they are his. Man's inability to become equal to himself leads to his recognition of the necessary Unique Being. The subject does not become equal to himself because he does not become equal to the power in himself. The necessary Unique Being is all that man cannot be--all thought and all action.

Man wants to possess this Being, and his point of departure is this very Being in so far as He exists in man. As man learns to evaluate himself and see clearly what he is and what he is not, as he grows in experience and be-
comes more capable of penetrating reflection, he begins to see that this Being has such a decisive influence on his very existence that without Him he would not be. He begins to realize that experiential knowledge of and possession of this Being are one. Man finds it disconcerting to discover that this Being is the absolute equation of being, knowing, and acting. This Being is a subject in which all is subject, even the consciousness which He has of Himself, even the intimate operation by which He realizes Himself. It is impossible for man to conceive His existence as being distinct from His knowledge or His knowledge from His action, for this would mean lowering Him to the very state of imperfection that forced him to the discovery of this Being. It is in the practical order that the certitude of the Being has its foundation, for in life action alone is necessarily complete and total. Only the total and concrete development of action reveals the Being to man. This does not mean that He is revealed under aspects which enable Him to be recognized abstractly by the mind; action rather reveals Him as a concrete truth, efficacious and useful to the will. And there is only one name for this Being who dominates and is life, the name that has been given Him through the ages—God.

The thought of God is brought to man's consciousness by the determinism and dynamics of his interior life. This thought has an immediate effect on the organization of his conduct, for his action is now related to the principle of action. The thought of God arouses in man a desire to know and to possess, and this desire partakes of the infinity in which it has its origin. The moment of the appearance of God in consciousness resembles eternity so much that one is afraid of entering completely into this thought. God is known necessarily, but He is necessarily not known completely. Against the clairvoyance of some
it must be maintained that in what man knows and wills God remains what he can neither know nor do; against the voluntarily blind it must be maintained that, without dialectical complications, in the twinkling of an eye, for all men, at every moment, God is the immediate certitude without which there is no other. God is the first light, the language that need not be learned. No one can really seek God unless he has already found Him. God wants to be sought, but first He must be found in order that He might be sought; He wants to be sought in order to be completely found.

Thought has never been enough to hold God. Just when man seems to touch God by means of thought, he loses Him. He holds Him fast through action. To think of God is an action, but man does not really act unless he cooperates with God and seeks His collaboration in everything he does. This "theurgy" (p. 362) reintegrates the divine element into the human operation. Action is a synthesis of man with God. The thought of the transcendent inevitably imposes a transcendent character on action. The conviction, vague perhaps, of a destiny to be fulfilled arises necessarily in man's consciousness and has an inevitable efficaciousness in the practical aspect of life. A disquiet about the nature of life as a whole takes possession of man; the problem is necessarily posed, and somehow no answer seems satisfying unless it places the meaning of life beyond life in some way. This explains the transcendent character of man's acts. What he does he never does just to do it. He may not admit this or any of these truths which press upon his consciousness, but a lie never changes the necessity of the truths it aspires to conceal.

Choosing the Death or Life of Action. Once the necessary thought of God arises in consciousness man's course, the pattern of his action, is, as it were,
Man necessarily feels the need to make his thought and his life equal to God. He cannot know God without wanting to become Him in some way. Yet it seems strange that man is forced to want to become what he himself can neither attain nor possess; this infinite ambition of his to exist manifests his inherent inability with painful clarity. There is but one way out: he must substitute the infinite will of God for his own in order that he might will not only infinitely but the infinite. This is what man must do if he is to become equal to the fundamental desire of the will, but he is not forced to choose such a course of action. He has an option, he can choose between alternatives. This is the option: man may choose to fulfil the fundamental desire of his will by consenting to be supplanted by God or he may aspire to be self-sufficient, to do without God, to profit from His necessary presence without making this presence voluntary, to borrow from God the force to do without him, to will infinitely without willing the infinite. He has the power to love God and he has the awful power to condemn God and to love only himself. Freedom is seen clearly in this option, for the will exercises itself fully only when the stakes are worthy of it. Thus the knowledge and the acceptance of something of the phenomenon, has led man along a determined path to this free decision upon which his destiny depends. One alternative is necessarily imposed upon him, but it is by his choice that he becomes what he wants to be. Determinism, therefore, is finally absorbed in freedom. Man aspires to play the role of god: to be a god without God and against God or to be like God through God and with God—that is the alternative.

