

Chapter XII

FREEDOM AND THE INTERVAL

A) THE INTERVAL AND THE PLAY OF PARTICIPATION

ART. 1: *The notion of the interval is inseparable from that of participation.*

The peculiarity of participation is to create a gap between the total act and the particular act, precisely so the pure act can go on inspiring and supporting the particular act, which nonetheless must be somehow separate from it in order to have a personal character and an initiative of its own. What defines every domain of action is the interval within which our action can be employed. And it is not hard to understand that it can be defined both by its extent, i.e. by the field it leaves open to our initiative, and by the specific term from which it separates us, which is always in rapport with the aim of participation's activity. There is no difference between the theory of the interval and that of participation. Of this interval one can say that there is no consciousness that does not keenly feel its reality: it is the interval we think of when we consider consciousness as a lack¹ that desire, will, dream and hope all try to fill. It is also this interval that certain

¹ Of fullness or being. Sartre later pushes the notion to an extreme, defining consciousness as a nothingness or a kind of black hole through which negation enters a world of uniform affirmation or there-ness.

modern philosophers designate by the terms “fissure” or “crack” to mark the presence, there at the heart of things, of a kind of ontological flaw, essential to the very existence of the universe.² It is this interval again which is bound up with so many unsatisfied aspirations and which gives a secret relish to all forms of pessimism, there in the depths of each consciousness. Finally, it is this interval which (following Plato, who vainly tried to deliver the thought of being from the stern chains with which Parmenides³ had bound it) so many philosophers claim as the non-being necessary for the independence of every particular being: for its development, for its power of invention and creation.⁴ It is nonetheless plain that this interval is a lack only for *us*⁵: for it precisely expresses that plenitude of concrete being—always present, always on offer—to which we continually respond with an action appropriate to us, which alone is capable of rendering being’s measureless superabundance ours in accordance with a unique perspective on the world.

Also, meditation on the interval will not produce any groaning in us but only a gravity-filled emotion associated with the simultaneous discovery of our dependence on the creative act and of our need to take possession of it in order to play a part in changing the face of the world, by creating ourselves. For the interval is indispensable to freedom, the very condition of its play. Thanks to it life is for us an uninterrupted initiative, an indefinite starting-over, an ever-fresh promise—but also a series of unforeseeable trials one accepts and gifts one receives. The interval is the I itself giving birth to a world before its very eyes, a world of which it is part yet which pertains solely to it.

Thus whoever follows the lessons of a master in freedom bases his personal freedom on that teaching. But he is not sure this freedom can give itself all that the master’s freedom did; the distance separating them is measured by all the ends that bring the teaching to mind yet have not been converted by the disciple into his own acts of freedom.

ART. 2: The act leaps the absolute interval between nothingness and being by converting it, there at the interior of participation, into an interval between the possible and the real.

The interval is almost always considered primary and the role of consciousness would be to bring its extremities together through an action

² I am unclear about which “modern philosophers” the author has in mind.

³ Parmenides (*circa* 500 B.C.) is one of the founders of Greek philosophy. The preserved fragments of his doctrine are typically taken to support the view that what-is constitutes a single being and that whatever appearance of division or assumption of non-being leads to error and should be rejected. Hence, the “stern chains” referred to above. Lavelle’s insistence on the univocity of being harks back to Parmenides but his philosophy also affirms the validity of manifold appearances, namely by way of his theory of participation and the interval.

⁴ To a notable degree this describes the philosophy later espoused by Sartre.

⁵ My italics.

defined quite naturally as a synthesis. But it should not be forgotten that the interval first arises in being as a condition of participation, and consequently of all the syntheses through which each of us fills it, according to his forces and by virtue of a free act.

