The Personalistic Philosophy of Louis Lavelle

Thomas Edward Gafney
Loyola University Chicago

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THE PERSONALISTIC PHILOSOPHY OF LOUIS LAVELLE

by

Thomas E. Gafney, S.J.

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

Thomas E. Gafney, S.J. was born in Cleveland, Ohio on November 28, 1932.

In June, 1946 he was graduated from St. James' Grammar School in suburban Lakewood, Ohio and entered St. Ignatius High School, Cleveland in September of the same year. After graduation from high school in June, 1950 he enrolled at John Carroll University, Cleveland. In September of 1952 he entered the Novitiate of the Society of Jesus at Milford, Ohio and was enrolled in the College of Arts at Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio. Four years later he entered West Baden College, West Baden Springs, Indiana, and was enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts Course of Loyola University, Chicago from which he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in June, 1957. He then enrolled in the Graduate School of Loyola University to pursue his studies for the degree of Master of Arts in Philosophy.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In recent years a great, new scientific interest in human nature has developed. Formerly our best scholars and intellectuals were devoted to studies which would provide men with greater material and cultural advantages, while man himself remained an unsearched mystery. But in the last fifty years this new interest, which in large part has been caused by the world-wide insecurity and unrest of our age, has made considerable progress in studies of man himself. There is genuine interest in the search for a more profound insight into our nature.

A corresponding interest in the nature of man has arisen in the realm of philosophy. Existentialist philosophy clearly exemplifies this intense new personal approach to man. The present thesis may be conceived of as an attempt to catch a glimpse of this philosophical movement by studying the system of a modern philosopher who had a share in its development.

No further explanation, then, seems necessary for undertaking the study of a philosopher of person. The purpose of the thesis is to examine and express the philosophy of Louis Lavelle from the particular aspect of his theory of person and personality. Special emphasis will be given to the notion of human freedom which is
central in his philosophy of person. The treatment of Lavelle's philosophy will be from the aspect of its historical and doctrinal contexts, and will include a description of his fundamental themes. The second part of the thesis will emphasize the primary importance of freedom in Lavelle's philosophy of person. While Lavelle never undertook to explain his philosophy in this way, it is hoped that the results are something that would be acceptable to him.

The bibliography comprises only the major books and articles written by or about Lavelle in French and English (with two exceptions) which were available to the author. An exhaustive bibliography on Lavelle (which includes everything written by or about him up to mid-1957) has been published by Jean Ecole in his book on Lavelle's metaphysics.¹

Before beginning our study, it will be of interest to learn something of the background, life, and characteristics of the philosopher whose system we are to study. Lavelle liked to recall with a smile the complaint of Charles Péguy that it is characteristic of Parisians "not to have a country" (n'avoir pas de pays).

The country which Lavelle so loved was situated near Bordeaux in the extreme confines of Dordogne in Périgord, France. Born on July 15, 1883 at St. Martin de Villereal, Lavelle spent all his early years in near-by Parranquet. He owned his family home in later years and spent as much time there as possible. As if destiny marked this preference, it was there he died after five suffocating hours on the night of August 31, 1951.2

After studies at Lyons under Hamelin, Lavelle received his Agrégé de philosophie in 1909 and his Docteur-ès-Lettres in 1922 from the University of Strasbourg. During the First World War, which interrupted his studies, Lavelle was a prisoner of the Germans. When the war ended he served as a professor in several lycées at Condorcet. From 1932 to 1934 he taught a course in general philosophy at the Sorbonne. Following this he lectured with great success at the University of Bordeaux until, in 1940, he was made Inspector General of Public Education. In December of 1941 he succeeded LeRoy and Bergson in the highly prized professorship at the Collège de France. During his entire philosophical career and right up until his death, Lavelle wrote many

2 René Le Senne, "Louis Lavelle," Giornale di Metafisica, VII (4) (Luglio-Agosto 1952), 407. This memorial article by Lavelle's close friend and associate has many interesting details and insights into Lavelle's life and philosophy. See also Georges Davy, "Louis Lavelle," Les Études Philosophiques, XII (4) (Octobre-Décembre 1957), 319-326, and XIII (1) (Janvier-Mars 1958), 15-31, for biographical details of Lavelle's life and a sketch of his whole system and works.
books and articles, and he contributed to numerous conferences in Cologne, Brussels, and the School for Higher Studies at Ghent. In all of his writings, perhaps most notably in *La philosophie française entre les deux guerres* (Paris, 1942) and *Traité des valeurs*, I (Paris, 1951), Lavelle shows a penetrating knowledge of the systems of both modern and classical philosophers.

In his years of study and teaching, Lavelle developed a profound philosophy, both personal and traditional, not by consciously reacting against the tendencies of his own age, but seeming to ignore them, by pursuing his own road. Vincent Smith has characterized him as "[o]ne of the greatest metaphysicians of our day... [who] has driven deeply enough into the real to find a point of intersection for whatever is positive and salutary in modern philosophy."³

An interesting result followed from Lavelle's tendency to independent thought. In 1921 he presented his doctoral theses on *La dialectique du monde sensible* and *La perception visuelle de la profondeur* before an academic jury of the University of Strasbourg. In spite of a brilliant defense, the reception he received was plainly reserved, and to the general surprise of his fellow students, he received only the note "good" and was awarded the equivalent of a B for his work. Perhaps he made the mistake of

affirming the originality of his thought in too forceful a manner, failing to have sufficient recourse to the masters of recognized authority. At any rate, because of this, he never occupied a Chair of Philosophy at the Sorbonne, since these are held only by those whose doctoral theses merit the equivalent of an A.

Lavelle had an extremely dignified personality. He seemed even a little majestic as he slowly moved his big body (which expanded a bit towards the end of his life). His words were grave and very correct, his speech slow and careful. When he spoke, his right arm kept time with the cadence of his words. The clarity and precision of Lavelle's expression was especially remarkable. His limpid style, appearing to flow from a spring which was never either turbid or dry, was a conquest rather than a gift. His thought was the expression of a personality which, although reserved, was always ready to give itself. Some have even considered his engaging style worthy of caution lest the reader, caught off guard, be fascinated by harmonious, fluid,
and somewhat exaggerated expressions which please the ear but render him a bit uncritical. 6

With all of Lavelle's winning qualities, we must acknowledge the fact that he has not been too widely known outside of France. How can this be explained? Père Troisfontaines attempts an answer to this question when, after referring to the "luminous synthesis" of Lavelle's philosophy, he writes: "But . . . the search for an absolute point of view, almost from outside concrete experience, is directly against the grain of the contemporary trend in modern philosophy. This, I think, explains the little influence exercised by Lavelle on French thought (whatever may be, in other respects, his intrinsic value). The atheists and materialists do not care for his personalist spiritualism; the Christians find him a bit too 'traditional,' a bit too crystalized, too 'classical'." 7

Lavelle was not a Catholic; he was Protestant by birth but was detached from any practice. However he considered himself a Christian and refers frequently to the importance of Christianity


7Information from a letter of December 9, 1957 to the author from Père Roger Troisfontaines, S.J., Professor of Philosophy at Collège Notre-Dame de la Paix, Namur, Belgium. (Translation mine.)
on his thought (without which he would have devolved into a sort of pantheism). Indeed, his inseparable friend, René Le Senne, remarks that by recalling the continuous, actual, vivifying daily presence of God in our experience (through his univocal concept of being), Lavelle manifests a "Catholic sensibility." 

The content of Lavelle's philosophy we will see more clearly in our discussion of his basic philosophical themes in Chapter 3. We may conclude this introductory chapter by quoting from the Inaugural Lecture which Lavelle delivered at the Collège de France when he assumed the Chair of Philosophy. He gave apt and memorable expression to his own philosophical ideals when he said: "To seek the absolute in oneself and not outside oneself, in the most intimate, profound, and personal experience, but an absolute in which we can only participate, which establishes our very existence in an ever-renewed communication with all beings by the intermediation of all things; ... such are the demands of French thought to which we intend to remain loyal. It is not in avoiding contact with the absolute, but in trying to rediscover it in all the events of our lives that we shall give them their true significance, and this will make us capable of appreciating the weight of our burden and of accepting it." 

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8 Ibid.
9 Le Senne, p. 421.
10 Lacroix, pp. 372-373.
CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF LAVELLE'S PHILOSOPHY

In seeking to understand the philosophy of Louis Lavelle, it will be profitable to consider what currents or streams of thought, common in the histories of philosophy, best describe the place he occupies in the modern philosophical world.

The whole of the contemporary philosophical world has been viewed as a product of the three schools of existentialism, Marxism, and personalism. But a still closer perspective of Lavelle's thought can be obtained by considering him in the light of existentialism, philosophy of spirit, and personalism. Each of these requires a brief description; their full pertinence, however, will be seen in the following chapter when the main doctrinal points of Lavelle's philosophy are discussed.

Existentialism

According to existentialism, the principal problem of philosophy is that of our concrete existence. Why do we exist? What is our purpose or goal? More simply, what does it mean for us to

exist?\textsuperscript{2} In its emphasis on this aspect of reality, existentialism is a reaction of the philosophy of man against the excesses and impersonalism of philosophies of reason, ideas, and things.\textsuperscript{3} The approach to reality by reason alone is through discursive and historical, systematic methods.\textsuperscript{4} For the existentialist, this approach is inadequate since it does not explain and elucidate the more intimate aspects of our existence which, though less tangible, are no less real.