The question arises: Is it possible to take everything from God and refuse God Himself? Can there be being without the Being? How can man do through God
what he does without and against Him? In so far as any good presents itself as an object to be conquered, it becomes a partial and limited motive, one that may be rejected. It can even seem that God Himself is finite, and that man and the aspirations of his heart are infinite. Given such a situation, the problem is this: Is man willing to restore to God His infinitude by means of a movement which seems self-initiated but which really comes from God? If man is not willing to do this, if he insists on seeking infinity in finite objects, he will end by placing their infirmity in himself and the infinity of his will in them. This is the decision that action forces man to face daily: Do I want infinity or less than infinity, that is, nothing? If man chooses something instead of infinity, he has something minus infinity which is nothing. This love of evil is the death of action. The very pretention of not going beyond the human order involves an evil that justifies not only the privation of good but an eternity of unhappiness.

If it is possible to apply the infinite tendency of the will to a limited term, it remains impossible to destroy this character of infinity. Man cannot hide from himself the grandeur of his destiny, he cannot refuse the honor in order to avoid the pain involved in attaining it. The very trifles he pursues receive their light and force from something beyond them. The vainest action is an opportunity for the will to experience its indestructible power. If man rebels against the tremendous power within him and the tremendous responsibility it entails, his very outcry comes from a heart enamored of the light; his cry is a cry against the darkness. If he tries to love a contradiction, he involves himself in contradictions. He speaks of the brevity of time, but if he thinks it is short and uncertain, it is strange that he acts as if it were never going
to end.

When a man fails to face the moral obligations imposed upon him, it is that he wants what he wills now to go on forever. To live as if one were never going to die is illogical. When a man uses insufficient goods as if they were sufficient, he places himself infinitely in debt, for what he uses in himself is infinite. His unhappiness springs from his putting eternity into time instead of time into eternity. Man uses his infinite power, paradoxically enough, to limit himself. He even bars the way to God by using the power he receives from God. In the end man's action itself is his judge.

Man's only salvation lies in action, for in action there is effected a secret marriage between the human will and the divine will. Through action man participates in the free necessity of God who cannot fail to will Himself. To abuse and corrupt the world is nothing compared to the crime of which the perverted will is guilty, for the perverted will seeks to abuse God and to kill Him in so far as He depends on man. Action is a synthesis of God and man; neither God alone nor man alone can change it, produce it, or annihilate it. To repair man's action "a degree of the all-powerful is not enough. . . . And, if it dare be said, it is necessary that God die if man's crime is to be compensated for; God must die voluntarily if man's crime is to be pardoned and destroyed. But man himself can effect nothing" (pp. 371-372). If man persists in his inordinate self-love, which is really self-hate, what he really and basically wants will escape him eternally, while what does not want, though he avidly seeks it, will be eternally present to him. If man wants the void, he will have it, but he will not be annihilated for having willed it. There is nothing in such a state that results from external constraint; he perseveres in
his own will, and this is both his crime and his punishment. Up to this point we have seen a picture of man lost, but man can be saved.

Action cannot restrict itself to the natural order and yet, of itself, it cannot go beyond it. Its life is beyond its own power. If action is to be restored to the fulness of its nature, the first place in action must be ceded to the First Cause, man's will must be submitted to the mysterious Guest of his being. God must be freely established in human life in order that the immanence of this transcendent Being may complete the operation of the will, making what wills equal to what is willed in action.