The absolute interval could be considered the very interval separating nothingness from being but this infinite interval is in some fashion eternally spanned by the pure act in so far as it is creator of itself and by the shared act in so far as it permits us to pass at every instant from nothingness to an existence that is ours. But the impossibility of positing nothingness in anything but a verbal manner compels us to create within being the interval between essence and existence, which can be traversed in two different senses if it is true that existence follows essence in God and that where we are concerned existence has to be posited precisely so that we can find our essence⁶: for we can rightly say that existence pertains to our body or to our handiwork once it has been achieved but neither our body nor our handiwork would have any true significance if they were not instruments that allowed us to put our inner activity into play so as to realise our spiritual essence, by expressing it.

We also carve out an interval between various possibilities and being, which is necessary for being to become our own being. But we know very well that possibility itself resides in being and indeed that there is within being a plurality of possibilities, from which we must choose our own being. Yet our being is at first only the being of this possibility, and indeed of these various possibilities, until the moment a free act will have indivisibly established our veritable reality in them. This interval between possible being and real being is there again in the interval which, in the case of thinking, separates negation, which is rich in the plurality of possible affirmations, from real affirmation, and absence, which I also populate with possible presences, from actualised presence.

We have formerly presented under the title *The Visual Perception of Depth*⁷ the most striking illustration of the theory of the interval. It is in fact the interval that visual perception opens before us—a space bathed in light which allows us to represent to ourselves all objects in the measure they do not coincide with us but also unfolds before us the path of desire and permits movement along it until the moment we reach the goal, i.e. the moment we can enter into contact with it and possess it.⁸ The depth of the visual image shows the distance separating possibility from actuality, and free movement alone converts one into the other.

⁶ The formula “existence precedes essence” is usually associated with Sartre but Lavelle anticipates him, both here and in Art. 3 of Chapter Six (“Existence and Essence”) where he asserts: “*The classic relation between essence and existence must be reversed and existence considered as the means of winning my essence.*”

⁷ *La perception visuelle de la profondeur*, untranslated, envisioned while Lavelle was a prisoner of war. It was later presented in a 1922 doctorate thesis. He gives a summary of it in the following sentences. In this connection it is worth noting that the word “*intervalle*” can be translated as “space”.

⁸ Lavelle’s notion of the interval can be usefully compared with Heidegger’s notion of “the Open” or “the Overt”; see particularly Heidegger’s 1930 essay “On the Essence of Truth”.

It is noteworthy that the oppositions, which have today become almost classical, between the constituting reason and the constituted reason of Mr. Lalande⁹, and in a different sense between the willing will and the willed will of Mr. Blondel¹⁰, are both meant to measure the interval separating the deep-seated act upon which our initiative constantly draws from the operation that expresses it and remains with respect to it imperfect and unachieved. No one can doubt that all our lifelong labours, all the works we accomplish and the very existence of the world we constantly perceive and transform have as their goal to make these two coincide.

ART. 3: *The identity of and difference between Being and the Act suffice to explain the interval between subject and object.*

The identity of Being and the Act which we established in the second part of Book I¹¹ was founded on this two-fold affirmation: first, that the reality to which our consciousness gives us access is being and not appearance; and second, that this reality can be interior to itself only if it is an act that creates itself. But how is it that we can indifferently employ the two terms “being” and “act” to designate it unless owing to the conditions under which participation occurs, which demand that I carry out a personal, temporal, abstract or intentional, ever-incomplete initiative that stands opposed to an object from which it is distinct, of which it seeks to take possession – either in order to represent it or to modify it – and upon which the act always must alight so to speak for it to be fulfilled? Yet it is this object which seems to exist without us that constitutes for us veritable being, though it can only emerge from our consciousness in rapport with an initiative that comes from us and is never resolved into the operations we undertake to assimilate or produce it.