The initiator of modern existentialism is the Danish S\øren Kierkegaard, who lived in the first half of the last century. He viewed every individual as an original, unique being who is isolated from the guidance of universal principles and who is unaided by thought and speculation, which are on a different level from individuality. In his conscious opposition to Hegelian rationalism, Kierkegaard strove to see the supreme reality of the universe in individuals. Existentialism today is essentially the same, though it has developed and been variously modified.

In the carefully chosen words of Père Jolivet, existentialism

\textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 13.

\textsuperscript{3}Emmanuel Mounier, \textit{Esprit}, Avril, 1946. (Cited in Grevillot, p. 13.) (Translation mine.) A footnote on page 14 of Grevillot gives Mounier's division of existentialism into twelve principal themes.

is "the collection of doctrines according to which philosophy has for its object the analysis and description of concrete existence, considered as an act of liberty which is constituted by self-affirmation and which has no other origin or foundation than this affirmation of self." Lavelle himself described existentialism as a system which implies that each of us is a being who is cast alone in the world with his own personal abilities which he must discover and actualize.

In his *Court traité de l'existence*, Jacques Maritain distinguishes two fundamental forms of existentialism. The one, he says, "affirms the primacy of existence, but as implying and preserving essences or natures, and as manifesting the supreme victory of the intellect and intelligibility." This he considers authentic existentialism, the existentialism of St. Thomas. The other "affirms the primacy of existence, but as destroying or abolishing essences or natures and as manifesting the supreme defeat of the intellect and of intelligibility."
Viewed in another way, existentialism can be seen to have two distinct currents. There is the atheistic, nihilistic strain, to which philosophers like J.-P. Sartre and Martin Heidegger belong. They view man as surrounded by nothingness, standing in anguish against pure otherness; and since there is only nothingness to clarify life, they despair of all meaning and value. The theistic current in existentialism, however, visible in Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel among others, takes a positive outlook and emphasizes man's openness to the Transcendent in nature. These philosophers take a dynamic view of existence, considering it the means by which man realizes himself. The "Philosophy of Action" of Maurice Blondel is a clear example of this. This positive and open approach to reality can be regarded partly as a reaction against positivism and partly as a reaction against the reduction of religion to social morality. It asserts, the Transcendent after a reconsideration of personal experience and its implications. 8

Lavelle, who is certainly in the existentialist movement, is also well within its theistic current. According to his philosophy I can discover and realize myself only in association with God, whom Sartre denies, and without whom, according to

Lavelle, I would be nothing.\(^9\) The third chapter will more fully explain Lavelle's concept of being, and discuss the all-important place he gives to participation.

Existentialism, however, when viewed in its total context, is a philosophy that affirms the primacy, or priority, of existence; and this priority is affirmed in relation to the traditional Platonic emphasis on essence. The philosophy of Louis Lavelle has been viewed as a neat synthesis of these two possibilities. For him, as for the existentialists, existence in man precedes essence; but—and in this he agrees with the essentialists—it is his essence, or what he is, and not his existence, or the fact of being, that constitutes the value of man.\(^10\)

Thus it is that many authors agree in creating a new division of existentialism for Lavelle's philosophy; they consider his philosophy an "essentialist existentialism." In his work Het spiritualistisch Existentialisme van Louis Lavelle, M. Delfgaauw notes that Lavelle has joined a metaphysical tradition which defines the relation of existence and essence. He cites a letter in which Lavelle states that existence is given to us precisely so that we can acquire an essence and come to know our individual

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\(^9\)Jean Ecole, "L'existentialisme de Louis Lavelle," Revue Thomiste, LII (2) (1952), 390. (Translation mine.)

\(^10\)Paul Foulquié, Existentialism (London, 1948), p. 12. [This English translation was made from the first French edition by Kathleen Raine.]
existence. Lavelle adds that he has never rejected the notion of an ideal essence, but rather considers it a mediatrix between pure being and individual existence.

Philosophy of Spirit

In the past twenty-five years there has arisen in France a peculiar philosophy under the name of Philosophy of Spirit. Interest in the realm of the spirit, of course, is not new in France, nor new in this century. It can, in fact, be easily traced in French philosophers back through Maine de Biran and Descartes. Vincent Smith sees an even more ancient source when he writes that the Socratic spirit and even the Socratic method has, to a certain extent, been renewed today by the group in France promoting the philosophy of spirit. Three main principles characterize this movement: a return to the absolute; a consideration of all human experience; and a consideration of all the spiritual tendencies which require the comprehension of the human person. The three most influential figures in the

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11 M. Delfgaauw, Het spiritualistisch existentialisme van Louis Lavelle (Amsterdam, 1947), p. 125. This is quoted in Jolivet's Les doctrines existentialistes in a footnote on page 27.

12 Ibid.


14 I. M. Bocheński, La philosophie contemporaine en Europe, (Paris, 1951), p. 178. (Traduit par François Vaudou.)
movement of the philosophy of spirit which continues the French traditions of spiritualism that Bergson embraced, are Gabriel Marcel, René Le Sénne, and Louis Lavelle. One might call their doctrines a "spiritual existentialism." According to Lavelle, there is no metaphysics of the objective; metaphysics ought to be rather the science of spiritual intimacy. He finds the idea of being in this intimacy, and will show by a kind of ontological argument that this idea contains a reality.

As Lavelle himself has written, the philosophy of spirit has marked in France an effort of resistance against all the doctrines which cultivate anguish and despair in the soul, instead of trying to surmount them; doctrines which regard nothingness (néant) as more profound than being (être). The nihilist philosophers remain satisfied with a sentiment of our subjection to the body; and instead of trying to free us from it, they cause us to labor to engage ourselves in the temporal servitudes from which it was the goal of ancient wisdom to free us. The philosophy of spirit seeks to restore the respect and love of spiritual values of which, they say, the highest form has been reached in the

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15Smith, p. 334.

16Bocheński, p. 178.

course of history by a "synthesis of Platonism and Christianity."\(^{18}\) The difference which separates true spiritualism from critical philosophy is that the former grasps act immediately in its very occurrence, while the latter finds act through induction.

In a private letter to M. Sciacca, Lavelle wrote: "I can only renew the expression of our agreement on the principle of defense of the spirit, of metaphysics and of a Christian Platonism in which one can find that alliance between the reality of the idea and the value of the person which doubtless constitutes the very essence of spiritualism."\(^{19}\) Whatever difficulties may lurk in their formal statements, the spirit of these philosophers echoes sympathetically in the hearts of genuine philosophers. Sartre may have hit the headlines, but spiritual existentialism has come inspiringly close to hitting the truth.\(^{20}\)

**Personalism**

Personalism is a philosophy; it is not merely an attitude, nor is it a system. In the broadest sense, personalism is a way of thinking that makes personality the key to all philosophical problems. It maintains that to be is to be a person or self. In

\(^{18}\)Ibid. The relations between Lavelle and Platonism will be discussed in Chapter 3.

\(^{19}\)Cited by M. F. Sciacca, "Dal mio carteggio con Louis Lavelle," *Giornale di Metafisica*, VII (4) (Luglio-Agosto 1952), 490. (Translation and italics mine.)

\(^{20}\)Smith, p. 370.
the personalist world if one poses the question: "What does it mean to be?" (the fundamental problem in philosophy since Parmenides), one prime fact imposes itself. It is that for me, to be means to think, to be conscious.21

The term "personalism" is of recent usage. Employed in 1903 by the French philosopher Renouvier to describe his philosophy, it then fell into disuse. When it reappeared in France towards 1930, there was a very different climate of thought, and the term was used to designate the first researches of the review Esprit and of some neighboring groups (Ordre Nouveau) concerning the political and spiritual crisis then arising in Europe.22 The concept of personalism today, however, is by no means a novelty. The universe of the person is the universe of man, and the personalism of the modern world is grafted onto a long tradition which some like to trace back even to Socrates' "Know thyself."

"The fundamental affirmation of personalism is 'the existence of free created persons'. But it is not a gratuitous metaphysical affirmation; it is a principle of human action and of meaning for people who take a common attitude in viewing man."23 The person


22 Mounier, p. vii. [English edition, p. 5.]

is not an object to be regarded, but rather a center of reorientation for an objective universe.\footnote{Mounier, \textit{Personnalisme}, p. 17. [English edition, p. xx.]} Because of the uniqueness of every individual person, there is at the heart of personalism a principle of unpredictability which excludes any desire for a definitive system.