Since man's great work is substituting, as it were, the will of God for his own will, renunciation, paradoxically enough, lies at the root of the life of action. The whole hierarchy of natural goods leads man to what he most sincerely and intimately desires, but this ultimate good cannot be attained without sacrifice and abnegation. It is not essential just to do all the good one wants to do, bona omnia facere, but to do well all that one does, bene omnia facere (seep. 376.), in a spirit of detachment and submission to a will other than one's own. Man must deny himself if he is to make the good his good. The immediate testimony of consciousness shows that action is good when the will submits itself to an obligation that demands effort and self-conquest. It is impossible to conform to the obligations presented in consciousness without surrendering one's own will. Thus, whatever the natural value of the motive that solicits the will may be, it must first be subdued in some way before it takes on a truly moral value.

There is only one way to reconcile contraries and dominate opposed desires; the different alternatives, even the one that is to be chosen, must be sacri-
fixed to something beyond the motive itself. Passion, even a passion for good, must never dominate man. Perfect and universal detachment renders man indifferent to particular forms of action and completely devoted to the great and supreme motive which alone communicates to everything else its infinite value. The idea of the infinite must be a living thing in man, something willed and practical, something that takes over his very being. The universal must be placed in all the particulars of life in order to give what is relative an infinite value. The man who lets the will of Another greater than he take over his own will always does his own will. The egotist is constantly telling himself that he is exempt from a certain type of action because of the circumstances. He vaguely perceives the necessity of submitting to a will other than his own, but he does not have the strength nor the insight to do so. Man’s good actions go beyond him and immolate him.

If, Blondel claims, renunciation is at the beginning of every good action, suffering is found in its expansion. Suffering is a means of formation, a sign and an instrument of reparation and progress. To love and to seek suffering, to place perfect action in painful passion—here lies the true triumph of the will, for such a state confounds nature and engenders in man a new and more human life. The heart of man is measured by its acceptance of suffering, for suffering is the imprint on him of another greater than he. Suffering is always foreign to man even when it is expected, and even the man who desires and loves it cannot help hating it, for it kills something in him in order that it might be replaced with something that is not he. But if man wants to be all that he should be, he must understand and accept the lesson and action of suffering. Suffering is the seed that dies within him in order that he may bear more fruit.
But suffering can effect nothing in man unless he cooperates with it actively. Suffering is a touchstone, a test, for it forces the will to manifest its secret dispositions. Suffering is a proof of love and a renovation of interior life; it plants in man an incurable restlessness. It is the newcomer, the unexplained, the infinite that crosses life like a sword. There is a kind of identity between true love and active suffering, for without the education of pain it is impossible to arrive at real disinterestedness and courageous action. To love means to love to suffer, for it is to love the joy and action of another in oneself. When man discovers the secret of finding sweetness in bitterness itself, then all is sweet. The power by which one deprives himself is worth infinitely more than that of which he is deprived. Thus the mark of a will that is sincere and in conformity with its initial generosity is not to be satisfied with anything finite. Mortification is true metaphysical experimentation, for it deals with being itself. True mortification effects the death only of what prevents man from seeing, doing, and living.

Finally, although everything must be expected from God, it is necessary to act as if all were to be done by one's own efforts. Man must not delude himself into thinking that his renunciation itself is his own work; this illusion would be worst than the first. Action is a common work that must proceed from both God and man. There need be no fear for the future, for this would mean a lack of confidence in God; man must always expect His all-powerful aid and collaboration. Man must face his destiny squarely and work toward it according to the degree of light and strength he possesses. He must remain over conscious that he cannot find in himself the principle, the means, and the end of action; he must never consider himself as having arrived at his term or goal.
Action itself must give him the vigor and insatiable hunger that mark the healthy, integral will. He must replace his own initiative by the absolute initiative of God. When he admits his basic passivity, he is on the way toward the perfection of activity.

From the void to the full possession of the Being of action the distance is infinite, and the way is filled with suffering and risk. But man may make the journey with complete assurance, for he never travels it alone.
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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Gerard Egan has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Philosophy.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

24 Sept, 1959

Date

[Signature of Adviser]