The classic opposition between subject and object appears as the simplest expression of the interval separating the participated act from the pure act. For it is necessary to observe that we will by turns consider the subject as an imperfect activity which struggles to envelope an object that is ever beyond it, and the object as a particular determination that limits but never exhausts the infinite power of the subject. Which is easily explained if we reflect that in the absolute being there is no distinction between subject and object but that as soon as the latter begins to come to light the interval that opens can be considered in two opposing ways: either limitation appears from the side of the subject, which becomes conscious of its inadequacy with respect to the totality of the object, or it

⁹ André Lalande (1867-1963), Lavelle’s senior at the Collège de France and author of *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie* (“Technical Vocabulary and Critique of Philosophy”), original studies 1902-1923.

¹⁰ Maurice Blondel (1861-1949) advocated an energetic philosophy that united pragmatism, Neo-Platonic principles and Christian ideals. Lavelle cites Blondel and Lalande in support of his contention that there is a gap between active and passive, subject-like and object-like, aspects of experience.

¹¹ Specifically Chapter Four “The Act of Being”.

appears from the side of the object, which thinking circumscribes without ever expressing its full fecundity. This sort of reciprocity is only an apparent contradiction if we agree to reflect that pure being, since it allows no separation between subject and object, could be considered by turns as an infinite subject for which the particular object represents and taps into one of its possible operations, and as an infinite object from which the individual subject seeks a possession that forever escapes him. One understands that each of these two perspectives holds a share of the truth and that when separately affirmed they give birth to the conflict between idealism and realism, whose nature is such that each perspective is assured of triumphing in its chosen view. We see then that the peculiarity of consciousness is precisely to constitute itself by opposing thinking to the thought: a gap always separates them and prevents consciousness from ever coinciding with either the entirety of thinking or the entirety of thought, which are identical in the total being; this gap always seems to be produced from one side or the other, and every effort is bent on filling it. The gap is so to speak the milieu of participation, and what we have just said sufficiently shows why participation seems sometimes to increase the internal activity we dispose and sometimes our radiation upon the world of objects.

ART. 4: The whole of consciousness oscillates within the interval separating nature from freedom and the action I accomplish from the response made to me.

One is very wrong to seek in freedom a form of activity that would rightly belong to us and that, while having a creative character, would nonetheless be ours alone. To act is to consent to an activity that is proposed to us, to carry out an option through which it is exerted within us and becomes our own. But since our activity is participatory it is obvious that there are both initiative and constraint in it. Where is the initiative unless in the operations which depend on our spirit¹²? Where is the constraint unless in the states imposed on us by the body? But in the very operations that depend on our spirit it still seems that the I responds to a law it can shirk, either through inertia or through revolt; by contrast, when it yields to it there is no constraint since the act it accomplishes and the act by which it consents to this accomplishment are no longer distinguishable.

The I is caught between alternatives so to speak; and consciousness is always consciousness of an oscillation between two orders that surpass us: a spiritual order in which we participate only by making it our own and a natural order in which we participate only by submitting to it. The peculiarity of freedom is to incline us toward one or the other. Only, there is no symmetry between them because to be free to choose is already to have access to spiritual existence, which however can become mine only if I will it, so that it would not be participated if

¹² Or mind.

it could not so to speak turn against its own principle and be enslaved to matter. The character of free-will is to permit us to choose, dare we say, between freedom and necessity; it is to be able to affirm or deny the freedom it disposes, to preserve it or to lose it, so that it always decides between an activity it receives, on the condition that it puts it into play, and a passivity imposed on it, to which it need only abandon itself. Not only does my personal will always oscillate between these two but there is in participation always an implication of activity and passivity: which explains on the one hand why I am passive even with respect to my own activity, and on the other hand why whatever surrender I might make impedes my activity in turn, distends it and obliges me to win it back.