What has been thus far described is distinctive of French personalism, of which Mounier and the periodical \textit{Esprit} are the chief representatives. There, the personalists make a great point of applying their doctrine in the political and social fields. Mounier opposes personalism to extreme individualism and its opposite of totalitarianism or extreme collectivism. Individualism is abhorred as bringing about the centralization of the individual in himself, whereas the first condition of personalism is his decentralization in order to set him in the open perspectives of personal life. In opposition to individualism and to whatever idealism still persists, personalism demonstrates that the human subject cannot be nourished by auto-digestion; that one can possess only so much as one gives, or only that to which one gives oneself; and no one can find salvation, either spiritual or social, in himself.\footnote{Ibid., p. 39. [English edition, p. 21.]} 

Mounier does not consider personalism a form of spiritualism,
despite the name of personalism's chief organ (Esprit). He sees in spiritualism a doctrine "which plays at being pure spirits" (qui joue aux esprits purs). This, however, is not true of all spiritualism, as, for example, the spiritualism of Descartes, which attaches importance to the union of body and soul. But, with many others, Mounier merely wishes to place the emphasis on incarnation, on "that being compounded of light and blood" (cet être mêlé de lumière et de sang). He believes in the primitive character of experience of the second person, you, which precedes the I. For him too, through affirmation of Transcendence, the person is orientated to the essentials of Christianity which affirms both transcendence and incarnation.27

"The personalist type of philosophy tends to recur as a protest or reaction against the recurrent forms of monism or 'totalitarian' philosophy which are felt to threaten the dignity and individual value of the human person. One might call it the periodic protest of the personal against the impersonal."28 In this context, however, the words "protest" and "reaction" are not meant to imply that personalism is something negative. Rather, it involves a positive affirmation and interpretation of personality. A personalist civilization is one whose spirit and structure is ordered to the fulfillment as a person of each one

27 Bréhier, p. 218.
28 Copleston, p. 105.
who constitutes it.  

We turn now to a brief look at personalism as it exists and is understood outside of France. There are in personalism two main tendencies. One is towards an organic view of society, as in Fichte and Hegel; the other (more typical) is democratic and reformist and is represented by Kant, Bowne, Mounier, and Maritain. "The tendency of this latter group is to test social systems by their treatment of the individual person, and thus to emphasize political democracy, to criticize existing systems of ownership and distribution in so far as they fail to respect personality, and to make specific applications of personalism to problems of labor and management, war and peace, and the like."  

Although for convenience we speak of "personalism" in the singular, we ought really to say that there is a plurality of personalisms. A Christian personalism and an agnostic personalism, for instance, differ in their most intimate dispositions or attitudes. Nevertheless, because they conform to one another in certain realms of thought and in certain lines of practical conduct concerning the individual or collective order, we are sufficiently justified in using the same name to describe their

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Almost all the European personalisms can be called Christian personalisms. They have Christianity for their central inspiration. M. Maritain has written that the notion of person is a notion of Christian index which is disentangled and made more precise by theology. Within the strong current of Christian personalism are found the inspiration and elements which have contributed to form the philosophy of Louis Lavelle.

31 Mounier, Personnalisme, p. 6. [English edition, p. viii.]

CHAPTER III

BASIC DOCTRINES OF LAVELLE'S PHILOSOPHY

The purpose of this chapter is to give a general view of the philosophy of Louis Lavelle in its more important aspects. Obviously, the attempt to encompass the entire philosophy of a man within a single brief chapter is hopeless. Lavelle's own attempt fills more than twenty books. It has consequently been necessary to select and choose only those aspects which are essential to his philosophy and which aid in understanding his concepts of person and personality.

As has been noted, Lavelle's philosophy can be considered as a convergence of existentialism, philosophy of spirit, and personalism. This will now be considered in closer detail. Beginning with a general description of his philosophy, we will go on to describe his initial fact, the notions of being, act, and univocity in Lavelle, his doctrines of participation and Platonism, and finally, accusations of pantheism made against his philosophy.

General Description of Lavelle's Philosophy

A first contact with the philosophic work of M. Lavelle may well be disconcerting. Philosophers customarily begin with immediate data of sense, the world, and facts of consciousness,
and ascend from this point to God. Lavelle, however, installs himself instead at the very center of all things, from which he proceeds to develop a coherent metaphysical explanation of reality. For him, being is an act (actus), a real experience and a personal accomplishment. The initial act or experience of being is internal knowledge of self, and has the character of an immediate possession. By asserting that being is "self-justifying," Lavelle wants to affirm its spontaneous and undivided character since he holds that being gets its meaning from itself and not, as for so many modern philosophers, from nothingness. "The immediacy of union between being and evidence . . . is expressed in the principle that being has no other end but itself."¹ A "thing," for Lavelle, becomes a "being" when it is brought into active consciousness in this internal experience.

From this starting point Lavelle goes on to assert that being is not only one but is univocal, and that by our proper act we are more and more discovering ourselves through an ever-increasing participation in the All, who is God. Lavelle has thus definitely established himself in the Platonic tradition, which he considers the only authentic source of the true "philosophia perennis." From what has just been described it is not difficult to understand why Lavelle has been accused of pantheism. His effective refutation of this interpretation will be described

In *De l'être*, Lavelle has written that there are only two philosophies from which one can choose: that of Protagoras, according to which man is the measure of all things, and that of Plato, in which the measure of all things is not man but God, a God, however, who permits himself to be participated by man. This gives us a good idea of Lavelle's basic orientation. But to prevent misunderstanding, Lavelle assures his reader that, far from reducing philosophy to an idealist immanentism, he uses the word "participation" precisely to show that the immanent always proceeds from the Transcendent; and circling back in a sort of dialectic, it serves to draw up into the Transcendent all the elements of knowledge and action.

Lavelle is often criticized for having engaged in "a purely logical game" (*un pur jeu logique*). Gabriel Marcel spoke in this way of him in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* for February, 1938. This reproach addressed to the Lavellian method is serious, especially today when philosophical thought is dominated by a sharp

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concern for the concrete and animated by a deliberate preoccupa-
tion for remaining in contact with the universe in which we live. If this divergence in attitude really exists between Lavelle and modern philosophers, it remains for us to conclude not merely that the doctrine of Lavelle does not respond to the needs of our times, but also and especially that it is not truly comprehensive of all the given, and of all the real. 5

To answer this difficulty adequately, it must be noted that human existence can be envisaged on two planes: that of phenomenological description and that of metaphysics. Modern philosophers are accustomed, in general, to a phenomenological description; Lavelle, on the other hand, resolutely brings his attention to metaphysics. If one studies only the expression and presentation of Lavelle's system, his "dialectic of the eternal present" appears to be an attempt at evasion of the real world. But if, under the appearances, one seizes the basic intuition which inspires Lavelle's writings, understanding that for him being is an act, and each of our limited acts is a participation in the Act who is God, then the previously obscure elements of Lavelle's philosophy become clear. One thus finds that the authentic and full sense of existence and the world have their true aspect within the metaphysical orientation which Lavelle adopts. 6

5 Ibid., pp. 212-214.
6 Ibid.
The Initial Fact

Lavelle, as has been shown, finds his initial fact in an act, the act of being. His primitive fact may be described as "act accomplishing itself," "being realizing itself," "self-consciousness," or in existentialist terms, as "decision" or "consent." In his own inimitable style he has expressed himself thus: "There is an initial experience which is contained in all the others and which gives to each of them their weight and depth: it is the experience of the presence of being. To affirm this presence is to affirm simultaneously one's participation in being. . . . The peculiar quality of philosophic thought is to attach itself to this essential experience, to refine its acuteness, to retain it when it nearly escapes, to return to it when all is obscure and one has need of a landmark and a touchstone, to analyze its content and to show that all our operations depend on it, finding in it their origin, reason, and source of power."7 Thus at the origin of all thought Lavelle finds a primitive experience which is that of the subject coming to understand himself as

7Louis Lavelle, La présence totale (Paris, 1934), pp. 25-26: "Il y a une expérience initiale qui est impliquée dans toutes les autres et qui donne à chacune d'elles sa gravité et sa profondeur: c'est l'expérience de la présence de l'être. Reconnaître cette présence, c'est reconnaître du même coup la participation du moi à l'être. . . . Le propre de la pensée philosophique est de s'attacher à cette expérience essentielle, d'en affiner l'acuité, de la retenir quand elle est près d'échapper, d'y retourner quand tout s'obscurcit et que l'on a besoin d'une borne et d'une pierre de touche, d'analyser son contenu et de montrer que toutes nos opérations en dépendent, trouvent en elle leur source, leur raison d'être et le principe de leur puissance." (Translation mine.)
being, that is, as forming a part of being.

The original fact is such that I can neither posit being independently of the self which grasps it, nor can the self be posited independently of the being upon which it is inscribed. Lavelle elaborates this in his book on being, where he writes that, if the initial experience is the experience of participation through which the ego constitutes the existence which is proper to it, there is obviously a twofold aspect in this initial experience, and neither aspect can be considered as isolated from the other. The first aspect is that of pure act, or the act which is only act, while the second aspect is that formed by the world, where the infinity of act manifests itself in the infinity of choices and states which seem born of the participation itself. Lavelle considers the world the "interval" that separates pure act (God) from the act of participation (ourselves). 8

Lavelle's last published article is helpful for a better understanding of this all-important discovery of being in his thought. In it he said:

Our first philosophic discovery, as undoubtedly that of all men when their reflection has begun to come into play, has been that of our proper existence in the face of a universe which up till then has exclusively retained all our attention, but as a pure spectacle. But the discovery of oneself is the extraordinary discovery of a being which participates in the being of the whole, but in such a way that he is this

8Lavelle, De l'Être, p. 23.
being instead of just seeing it, that in speaking of it he can say I or me; that he has control over it and, instead of regarding it from without, he makes it come into existence from within. . . .

As my first experience was that in which the spectacle of the world was in no way abolished but rather abandoned in favor of an act which was entirely interior, aware of its pure determinability and its pure exercise, so the second experience was that of time in which my life was flowing on and which was not denied but rather rooted in a present coextensive with Being in which that time itself was the foundation of its own reality. . . .