Our consciousness therefore oscillates within an interval without which it would have no play. To define the character of this interval in a more precise manner it is enough to observe that a nature has been given to us for which we cannot say we are responsible, though heredity perhaps argues against there being something in the world that is a pure given and that escapes all responsibility.¹³ But if there were only nature within us there would be no room for freedom. Now we are also a reason¹⁴, and if we were nothing more we would be like spiritual automatons. But we are reason *and*¹⁵ nature, and our consciousness moves from one to the other without ever being irresistibly carried away by either. Our reason would remain abstract without nature which gives it matter; our nature would remain blind if our reason did not try to take hold of it. Neither one nor the other alone would be enough to constitute our I; the sole thing that belongs to us, as Descartes maintained, is the use of our reason – yet in rapport with our nature.

A new interval then appears between the act I make mine and the response given to it. Perhaps one might recognise that every dialectic of thought and will consists for us in a correspondence between the action we accomplish and the result we seek to produce. Here resides the principle of all the methods we apply, all the rules we put into play. But no method, no rule ever succeeds completely. The result escapes us at a certain point. It brings us sometimes more, sometimes less than we had hoped for; and the dialectic of consciousness is that of our successes and our failures, i.e. in a more general sense, of our trials. If it were not thus our life would run no risks. It would develop by virtue of an infallible mechanism. It would know neither personal invention nor voluntary good nor enrichment.

But between action and result the interval is presented in two different guises: it is first of all an interval that is the same for me and for everyone and that appears generated by the conditions under which participation in general is

¹³ I am not clear what Lavelle means by this aside. Perhaps he wants to suggest that even inherited characteristics involve responsibility and choice on the part of forbears.

¹⁴ A reasoning faculty and cause.

¹⁵ My italics.

realised, along with the constitution of all finite being; it is next a subjective, individual and variable interval that expresses the conditions under which my freedom is exercised and that puts the perspective I take on the world in rapport with not only my own originality but with the activity I dispose, i.e. with my merit.

B) THE INTERVAL AND THE DIVERGENCE OF CONTRARIES

ART. 5: *The interval always gives rise to pairs of contraries, one member of which always has a positive privilege and calls for the other only by way of its limitation, as one sees in the pairs of necessity and freedom and of the act and the given.*¹⁶

One will not fail to consider the disparity between the contraries joined in various couples. There is always one that has positive priority and another that is in some respect its negation; this is easy to prove by examples. Yet if one of these two terms always has an invincible ascendancy over the other it is because their opposition is always realised within the higher term, where the interval that separates them and is required for their interplay is born. In this consists the secret of participation.

Thus we can oppose freedom to necessity, which make sense only in relation to each other; freedom being the first term, since we doubtless have an experience of freedom and since necessity can be defined only by negation, as what can neither be nor be conceived in any other fashion than that it is not¹⁷. Freedom by contrast is always linked to choice and possibility. Now it is within the interval separating the two terms of this pair that our activity is exerted. But it is obvious that this couple itself makes sense only in connection with a Supreme Act, of which freedom contains all that is positive in it, though it only participates in it, which means that it calls for its contrary, i.e. necessity, as both the condition and expression of its operation. This limitation introduced into my freedom makes it a free will, i.e. a faculty capable of choosing between a pure freedom towards which it ever tries to raise itself and a necessity which threatens to enslave it and to which it always risks succumbing. However the Supreme Act we are speaking about here rises above both freedom and necessity: instead of being the synthesis that unites them it is the principle that founds their

¹⁶ The formulation calls to mind Hegel's dialectical scheme whereby a thesis generates an antithesis from which springs a synthesis. But whereas Hegel's dialectic looks toward the future as a kind of ascent, Lavelle's looks toward the origin from which all contraries devolve. For him ascent is always inward and a matter of returning to the source while outwardly moving forward in time.

¹⁷ A way of speaking that I suspect harks back to Parmenides.

opposition.¹⁸ For it is a perfect freedom that finds within itself the sole origin of what it is and what it does but cannot know those imperfections in knowledge and those hesitations in decision that are inseparable from freedom of choice: thus instead of being opposed to necessity it coincides with it in the indivisible unity of a spiritual spontaneity.¹⁹

It is easy to see that we can in the same way oppose the act to the given by showing that these two terms are correlatives but that the act has priority because there is no given save through it. Nonetheless this opposition is brought about only by an Act²⁰ which admits of no limitation, to which no given corresponds and which renders possible both the participatory act and the given which is correlative to it. In the pair formed by activity and passivity, passivity is subordinate to activity since one can say of passivity that it is a non-activity, a limited and interrupted activity, but one cannot say of activity that it is a negation of passivity or a “least” passivity, which would be insufficient to engender activity, except in the measure that, by negating the negation which is inseparable from this passivity, one precisely gives rise to the primitive affirmation without which the first negation could not have occurred. This sufficiently demonstrates that the opposition between passivity and activity is produced within an activity superior to the terms of the pair, an activity in which they are determined and set apart. Passivity is therefore always second, but it is such only in relation to the activity with which it forms a couple, because both first become what they are in connection with a participable activity that surpasses participated activity. Thus, because the opposition between the act of participation and the given grants the first of these terms privilege over the second, there at the very interior of the pair, we can consider the Pure Act as an absolute which exhausts the totality of being, which is above participation and provides all its conditions.

ART. 6: Similarly with the pairs of the one and the many, the universal and the particular, and presence and absence, a positive privilege is given to the one, the universal and presence.

In the same fashion we regularly posit a couple comprised of the one and the many where the two terms determine each other. But the one has pre-eminence over the many, which is the not-one; the one is, if you like, the affirmation since it is the act of spirit²¹ and the multiple is the negation since it continually flees us as

¹⁸ Plainly in contrast to Hegel the author is referring to the unifying thesis that *precedes* opposition instead of the unifying synthesis that *follows* it, i.e. by way of a kind of compromise. To seek this term is effectively to go against the grain of time as Lavelle’s *Of Time and Eternity* makes clear.

¹⁹ The “spiritual spontaneity” of the Supreme Act is both “perfect freedom” (as self-determination) and perfect necessity (as a condition where conflicting alternatives do not arise). In terms of its single thrust and absolute sway perfect freedom is perfect necessity.

²⁰ Note the distinction between “act” (in the realm of participation) and “Act” as an absolute.

²¹ Or the mind.

long as the one has not recovered it, e.g. in counting it, in making it a number. But to posit this one which is the contrary of the many is therefore to refer to a One²² that contains the two contraries, whether the many is obtained by division of the one and attests to its richness or by a multiplication and attests to its fecundity. Division discloses the many in the one as the reality that fills it, as the infinity it holds in potential; and multiplication is the same operation but considered in its development rather than in its principle: like the other it does not efface the one that produces it or posit any new term among the many without including it, along with those preceding it, in the unity of a number, i.e. in its own unity, to which the many ever testifies, since it does not succeed in escaping it.²³

It is noteworthy that knowledge itself is always presented in the form of an opposition between the universal and the particular. Here, the universal again has a kind of privilege since it expresses the unity of our spirit; also one understands that the universal has been considered the proper object of knowledge, that the particular checks it and that we always seek to reduce it to the other. If every act of the spirit necessarily displays a universal character we can say that the particular is precisely its negation, i.e. the non-universal. However, in the opposition between the universal and the particular, the universal is always abstract and the particular concrete. Also one can consider them as the sundering of a Concrete Universal which includes both of them and which, at the moment participation begins, precisely allows us only to grasp the universal in the form of a pure power, or of a category whose simple application is insufficient to grant us the presence of the real, and the concrete in the form of a particular which it seems can only be given, which resists the ventures of thought and constantly limits them.