A third experience, which was to give the preceding two all their value, was that which Plato no doubt early experienced, namely, that the world we live in is not that of things which we see, but the world of thoughts which we have. Each one of us lives and dies in the world of his thoughts rather than in the world of things.9

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9Louis Lavelle, "Témoignage," Les Études Philosophiques, VI (1951), 129-130:

"Notre première découverte philosophique, comme celle de tous les hommes sans doute dès que leur réflexion a commencé à s'exercer, à été celle de notre propre existence en face d'univers qui jusque là avait retenu exclusivement toute notre attention, mais comme un spectacle pur. Or, la découverte de soi, c'est cette découverte extraordinaire d'un être qui participe à l'être de tout, mais de telle manière que cet être, il l'est au lieu de le voir, qu'en parlant de lui, il peut dire je ou moi, qu'il en a la charge et qu'au lieu de le regarder du dehors, il le fait être du dedans.

"Comme ma première expérience était celle où le spectacle du monde était non point abolu, mais abandonné au profit d'un acte tout intérieur prenant conscience de sa pure disponibilité, et de son pur exercice, la seconde expérience était celle du temps où ma vie s'écoutait et qui était, non point nié, mais enraciné dans un présent coextensif à l'être et où ce temps lui-même fondait sa propre réalité. . . .

"Une troisième expérience, qui devrait donner toute leur portée aux deux précédentes, c'était cette expérience que Platon a faite sans doute de très bonne heure, à savoir, que le monde dans lequel nous vivons n'est pas le monde des choses que nous voyons, mais le monde des pensées que nous avons. Chacun vit et
The primitive experience of being for Lavelle, then, is not merely the experience of the inscription of myself in being, but also that of participation in being. It puts us in touch with an absolute being which, however, is not outside of us at some inaccessible distance since the exercise of our activity can not exceed the presence of being. Thus Lavelle sees an identity between the discovery of Being and that of our own proper being.10

Notions of Being, Act, and Univocity

Lavelle, who is Kierkegaardian in many respects, maintains that being is discovered by the human mind in the experiential actualization of the mind's coming to know reality, in the "act accomplishing itself." He maintains the unity and univocity of being, and founds his whole philosophy on an ontological argument which identifies being and the idea of it in God. The affirmation of being is the primary evidence, the starting point of all philosophy. To exclude nothingness and to affirm the universality

meurt dans le monde de ses pensées plutôt que dans le monde des choses." (Translation mine.) Other pertinent references to Lavelle's writings are: De l'être, pp. 9, 23, 294; De l'acte, (Paris, 1934), p. 49; La présence totale, p. 212. See also Dom. Raymond Loza, O.S.B., "L'expérience primitive de L. Lavelle," Revue Thomiste, LVI (1956), 271-280.

of being are at bottom one and the same.  

"[There is] a threefold aspect within the initial presence of being whose evidence is act. There is first the presence of being, and we are aware of it before adverting to ourselves. . . . Second, there is the discovery of our presence to being which was implied but not actually distinguished in the first awareness. . . . Lastly, there is the awareness of our interiority to being, a recognition that we participate in the presence of being."  

The world is no longer an object to be known, but it is a creation to which we are associated. In keeping with this line of thought, man finds himself closer to his fellow men. "To scorn, to ignore anyone," Lavelle has said, "is to wish to hurl him into nothingness."  

It might also be noted that, since the idea of being is itself a being, the only concept that is adequate to it is the concept of being. As Lavelle puts it, "it is impossible to pose the idea of being without perceiving at once that the being of the idea is the same as the being of which it is the idea."

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12Smith, p. 348. Italics mine.

13Quoted by Jean Baruzi in his "Louis Lavelle," Les Études Philosophiques, VI (Avril-Septembre 1951), 139. (Translation mine.)

14Cited in Smith, p. 348.
Whatever our verdict on his notion of act rather than fact as the metaphysical point of departure, Lavelle claims several considerable consequences for his doctrine. First, it enables him to bridge experience and philosophy. Secondly, it reaffirms the principle that being is intrinsically intelligible. Thirdly, act is its own sufficient reason. And fourthly, act is eternally efficacious. Lavelle emphasizes interiority and thus makes each individual valuable and truly operative as a second cause.15

The notion of univocity of being in Lavelle's philosophy can best be described in his own words: "When I used . . . [the notion of univocity] for the first time, it was in no way to contradict analogy; but it was to combat phenomenalism and to show that it is impossible to avoid the unity of being and to adhere to [notions of] a multiple phenomenal existence. My position is the following: all beings can differ, indeed, in so far as they are individual beings. Their proper being resides, however, in their very dependence with regard to the absolute being who alone is capable of sustaining them in the totality of being."16

15Ibid., pp. 347-349.

16Letter of Louis Lavelle to N. J. J. Balthasar dated December 17, 1950. Cited by Balthasar in his "L'univocité non immanent de l'être total," Giornale di Metafisica, VII (4) (Luglio-Agosto 1952), 433: "Lorsque je l'ai employée [la notion de l'univocité] pour la première fois, ce n'était nullement pour contredire l'analogie; mais pour combattre le phénoménisme et montrer qu'il est impossible d'éviter l'unité de l'être et de s'en tenir à la multiplicité des formes des existence phénoménale. Ma position est la suivant: c'est que tous les êtres peuvent bien différer en tant
Lavelle's great contribution to contemporary metaphysics is his reaffirmation of the ubiquitous, transcendental character of being as the primary object of human wisdom. By identifying act (actus) and being, he attempts a union of metaphysics and experience. "Credit must go to him likewise for restoring the analogy of being as a problem in philosophy and for defending the dignity of man in a climate that sometimes dignifies only dollars."¹⁷ He does not begin with a preconceived method in philosophy; and, synthetic as he is, he is ever willing to search through the past and the present to assimilate truth wherever he comes upon it. But there are grave problems in Lavelle too. Is description adequate as a philosophical method? "Can a philosophy carry certitude at its heart when its feet are resting on a non-knowledge type of awareness?"¹⁸ But to do more than mention these difficulties would carry us away from our goal in this thesis.

**Participation**

The identity of being and act is the central and most orig-

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¹⁷Smith, pp. 368-369.

inal feature of Lavelle's thought— it is the key to his whole metaphysics of participation. Being unfolds itself as one and univocal, but it is at the same time infinite and above all, pure act: God. For Lavelle, all that exists, exists by a participation of this pure, infinite act. By means of this participation Lavelle intends to surmount pantheism and to affirm the transcendence of God. Lavellian participation is neither inductive nor deductive, but an initial and constant fact of experience. 19

Human struggle and endeavor, then, may be considered as motivated by the desire to render our ontic condition less potential and imperfect. Our passage from thing to person and from state to act testifies to our finitude and desire for the infinite. 20

Since the activity of the ego participates in the absolute activity, and that by the intermediation of the world and human nature, different possibilities of action for man are but different ways of realizing this participation. The experience of participation, then, the initial fact from which all Lavellian philosophy takes its flight, "seizes on vital consciousness as a personal act. In this way the act of consciousness perceives and recognizes its active participation in Pure Act, who is Himself a Person, and


who offers Himself to be participated in by consciousness. This consciousness, then, is an act participating in the Absolute itself. Here is all its reality, all the reality of the ego which in no way differs from consciousness.  

Lavelle views man as a limited participation of the Infinite, as indeed, every creature necessarily is. But the creature still bears a resemblance to the divinity. Lavelle wrote: "It is a fact that God cannot create things (which are only appearances) but only beings, and that he cannot create them without making them participate in his essence, that is to say, giving them the power of self-creativity just as he eternally creates himself."  

The words of Professor Collins on Lavelle serve as an apt conclusion to this section on participation. "Lavelle has always kept clearly before him the twofold aim of his philosophy: it must maintain a certain unity in being in order to allow for creaturely participation and for knowledge of the Transcendent, and it must likewise maintain the distinction between beings which have personal autonomy. . . . The vocation of the creature is to bring

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21Sargi, p. 11. (Translation mine.)  
22Louis Lavelle, "Notes sur le sujet: pourquoi y a-t-il un monde?," Giornale di Metafisica, X (3) (Maggio-Giugno 1955), 384: "C'est une évidence que Dieu ne peut pas créer des choses (qui ne sont que des apparences) mais seulement des êtres et qu'il ne peut les créer qu'en les faisant participer à son essence, c'est-à-dire en leur donnant à eux-mêmes la puissance de se créer comme il se crée lui-même éternellement." (Published posthumously; translation mine.)
forth its own being by sharing in the power of God, for the creature is no mere limitation of God."  

Platonism in Lavelle

"One is a philosopher in so far as he is a follower of Plato" (On philosophe [sic] selon qu'on platonise.) Such are Lavelle's very words. The myth of the cave is for Lavelle the introduction to philosophy. There is a sensible world and an intelligible world, a world of appearances and a world of hidden realities, which are the only authentic ones. And one of these worlds hides the other from us, but not to the extent of making us unable to discern it or of preventing us from reaching it. We must come out of the cave, from the world of shadows, and discover little by little the world of true ideas. But this myth can be misunderstood and the wrong aspects of Platonism attributed to Lavelle. For him reality is not behind but within appearances; and being is not behind but in experiences. Lavelle himself has noted what he considers the shortcomings of the full Platonic doctrine. He writes: "But it seems to us that Plato gave way to an idolatrous penchant when he considered that he consolidated our thoughts by

23 Collins, p. 177.


25 For fuller discussion of Platonism and Lavelle see Truc, pp. 133-158; Lacroix, p. 374; and Lavelle, "Témoignage," p. 128.
making ideas of them, that is to say, objects accessible only to pure intelligence, and that it was to ignore the true function of things to reduce them to being only illusory and useless copies of ideas when they were for us, on the contrary, the double way by which each spirit became capable of utilizing his own possibilities, that is to say, of actualizing them, and of communicating with other spirits in a universe which was the same for all." 26

Elsewhere, however, speaking of strict existentialism, he complained that it was an anti-Platonism, observing that Platonism always comes to life again after it has been neglected. This is necessarily so, he said, since, although Platonism ceaselessly denies the world we have under our eyes where our existence unfolds itself, this denial is the only way of access to the life of the spirit, the life that is truly ours. 27

Existentialism's strong emphasis on the existence of things has already been pointed out. Platonism and Lavelle prefer to

26 Lavelle, "Témoignage," p. 130: "Mais il nous semblait que Platon cédait à une sorte de penchant idolâtre, quand il croyait consolidaire nos pensées en en faisant des idées, c'est-à-dire des objets encore, accessibles seulement à l'intelligence pure, et que c'était méconnaître la fonction véritable des choses de les réduire à n'être que des copies illusoires et inutiles des idées, là où elles étaient pour nous au contraire le double moyen par lequel chaque esprit devenait capable de mettre en jeu ses propres possibilités, c'est-à-dire de les actualiser, et de communiquer avec les autres esprits dans un univers qui était le même pour tous." (Translation mine.)

stress the priority of essence. They conceive the essence as pre-existing, and the being exists only in so far as it participates in the essence. Of course, God is the being whose essence implies existence and whose boundless existence constitutes the center of all essences. But in human essences there is an ideal type which embraces all that can be realized of what is properly human, and it is towards this that we must look in order to find the qualities and features that we should give to our existence. For Lavelle, as for all Platonists, what counts is not to exist but to choose the essence that is best. Of itself existence is valueless. "We may say that essence is not merely the possibility of existence, or its content, but that it gives value to existence." 

In *La conscience de soi* Lavelle most clearly expounds his re-statement of Platonism, or perhaps more accurately, of Augustianism. "The real world," he says, "is the world of ideas and not the world of things. From the moment we penetrate into it we find ourselves enlightened; our own nature, our destiny, the conduct we must follow, our relations with other beings, appear to us in a moving light that we delight to contemplate, and that magnetizes our will. . . . We do not in any sense create ideas. They are the elements of a material universe. They re-

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veal themselves to us by an act of intelligence as things reveal themselves to us by an act of attention." From this view we can see how Lavelle's philosophy does constitute a synthesis of essentialism, existentialism, and the philosophy of spirit. This also explains reference to his philosophy as an "essentialist existentialism" or a "spiritual existentialism".

But Lavelle did not feel that Platonism alone was adequate. He felt, rather, that Platonism risks sacrificing the person to the idea if it does not incorporate into itself the influence of the Christian tradition. Lavelle's desire was to maintain and reanimate a philosophy which could be considered as of Platonic and Cartesian inspiration but in which the share of Christianity was capital. Lavelle recognized that this undertaking was open to widely differing forms of thought, but he desired that within his system there should reign an agreement on the primacy of the life of the spirit and on the impossibility of leaving the direc-

29 Louis Lavelle, La conscience de soi (Paris, 1933), pp. 60-61: "Le vrai monde, c'est le monde des idées et non pas le monde des choses. Dès que nous y pénétrons, nous nous sentons éclairés; notre propre nature, notre destinée, la conduite que nous devons tenir, nos relations avec les autres êtres, nous apparaissent dans une lumière mobile qui réjouit notre regard et aimante notre volonté. . . . Nous ne créons point les idées. Elles sont les éléments d'un univers de matière. Elles se révèlent à nous par un acte de l'intelligence comme les choses se révèlent à nous par un acte du regard." (Translation mine.)

tion of human conduct to science and different techniques. 31

Pantheism in Lavelle

From what has been said thus far it is not difficult to understand how the charge of pantheism could be brought against these ideas. Many of Lavelle's statements would seem to admit of only this interpretation, as for example: "God is the true essence of all beings, and, as is often said, more interior to me than I am to myself." (Dieu est l'essence véritable de tous les êtres, et comme on le dit souvent, plus intérieur à moi que moi-même.) 32 But in reality Lavelle did not intend a pantheism, and considers that he has escaped this reproach by his conception, unitary and double at the same time, of freedom and participation. The purpose of "things" (the given) in Lavelle's philosophy is to send us continually back to "beings" (conscious possession of the given in the act which is being.) In a sense nature is that which sends me back unceasingly to myself. It is in returning to myself that I discover the origin and source of being. In discovering ourselves in this way, in our profoundest depth, we discover also the nature of the Being by whom alone we exist. And what the intuition reveals to us is that being in act. 33

31Ibid., p. 487. (Letter dated April 22, 1946.)

32Lavelle, De l'acte, p. 105. (Translation mine.)

33See Lacroix, p. 377.
Perhaps the strongest proof advanced by Lavelle against pantheism is his idea that we do not share in being as parts in a totalized whole, but rather as personal agents united with a God who is the personal source of our reality. The incommunica-

bility proper to a person prevents either an identification of absolute and participated being, or a designation of God as the point of convergence of an infinite number of finite persons.34

More than once Lavelle had to handle this objection to his system. Here, in his own words, is the answer he gave to his friend, M. F. Sciaccia:

I am grateful to you for having been kind enough to point out the fears to which my position on God and freedom have given rise. You fear too that a suspicion of pantheism or Spinozism may be generated in the minds of some readers. This is not the first time that I have heard such a reserve expressed, but I always defend myself against it. I believe that it is precisely there that the remedy is found for all possible pantheism. For if God is a being who is sufficient to himself or who gives being to himself, creation for him consists always in the communication that he makes of his being, in a gift of himself which he renews infinitely. But this gift which he makes of himself would be illusory if there were no possibility for each created being of giving himself by an act which renders him the cause of himself, that is to say, by a free act. Also, it is our subordination to God that frees us instead of enslaving us. This explains both why God created consciences—and the world as the possibility of their existence—and why we are always able to turn against God the very freedom which comes from him and

34Collins, p. 176.
which can be exercised fully only in union with him.\textsuperscript{35}

In summary, then, we may say that Lavelle's philosophy begins with a reflexive analysis of the one evident reality, our consciousness of our being. In this experience, which is an act, we can develop our essence through choices born of our free will. Being is precisely this act through which we participate in the very being of God, and our life should properly develop by an ever-growing participation through our freedom in the pure act, who is God. Freedom, of course, implies an importance in the being who exercises it. These two factors will be discussed in

\textsuperscript{35}Louis Lavelle, Letter of May 20, 1946 to M. F. Sciacca. Cited by Sciacca in "Dal mio carteggio con Louis Lavelle," Giornale di Metafisica, VII (4) (Luglio-Agosto 1952), 489:

Je vous remercie aussi de vouloir bien de me dire les craintes que vous a suggérée la relation que j'établis entre Dieu et la liberté et le soupçon de panthéisme, ou de spinozisme qu'elle peut faire naître dans l'esprit de quelques lectures. Ce n'est pas la première fois que j'entends formuler une telle réserve. Mais je me défends toujours contre elle. Je crois précisément que c'est là que se trouve le remède contre tout panthéisme possible. Car si Dieu est un être qui se suffit ou qui se donne l'être à lui-même, la création pour lui consiste toujours dans la communication qu'il fait de son être, dans un don de soi qui se renouvelle infiniment: mais ce don qu'il fait de lui-même serait illusoire, si ce n'était pas la possibilité pour chaque être créé de se donner l'être à lui-même par un acte qui rend cause de soi, c'est-à-dire par un acte libre. Ainsi c'est notre subordination à Dieu qui nous libère, au lieu de nous asservir. Ce qui explique à la fois pourquoi Dieu crée des consciences—et le monde comme possibilité de leur existence,—et pourquoi nous pouvons toujours retourner contre Dieu cette liberté même qui vient de lui et que ne s'exerce pleinement que dans son union avec lui. (Translation mine.)
the following chapter where Lavelle's concepts of person and personality will be elaborated.
CHAPTER FOUR

LAVELLE'S PHILOSOPHY OF PERSON AND PERSONALITY:

THE PRIMACY OF FREEDOM

In giving a philosophical explanation of the human person, St. Thomas and the other medieval theologians placed emphasis on the human substance.\(^1\) But this emphasis was destined to change.\(^2\) Several centuries later Descartes placed his emphasis on the self-consciousness of the spiritual substance, the whole essence of which was "to think," and this set the tone of all subsequent inquiries. John Locke, for instance, in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* describes the person as a "thinking, intelligent being that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself."\(^3\) In a very true sense we may say that all modern philosophy tends to look on consciousness or self-consciousness or self-contemplation as the essence of the person.

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\(^1\) Pertinent references to St. Thomas' writings on "person" are: *S.T.*, I, 29, 1; 85, 7; *C.G.*, II, 75 and 83; *Q.D. de An.*, 3; *In I Sent.*, 25, 1; *De Pot.*, 9, 2.


sciousness as the chief characteristic of person and personality. This can be seen clearly in Hegel, for whom the progress of Mind or Spirit consists largely in the advance of self-consciousness.