One will encounter the same features lastly in the opposition between presence and absence.²⁴ For it is obvious that presence and absence can be conceived only by way of their correlation. Yet no one will doubt that presence is positive, even if it is revealed to us with particular acuity when absence suddenly ceases; and no one can doubt that absence is felt as a non-presence. But it is noteworthy that every absence is necessarily the absence of something. Otherwise it would be indistinguishable from nothingness. We could not even speak of it. Not only is the feeling of absence present but the absent object itself is present in some fashion, whether by way of the idea that represents it to us, the appeal that carries us toward it, the void it causes us to experience, the need we have of it or the simple malaise this absence gives us. This suggests that absence itself is only a particular form of presence, an insufficient and discontented

²² The term recalls the writings of the Platonic philosophers, e.g. Plotinus (205-270 A.D.) for whom “the One” was the preferred name for the Absolute.

²³ It can also be said that however large or small it might be, a number is only another number. Though the number system is formally open-ended or infinite it is totally contained in and surpassed by the understanding of the mathematician, i.e. in a unity which essentially is not a number.

²⁴ This theme is addressed in greater detail in *Of Time and Eternity*.

presence that seeks to arouse someone who lacks it.²⁵ We cannot have the experience of a true and absolute absence. We incessantly pass from one presence to another, and we call the first “absence” when the other is what we desire. But here determinations are contrasted with an Absolute Presence which does not know absence and at the interior of which particular presences are wholly contained—though they appear to be excluded in a certain fashion, as the presence of desire excludes the presence of a thing and can be called an absence with respect to it.

C) THE INTERVAL AND THE I THAT REALISES ITSELF

ART. 7: *The I never coincides with itself²⁶, and the interval separating it from itself is shown by its infinite faculty for going-beyond.*

The difficulty we face in defining the nature of the I and in ever grasping it as a separate object²⁷ plainly shows us the true nature of participation. We encounter the I nowhere: it is a being that forms itself but is never formed, that seeks but never finds itself. If we look on the side of objects we see nothing more than our body in the midst of the world: no one will agree to say that this body is the I.²⁸ If we look on the side of that invisible activity which is one with self-consciousness we find in it only a mysterious potential whose actualisation depends on us, an ideal toward which we constantly tend but with which we will never coincide. The being of the I is a limited being but does not wish to remain closed within its limits: that it feels them is a sign it is already beyond. It is therefore a being that ever surpasses itself but that, in the very effort it makes to surpass itself, affirms the limits within which it remains held. Its being is the rapport or unstable equilibrium between its limits at each instant and its infinite capacity for going beyond. This faculty for going beyond gives expression to the interval within which the I constantly moves; and one finds the same interval, as well as the same unstable equilibrium between what we are and what we want to be, in the contrast between our individual nature or character and that universal,

²⁵ The author is at pains to persuade readers that absence can play an active role, even to the point of describing it as “discontented” and seeking to “arouse” us. In his *Being and Nothingness* Sartre will later expand upon the nature of absence as presence—without reference to Lavelle.

²⁶ This must refer to the I defined as a role, a body, a certain personality, a distinct history, etc. It is a question of self in the guise of an object. But surely there is also a self-sense—at one with sense of being—which is always the same and not a changing role, body, personality, history, etc. In that case the I *must* coincide with itself. So intense is Lavelle’s focus on the future in this section that he seems to short-change the possibility of a present realisation of self except as a current potentiality.

²⁷ The obvious solution to the difficulty is that the I is *never* a “separate object” but I suppose Lavelle is considering whatever it is that links the I to its changing manifestations.

²⁸ Yet on what basis can the body be rejected unless there is prior knowledge, however vague, of the I’s inner nature? At least some fully-achieved sense of self is needed to preserve its identity over time.

rational legislation to which we try to submit it, and in the contrast between that purely external life we almost always lead (where we yield to the solicitations of the body or society) and that perfect inwardness to ourselves we endlessly pursue but is for us an only ever-distant and ever-threatened ideal.

The I's proper activity necessarily calls for the idea of an interval within which it plays. This interval measures the field in which it exerts itself, permits it to chart the paths to which it is committed and to combine the initiative it puts into play with a constraint that limits it and that it endures. Within this interval are interwoven all the relations that it has with the world and that shape the world in which it lives. The concrete reality of this interval is defined within us by the gap separating what we desire from what we have. And one can say that being becomes present to us not at the moment desire ceases but at the moment desire coincides with the object of desire. In this encounter is produced the act that gives us being. Finally, this interval is measured by time, i.e. by the path that is given to us within the two limits of birth and death and that permits us to make a certain use of the being we have received by impressing upon it the stamp of all we have chosen. It is time that, by introducing delay into our life, clears this three-fold distance—between the finite and the infinite, between idea and being, and between absence and presence—which is the very condition of all participation.

ART. 8: The quantitative interval separating the individual from the All has concrete value only owing to the qualitative interval separating each individual from his essence or his vocation.

There is in the problem of participation an essential ambiguity that is important to clear up. For we almost always think that the interval separating the Pure Act from the participated act belongs to an exclusively quantitative order. Consequently it seems to us that the peculiarity of participation is to define our limits, though also constantly to push them back: for participation to be ever-growing it should be engaged in a progress that goes to infinity. Here is an aspect of participation one does not want to disregard but which nonetheless has an abstract, schematic character that expresses so to speak only the possibility of participation such as it is rightly offered to everyone. It offers various consciousnesses a field of comparison that allows the establishment of ranks among them, which gives it a kind of allure. But quantitative participation evokes only the expansion of our phenomenal action throughout space and time. Yet we know very well that the metaphysical value of participation consists not in its breadth but its depth. Each of us feels that there is much vanity in the indefinite growth of our power over things or ideas which risks distancing us ever further from our true essence. Such continuous expansion of participation makes sense only if it is an occasion that obliges us to perform a falling-back

upon self which delivers us to ourselves.²⁹ In this respect, our capacity for inwardness is proportional to the risk of diversion. The end men pursue is not the same for all: each individual seeks an absolutely original possession of himself that is the expression of his spiritual vocation. One is right to want always to surpass one's limits. But it is necessary to distinguish between the limits of existence that are given to us and those of the essence that we seek to acquire. It is within the interval separating them that our activity possesses true efficacy. As it happens, our life is alack for want of recognising the destiny to which we are called, knowing how to keep ourselves firmly within the limits of our powers and realising all the being they encompass.³⁰

The absolute is revealed to us neither in the dream of infinity nor in the vague aspiration that carries us toward it but in the way we limit ourselves to the being we are and push the vocation assigned to us to the last degree: in this sense restriction is often true wealth, and fidelity to self is often true fidelity to God. We understand therefore why our union with the Total Being is best realised by grasping its particular determinations, and why our participation in the Pure Act is most nearly perfect in the exact accomplishment of our limited tasks. Our contact with the infinite is shown by the perfection of our action at each point. The infinite engages us in a series of endless trials but these trials themselves, as one sees in the work of art, ever tend toward the immediate possession of an object that integrates them all, that grants us a final satisfaction and that, without arresting the flow of imagination, gives it inexhaustible nourishment within its proper bounds. Quantitative participation opens before us the common paths that permit each of us to obtain a unique and qualitative coincidence with Being from which all differences in magnitude are withdrawn. Which is sufficiently shown in the interval separating mathematical thought from sensible reality, movement from its result and, in artistic creation, the most skilful technique from the most humble success.

Thus the true mark of participation does not reside in the appearance of a quantitative infinity in which our spirit would engage itself in obtaining measureless growth. For quantitative infinity expresses very well in symbolic form the law of participation which, by joining my particular being to the Total Being, puts me in rapport with a reality that constantly provides for me; but considered on its own it seems to compel me less to seek myself than to flee myself, seems to prevent me from possessing anything by always leaving me equally far from a good I pursue which ever escapes me. It expresses the progress of participation but not its concrete, individual value: that is realised

²⁹ This and the following comments seem to affirm a basic self—more than an abstract potentiality—to which one can return.