"Consciousness" is presence to self in being through varying experiences. This is the point that Professor Knudson makes when he writes: "From the metaphysical point of view the most important thing connected with personality is the fact that in it unity and identity are co-existent with plurality and change."\(^4\)

Two current philosophical movements in which Lavelle has been found to participate are especially concerned with person and personality. They are existentialism and personalism. In this chapter brief consideration will be given to the notion of person in each of these schools of thought, taking Marcel as a representative of the first and Mounier as representing the second. The relation and application of these ideas to Louis Lavelle's philosophy will then be shown in detail, with special attention given to the important concept of freedom.

Existentialists stress the difference between a human person and the things of nature which man uses. For an existentialist there is a sharp difference between the Umwelt, the world of things or objects, and the Mitwelt, or world of persons. In his existentialist philosophy, for instance, Gabriel Marcel shows how

one becomes a "person" by transcending one's self-enclosedness through love for other persons and free acceptance of a personal, spiritual relationship with God. He lays emphasis on the individual, concrete subject, which is neither identical with the empirical ego nor a moment in the subjectivity of a Kantian transcendental ego. The ego (le moi) or self-enclosed consciousness in which man is a member of the anonymous "one" (l'on) is distinguished from the person. For Marcel the person is characterized by a commitment. I affirm myself as a person in the measure that I assume responsibility for what I do and say in work, action, or the whole course of life.5 Because of its very nature, personality cannot be exhausted in any one particular commitment since it participates in Being, which is its beginning and its end.6

The personalists, on the other hand, regard man as capable of becoming a "person," but as threatened at the same time by a tendency to surrender either to egocentric individualism or to submersion in the totality. They distinguish sharply between the individual and the person. "Individual" is used in a pejorative sense to denote man considered as a center or spring of egoistic desire. "Person" is conceived by the personalists in close connection with the idea of a moral vocation. "Individual" and "person" are not separate, but two aspects of one human reality.

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6 Ibid., pp. 32-33.
It is but a question of uniting them hierarchically. Emmanuel Mounier, the chief modern French personalist, has given careful thought to his definition of person: "A person is a spiritual being," he says, "constituted as such by a manner of subsistence and of independence in being; it maintains this subsistence by its adherence to a hierarchy of values freely adopted, assimilated, and lived, by a responsible self-commitment and by a constant conversion. It thus unifies all its activity in freedom and develops its own unique vocation, moreover, by means of creative acts." 7

While the person is a social being, he is, nevertheless, more than a mere member of a group. Rather he is orientated towards a society of persons who are free, morally responsible human beings. As Mounier writes: "The person is not 'something' that one can find at the end of an analysis, nor is it a definable combination of characteristics. If it were a sum-total, the items could be listed: but this is the reality whose contents cannot be put into an inventory (Gabriel Marcel). If they could it would be determined by them; but the person is self-determining and free.

7 Emmanuel Mounier, Maniflste au service du personnalisme (Paris, 1936), p. 63: "Une personne est un être spirituel constitué comme tel par un manièrre du subsistance et d'indépendance dans son être; elle entretient cette subsistence par son adhésion à une hiérarchie de valeurs librement adoptées, assimilées, et vécues par un engagement responsable et un constante conversion; elle unifie ainsi toute son activité dans la liberté et développe par surcroît, à coups d'actes créateurs, la singularité de sa voca-

(Translation mine.)
It is a presence rather than a being, a presence that is active, without limits."\(^8\) And again Mounier writes: "In its inner experience the person is a presence directed towards the world and other persons, mingled with them in universal space. Other persons do not limit it, they enable it to be and to grow. The person only exists thus towards others, it only knows itself in knowing others, only finds itself in being known by them. . . . Just as a philosopher who from the start confines himself to thinking never finds the doorway to being, so the man who begins by shutting himself in himself never finds his way towards others. . . . One might almost say that I have no existence save in so far as I exist for others, and that to be is, in the final analysis, to love."\(^9\)

From these sketches we can see that there are definite differences between personalism and existentialism. Personalism emphasizes the person's orientation towards society and other persons; existentialists have a tendency to belittle objective, social institutions. Perhaps one reason for this, as Mounier has suggested, is that existentialism tends to describe authentic existence in negative terms, which involves tearing oneself away from the mentality of the crowd. Personalists view the person

\(^8\) Emmanuel Mounier, *Personalism* (New York, 1952), trans. Philip Mairet, p. 35.

\(^9\) Ibid., p. 19.
and society of persons as a positive standard. The theme of self-creating is common to both; for personalists it constitutes personality; for existentialists it is the achievement of freedom and the fulfillment of one's nature.¹⁰

Before concluding this section on modern theories of the person, let us briefly consider the philosophy of a modern Christian personalist from among Thomistic philosophers. Jacques Maritain accepts the notion of matter as the principle of individuation, and describes individuality as "that which excludes from myself all other men," and as "the narrowness of the ego, forever threatened and forever eager to grasp for itself."¹¹

Like many modern philosophers, Maritain places his emphasis on freedom as the chief characteristic of the human person. Thus he holds that one can become a person, cease to be a person, or descend into being a mere "individual," a mere "self." In The Degrees of Knowledge Maritain writes that "a person is a centre of freedom which confronts things, the universe, God, talks with another person, communicates with them by intelligence and affection."¹² Personality, for him, is the subsistence of the spiri-


tual soul communicated to the composite. It consists in individuality (not individuation, which is a bodily characteristic), unity and integrity, subsistence, intelligence, will, liberty, and the possession of the self by the self. Thus Maritain views personality as a substantial, metaphysical perfection which opens out in the order of operation to psychological and moral values. "Man has to work for his personality, just as he must work for his liberty; and for that he must pay a very high price. Indeed, in the field of action, a man will be a personality (the maker of his own self) only when his reason, by means of organized virtue and inspired by love (no less than God's Spirit) gathers up his soul into his hands—\textit{anima mea in manibus meis semper}—and into the hands of God. For thus he gives to that torrent of conflicting forces within him, the beautiful unity of a moral profile, which is but the seal of his radical ontological unity."

In this first part of this chapter we have tried to describe the climate of modern philosophies of person. Personalism holds that the true person is manifested only when one is "outer-directed" to the world of persons and things other than himself. Existentialism, on the other hand, in the doctrine of Gabriel Marcel, is chiefly concerned with the concrete, individual, experiencing subject, who must affirm or commit himself to the reality he

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 287.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 285.
experiences. In the following section it will be shown how Louis Lavelle's ideas of person and personality are a combination of the personalist and existentialist notions of person and the Platonic idea of participation—thus forming a metaphysical doctrine which synthesizes the various modern philosophical notions of person and personality.

**Person and Personality in Louis Lavelle**

As has been shown, the "I" or "ego" for Lavelle is a participated being, that is, something first found within being which freely gives itself its interior being by an act which is an acceptance. "Man is a being caught up (engagé) in matter which individualizes and separates him, and he is called upon to surmount that barrier in order to rise to the purity of the spirit that is One. By acts of the will he posits himself as a spirit in his own proper and individual being, thus participating in the creative activity of the Pure Act. Thanks to intelligence, he transcends the limitations of his individuality and is able to conceive the universal, which thus opens itself to a participation that can thereafter be realized by his will."\(^{15}\) For Lavelle, man is not only man; he is a spirit who lives, acts, and grows according to his participation in the Spirit, God. A problem which holds a prominent place in Lavelle's thought is that of knowing how

conscious beings can have a friendship with one another. In *La présence totale* Lavelle writes: "Behind all the particular questions that we can pose for ourselves, the problem of being and the ego is the only one which interests us profoundly." And again: "Communication between conscious beings is possible, doubtless, only beyond the one and the other and in a deep and serious interiority which is common to both, to which each penetrates by the mediation of the other." The ego, for Lavelle, is not something that follows upon consciousness. It is in one and the same act that the ego and consciousness are given.

Apart from the body in which it is existing, the ego, or self, is nothing. It is an empty form which only the non-self can nourish or complete. We must make a distinction, therefore, between ourselves and the world, and consequently we must have a limited body. By my body I become an existent object for another, and an individual center of sensations and representations for myself. "Further, it is right that we should love even our bodies, inasmuch as they are a part of our person and are the condition of our spiritual life." The theory of *mon corps* (my body)

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17 *De l'âtre* (Paris, 1947), Introduction, p. 33. (Translation mine.)

18 *De l'acte* (Paris, 1937), pp. 401-402.

holds as important a place in Lavelle's thought as in that of Gabriel Marcel. This body is both mine and an object in the world which bears witness to my participated being and to my placement in the world. Matter serves as the support for action and the basis of objective communication between persons. But material life is only a means whereby we acquire the life of the spirit and determine our complete essence. As a co-principle in human nature, the body helps to keep an individual spirit unique.

Because we have bodies, we are bound by sensation and time. Sensation gives contact with the present; time is an instrument of our personal development placed at our disposal to convert floating states of consciousness into integrated personal actuality, and thus we construct our subjective life.