³⁰ Note the implication of a kind of mission. It suggests a pre-ordained ideal of self (like soul) that has to be created or won. However the last volume of Lavelle's dialectic, *Of the Human Soul*, appears to avoid any hint of pre-ordination.

only by quality, which is correlative to quantity and gives it a content and a meaning.

Only an act carried out by such-and-such an individual in such-and-such a place and at such-and-such a moment is a real act. But then it always brings forth from the real a unique and incomparable form of participation which ought not to be judged merely according to magnitude but according to proportion, measure and justice. There are perhaps peaks in our life that cannot be surpassed. Quality is, within the objective order, what vocation is within the subjective order. There exists an absolute of individuality, a final term in the actualisation of its powers which is so to speak its perfection. Each of our real undertakings remains separated from it by an interval that precisely gives it its élan and its play.

ART. 9: *Each being tries to bridge the interval between being and having without ever completely succeeding.*

In recent years people have often tried, as much in Germany as in France, to penetrate the relation between being and having.³¹ These two auxiliaries that govern our language and thought perhaps express all the ends we can lay claim to. And there is no difficulty in showing that the most profound men are preoccupied solely with being, and the flightiest solely with having. Why – unless, for this first reason, that I am nothing except what I am capable of making of myself, with the consequence that *being* is supremely exacting in that it requires me to put all my activity into play, whereas *having* is what I receive, what permits me to utilise certain goods through which I constantly increase my likelihood of being affected, which in turn limits my ambition to the study of an object capable of acting upon me; and for this second reason, that my being is invisible and reduces me to my associations with myself and with God while my having is an appearance that I can flash before everyone's eyes and through which the reality of what I am becomes manifest to all those who surround me, even if it inwardly escapes me?

However participation forbids that the relations between being and having are purely oppositional. For what I am, i.e. the act by which I constantly fulfil myself, would be indistinguishable from the divine act if it did not encounter a limiting materiality in which I determine my own attributes. But will I say that I am these attributes or that I possess them? Further, we indeed feel that the relation of possession to what surrounds us is capable of being stretched and becoming more and more distended but there is rightly nothing that escapes it. Yet far from being able to dissociate what I am from what I have, is it not necessary to say that if the act through which I create myself is a participated act, then my being is precisely my having? However, this would be a fresh trap into

³¹ Cf. Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*. [Author's note]

which it is important not to fall. I am not truly what I have but the longing look and the operation of consent through which I attribute something to myself. One never possesses anything but self, i.e. the act one performs; and the thing is not the aim of possession but the means that makes possible the very act of possessing. This explains why it is so difficult to possess anything and why the richest people often possess nothing and why I do not truly possess any material good but only the use I make of it. It also explains why I choose what I possess and why possession is not exclusion since it is never a question of the thing but only of an act I carry out, which can neither hinder your act nor take the place of it. Finally, it explains why the spiritual person who renounces all goods becomes master of them all, i.e. of the very operation that produces them: consequently one sees very well that for him possession and being go together: just as everything seems to be given to him at the moment he thinks of holding onto nothing, the being of the All is joined to him at the moment he realises the personal sacrifice of the being of the divine I³².

My being resides solely in the act I accomplish. And God, who is sheer being, is likewise without having. But having is inseparable from the finite I which never succeeds in becoming a true self³³; therefore it turns back toward its finite being which is always up to a certain point an object it wants to own; the relations it has with the entire world are up to a certain point external and allow it to make this world its property.

³² The author's use of "*le Moi*" in place of "*le moi*" makes it clear that he intends a sacrifice on the part of the Pure Self or God. Lavelle does not spell out what this "personal sacrifice" entails.

³³ Again this gloomy streak in the otherwise positive philosopher. It is as if he sees any perfection in the individual as usurping God's place rather than affirming it.