Having noted the importance of matter, or a body which is a necessary element for us as participated beings, we must give special attention now to the freedom we possess and its importance in Lavelle's understanding of the human person. Our experience makes us aware not only of our corporal existence but also of our freedom or liberty. By means of our liberty we realize ourselves through choices which determine and shape our being. Ours is a

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20 For specific passages on the importance of the body in Lavelle, see Présence, pp. 78, 154-155; Actes, pp. 402-403.

liberty which supposes matter. "Each of us has a situation in the universe which is proper to him, it is submitted to a certain number of conditions which in no way depend on him, which he has not chosen, but without which he would not exist as a particular being."22

With the introduction of this notion of freedom we touch upon the central point in Lavelle's doctrine of person and personality. Indeed, he calls freedom the "heart of myself."23 Freedom is also the central factor in the problem of participation. Without it, participation would be inexplicable. "The end of freedom is the perfection of the subject who exercises it. It is the relationship between different possibilities [of the person's activities] and their individual realization which constitutes the permanent dialogue of participation. Self-creation by participation is the autonomous realization of certain possibilities possessed at the base of our free choice."24 In Lavelle's own words, freedom or liberty is our "participation itself inasmuch as it is a participation in an act which is a cause of itself."25

Lavelle looks upon freedom as the power of creative initia-

23Acte, p. 189.
25Lavelle, Acte, p. 198.
tive through the use of which we make ourselves participate more
and more in the All, or totality of being. Further, this freedom
is something received, and is orientated to society with others.
Lavelle argues that the existence of a moral order demands the
existence of a plurality of free beings. "I have need of other
freedoms because my freedom can only take another freedom as its
object. We are well aware that it truly exercises itself only in
the presence of a free being and not in the presence of a thing.
It is the encounter with a freedom which is not mine that obliges
my freedom to question itself, to become deeper, and even to
actualize itself." 26

In Lavelle's philosophy, the creation of the self is effec-
ted only through the act of participation. In fact it would not
be an exaggeration to say that Lavelle's whole philosophy is a
description of this creation of the self by the self. 27 But
although Lavelle asserts that we create ourselves, he in no way
intends to attribute to us a freedom so complete that we are self-
sufficient in creating ourselves. 28 Our ego resides essentially

26 Ibid., p. 185: "J'ai besoin des autres libertés parce que
ma liberté ne peut prendre qu'une autre liberté pour objet. Nous
sentons bien qu'elle ne s'exerce vraiment qu'en présence d'un être
libre et non point en présence d'une chose. C'est la rencontre
d'une liberté qui n'est pas la mienne qui oblige la mienne à
s'interroger, à s'approfondir, et même à s'actualiser." (Trans-
lation mine.)

27 Jean Ecole, La métaphysique de l'être dans la philosophie
in the act by which it exists—a participating act. Our liberty, then, is the disposition or use of the existence which we possess and the ways which are offered to us to use it.29

But if it is the same thing to create oneself and to participate, and if, on the other hand, the possible is that which our liberty can do with our nature, then to participate or create oneself seems to be essentially the discovery and acceptance of the powers of our nature in order to render them our own. The act of acceptance, Lavelle says, is nothing more than consciousness of our participation in the great All.30 But the Lavellian philosophy aspires less to elaborate a theory of participation than to give a total solution to the existence of the participant. In fact, at every moment experience reveals the individual, personal participant to us.31 Our liberty is given to us in order that we may realize or conquer our essence. For Lavelle the whole question of how we can create ourselves is contained in clarifying the association between our existence and our essence.32

In De l'âme humaine Lavelle maintains that the problem of the relationship between essence and existence was the central ques-

29Ibid. See also Lavelle, Acte, p. 343.
30Lavelle, Puissances, pp. 151-152.
31Sargi, p. 104.
32Ecole, pp. 96, 154.
tion of traditional ontology. But for him the problem is meaningless except when referred to the problem of the human person. 33

Although there exist different freedoms, or free beings, which are separate and mutually exclusive, each possesses a mutual solidarity and union in virtue of its relation (by participation) to Pure Act, the Transcendent Free Being, God. By its very nature freedom is directed towards the creation of a society of free persons who, in turn, reach out to the plenitude of being, to God. Thus Lavelle's doctrine of the human person is closely dependent on his metaphysics of being. Freedom, which is received and orientated to others, is a participation in infinite creative freedom. 34

For Lavelle "person" and "personality" are but two aspects of one thing. "Person" indicates the power that an individual has of uniting himself by his own initiative in a closer participation in the All; and "personality" is the participation he possesses from the Absolute Personality, without which the essential character of the person would be destroyed. 35

The characteristic property of liberty is, then, to found our personality, that is to say, to permit us to discover and assume our original vocation in the interior of the All. This is the

34 Acte, p. 185. See also Copleston, S.J., pp. 122-123.
35 Sargi, p. 71.
only possible condition for each being's becoming a focus of initiative. ... But personality cannot be identified with liberty. This latter is a pure power which it is impossible not to actualize even if by discouragement or sloth we refuse to employ it. But it supposes matter which is furnished for it by individuality. The person is therefore the synthesis of the individual and liberty. It is neither the one nor the other. ... But the characteristic property of the person is to take into his own hand the destiny of the individual, to detach him from the yoke of interest and instinct, and to confer on him consciousness of his creative power in regard to himself and the world. 36

For Lavelle, the person is established in all his moral gravity when he assumes responsibility through the experience of being and through freely sharing in the act which binds him decisively to Pure Act. "Act is at the same time a person and the entrance to all personal existence." 37

The person is not behind impersonations or appearances, but in them. The mystery of the subject is not hidden away in some recess from which we must extract it; it is everywhere, and

36Lavelle, Puissances, pp. 163-164: "Le propre de la liberté est donc de fonder notre personnalité, c'est-à-dire de nous permettre de découvrir et d'assumer notre vocation originale à l'intérieur du Tout. Car cela n'est possible qu'à condition que chaque être devienne un foyer d'initiative. ... Pourtant la personnalité ne peut être identifiée avec la liberté. Celle-ci est un pur pouvoir qu'il est impossible de ne point mettre en œuvre, même si, par découragement ou par paresse, nous en refusons l'emploi. Mais elle suppose une matière qui lui est fournie par l'individualité. Et la personne est justement la synthèse de l'individu et de la liberté. Elle n'est ni l'un ni l'autre. ... Mais la propre de la personne, c'est de prendre en main la destinée de l'individu, de l'arracher au joug de l'intérêt et de l'instinct, de lui donner la conscience de son pouvoir créateur à l'égard de lui-même et du monde. (Translation mine.)

37Acte, p. 140.
penetrates the totality of the ego and all its acts like an atmosphere. The person does not reside only in a state where will and nature are almost confused, but is rather a possession of the self which is continually produced, and consequently an ideal to be realized by moral effort, a victory to be obtained.\textsuperscript{39} The person is not made one with the spiritual, which is never given; but he makes himself into a spiritual being, he "chooses" himself. The person, therefore, is always a permanent creation of the self.

"What are the conditions which make the person? There cannot be a person where there is no interiority, subjectivity, and a secret of the being with himself. . . . There is a person only where there is an activity which permits the ego to constitute itself with the elements which it finds already in itself but by an operation which depends only on itself."\textsuperscript{40}

The person indicates in the individual the power he has by participation of going out of his individuality in order to unite himself by personal initiative to the universal. "Unity, interiority, initiative, responsibility, and the assumption of the self

\textsuperscript{38}Jean Lacroix, "A Philosopher of Acceptance," \textit{Downside Review}, LXXI (1953), 374. (Translated from the French by Dom. Illyd Trethowan.)

\textsuperscript{39}Collins, p. 176. See also Lavelle, \textit{Puissances}, p. 165.

\textsuperscript{40}Lavelle, \textit{Puissances}, p. 165. (Translation mine.)
by the self are the elements by which act defines itself."\[41\] They are the distinctive characteristics of the person. "The individual receives the dignity of the person only from the universal act which imparts it."\[42\]

It is in the presence of being that Lavelle begins philosophy, but this is still a confused experience that needs analysis. The analysis involves a series of operations, in the course of which our personality constitutes itself. Uncovering its own true essence, our personality unites itself to being, but this time in an intelligible act where the initial experience finds its explanation and achievement.\[43\] In the multiple relations thus constituted, the formation and progress of our personality becomes possible.\[44\]

Our ego also constructs eternal life for itself, according to Lavelle's doctrine, and this implies our union with pure being. This union, in turn, consists in an operation which founds our personality instead of permitting it to dissolve or be annihilated.\[45\] In Lavelle's own words: "All our spiritual life is

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\[41\] \textit{Acte}, p. 141. (Translation mine.)

\[42\] \textit{Ibid.} (Translation mine.)

\[43\] \textit{Puissances}, p. 15.


\[45\] \textit{Etre}, p. 49.
contained in the formation of our personality, which is possible only by the conquest and use of our liberty. It is impossible to separate the idea that we have of ourselves from the action of our liberty. It is by means of liberty that the ego disengages itself from nature and fatality, and that it becomes an original source of being and life in the world, that it succeeds in making its actions its own and justifying them."46

Only a failure to realize that we become persons not by keeping within individual limits but only by surpassing them, can account for the refusal to allow that God is a person. For Louis Lavelle as for any genuine philosopher of person, God is the foundation of our personal being. Indeed, Lavelle has written that it is his absolute relation with God which gives to each individual, "whatever be his limits or weaknesses, the mark of the absolute, that is to say, which makes a saint of him."47

Thus the influence of both existentialism and personalism can easily be traced in Lavelle's philosophy. The existentialist's concern with the concrete, living person who must

46 Puissances, p. 163: "Toute notre vie spirituelle réside dans la formation de notre personnalité qui n'est possible que par la conquête et l'usage de notre liberté. Il est impossible de séparer l'idée que nous ayons de nous-mêmes de l'action de notre liberté. C'est avec la liberté que le moi se dégage de la nature et de la fatalité, qu'il devient dans le monde une source originale d'être et de vie, qu'il réussit à faire siennes ses propres actions et à les justifier." (Translation mine.)

47 Quatre Saints (Paris, 1951), p. 35. (Translation mine.)
commit himself to being and reality can be seen in Lavelle's notion of man as a being who must use the existence he has to shape his personal essence. This is done by means of human freedom, whose sole purpose is the perfection of the individual subject who exercises it. Personalists too consider the human person as self-determining and free, but they emphasize man's orientation to society and other persons. Strains of this can also be seen in Lavelle where he gives special prominence to the question of human communication and friendship. Lavelle does not view freedom as something merely personal but rather as something which is necessarily directed to other persons. For him an encounter with other freedoms is imperative if I am to bring my personal freedom to a fuller actualization.

In revealing its intrinsic dependence on personalist and existentialist doctrines, Lavelle's thought can at the same time be shown to be a highly personal synthesis and development of each of these. He has taken various aspects of these doctrines and woven them into a metaphysical doctrine of being based on human consciousness and freedom.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The present century of unbelievable scientific advances has also witnessed a new interest in man. "What is meant by 'person'" is a question that many scholars have tried to answer. The empirical science of psychology has not been alone in this quest, but modern philosophy as well has taken up the new, revitalized interest in man's nature. This is most clearly seen, perhaps, in the concern with the "personal" element of our concrete, immediate, daily experiences which is so characteristic of existentialism, phenomenology, and personalism.

The aim of the present thesis was to study the thought of a modern philosopher, Louis Lavelle, especially from the point of view of his philosophical theory of person and personality. To do this, we had first to get an understanding of the philosophical climate in which he wrote, and a grasp of his general doctrine. Then, brief attention was given to some of the prominent current theories of person and personality in order to provide a context in which to situate Lavelle's position. Now we can look back to glance over our steps and review the results.

Like the philosophy of any individual, Lavelle's thought derives partly from a philosophical heritage, partly from his own
creative reflection. Platonism, existentialism, the philosophy of spirit, and personalism are the major sources from which Lavelle's doctrine flows. But the union of these various approaches to reality within a single philosophical synthesis is solely the work of the man. To him belongs the credit for a masterful attempt at combining the need and value of metaphysics, the importance of spiritual reality, personal autonomy, and participation in God's transcendence into one vital body of thought. Almost in reaction to the growing tendency of compartmentalizing our knowledge and interests, Lavelle has essayed a unified body of thought which includes the central and most important themes of human thought.

Lavelle's philosophy, however, is not entirely free from difficulties. And since the philosopher with whom we are dealing is primarily a metaphysician, it is not surprising that our difficulties arise from an attempt to justify his ontological system.

Briefly stated, our principal objection to Lavelle's metaphysics is that he fails to distinguish between act as existence (first act) and act as operation (second act). Lavelle makes a three-fold distinction of being into Pure Act (pure intimacy), participated act (union of passivity and activity), and pure passivity (pure exteriority, the given). In a participated being Lavelle reduces first act to second act. This reduction causes no problem if we are considering Pure Act, in which there is no distinction between existence and operation. But when we consider
participated being—a human person, for example—we meet an insoluble difficulty. Pure Act is distinguished from a finite being by the latter's act of participation. As a participating being, my act is formed of both activity and passivity. But if asked what in me is passive and what active, Lavelle's system seems unable to furnish an adequate response. Nowhere can we find an explanation of what gives to the participating act the individuality by which it is ontologically distinguished from Pure Act. Lavelle has failed to make a close study or analysis of the form of finite being, or contingent act. This ambiguity makes the suspicions of pantheists which have been cast upon Lavelle's doctrine more easily understandable.

According to at least one author, this problem would not have arisen in Lavelle's philosophy if he had not based his ontology on the rejection of the real composition between substance and accidents in finite beings.\(^1\) Fearing that this distinction would lead irrevocably to the Kantian distinction between the noumenon and phenomenon, in which all being would be merely an unknown substrate for phenomenal changes of the real, Lavelle concluded that the distinction between substance and accidents was only the projection on the real of our manner of

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thinking.  

In Lavelle's philosophy the initial experience of being establishes us immediately in a dualism of ego (consciousness) and being. This dualism, however, is different from the traditional dualism which places a reciprocal relation between the subject and object. Lavelle's is a dualism of intimacy in which the ego is separated from being only by its self-affirmation in the expression of its very intimacy with being. This self-affirmation in the human person is the very core of his freedom, and by means of participated acts of freedom we find it possible, in the Lavellian scheme, to create ourselves and to participate more and more fully in the fullness of being. It would not be too great an exaggeration to consider Lavelle's whole philosophy as a description of the creation of the self by the self.

We have seen that in the Lavellian metaphysic, being is an act, an act in which we both realize our own being and construct our proper selves through free choices. In this way we cause ourselves to conform more and more closely to the ideal image of the human being, and thus to acquire a deeper penetration of and participation in the Transcendent Pure Act, God.

2 Thus it does not seem quite accurate to say, as Professor Collins does in his article on Lavelle (Philosophical Review, LVI [1947], p. 165) that Lavelle's "created creation" or self-formation in freedom is the same as Scholastic secondary causality. Human creativity truly partakes of the character of our mode of being. But Scholastics and Lavelle differ in their metaphysical explanation of the human person.
From this scheme of things the extreme value of the human agent can readily be seen, and here enters the underlying concepts of person and personality. By his nature man is capable of making free choices which simultaneously cause him to realize and constitute himself in being, as well as to come into closer communication with the Divine Being. Freedom and the ability to make choices, plus his limited participation in the divine essence, constitute man's dignity: they make him a person. The actual use made of this ability, and the sort of being which consequently results is what Lavelle means by personality. While use of these terms in this sense is peculiar to Lavelle's philosophy, they do serve to point out the original and synthetic character of his thought.

In the beginning of Chapter 4 we observed that the idea of person evolved from an emphasis on the human substance (during the Middle Ages) into the strongly psychological notion of a self-conscious being (from Descartes' time until the present.) Now, just as Lavelle's metaphysical thought is a synthesis of essentialist and existentialist doctrines of being, so in the area of philosophy of person does his thought represent a union between the "self-contained" notion of person and the notion of person as a "substance". The individual person, Lavelle would vigorously assert, is a substance—and this is known from the initial fact of unified consciousness which each person experiences in himself.
But this human substance only becomes a person by exercising himself in a subjective series of choices through which he "makes himself" according to the pattern of an ideal human essence. Here enters the important concept of freedom. Only by means of my freedom am I able to perform conscious and responsible human actions. Thus, and only thus, do I merit the dignity of being a human person. By my commitments and strivings towards this goal, I more and more realize the fullness of my participated nature in the One Transcendent Free Being, God, the source of all being.

Precisely here, in the special emphasis which he gives to human freedom, does Lavelle effect a union between the traditional philosophical truths of past centuries and the most deeply felt needs of modern man. Traditional Christian thought has always defended man's moral autonomy with firm philosophical principles. While materialism and scientific progress have largely caused him to lose sight of these firm principles, modern man is nevertheless keenly interested today in the psychological fact of his own freedom. By his philosophical synthesis Lavelle has united these two elements of yesterday and today. Through his attention to consciousness and the necessary autonomy of human volitional activity, Lavelle has explained the existential fact that men are free beings. But his explanation is in terms of philosophical ultimates: being, act, participation, and causality. The fact that he gives a metaphysical foundation to current psychological and existential themes seems to be the principal advantage which
recommends Lavelle's philosophy to modern thinkers.

In asserting that essence precedes existence, Lavelle had no other end in view than to maintain the reality of liberty, or freedom, against the determinist philosophies which are so prevalent in the philosophical world of today. These philosophies enclose us in an immutable nature which we are unable to change in spite of our very best efforts. As if to answer this sort of philosophizing, Lavelle sometimes equates existence with liberty, as when he says: "existence cannot be defined otherwise than as liberty," and "when treating of a free being, that which we call his existence . . . is his freedom."

The philosophical world has much to learn from the intriguing writings of the modern French metaphysician whose doctrine we have been studying. It is to be earnestly hoped that more thinkers will turn their attention to his ideas, though they need not agree with everything he has written. The most stimulating thinkers in history have been men who have held to certain capital principles, and then tried to run a middle course between extremist positions. Lavelle may not have succeeded perfectly; indeed, no man does! But we should be grateful to him for holding firmly to our highest

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3Louis Lavelle, Introduction à l'ontologie (Paris, 1947), p. 34: "[L]'existence ne peut être définie autrement que comme une liberté." (Translation mine.)

4Acte, p. 96: "[Q]uand il s'agit d'un être libre, ce que nous appelons son existence . . . c'est sa liberté."
Christian traditions, and then resolutely striking out on a path which would enable man to see that the natural and the supernatural, the old and the modern are not incompatible. Everything participates in the All, the Supreme Person Whose supremely perfect personality it is our life's task to imitate.
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B. ARTICLES


The thesis submitted by Thomas Edward Gafney, S.J., 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.

[Signature of Adviser (Substitute)]

[Date] July 6, 1957