

Article

# Ritual and Thought: Spirituality and Method in Philosophy of Religion

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**Abstract:** This paper outlines a strain of French Spiritualism, a philosophical tradition extending from Maine de Biran, Félix Ravaisson, and Jules Lachelier to their reception in the work of Maurice Blondel and his protégé Henry Duméry. In receiving and transforming this tradition, Blondel and Duméry have helped to provide a distinct philosophical paradigm in philosophy of religion, capable of providing insight into the spiritual nature of the human being, both in how spirituality relates to the advanced stages of religious culture in addition to its primitive presence in spontaneous action. As a tradition consecrated to the study of human consciousness, and the operations of the mind [*l'esprit*], the French spiritualist tradition provides a rich conceptual matrix for analyzing the nature of human thinking and its relationship to action. In such an analysis of human thought, Maurice Blondel set up a moral psychology and metaphysical anthropology, highlighting how the consciousness of the human being is linked to the objective order of existence, both in its material form and in the intelligible realities behind the nature of existence. This philosophical matrix helps to show how religious practices, through embodied engagement with the material world, are effective at generating a consciousness of metaphysical or transcendent realities. As such, this philosophical paradigm provides the means for constructing a theory of ritual, where ritual acts with symbols and signs may be rendered intelligible as the sensible means for the cognitive expression of spiritual activity.

**Keywords:** philosophy of religion; French spiritualism; realism; phenomenology; metaphysics; cultural anthropology; cognitive archaeology; comparative religion



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## 1. The Religious Problem and the Question of Anthropology

The philosophical tradition of French spiritualism emerged during a period of intense competition between ideas. After the ascendancy of the French enlightenment, in the *Siècle de Lumières* of the eighteenth century, the question of religion and of spirituality became a central point of discussion, positioning the nineteenth century as a time of sustained critical reflection on the nature and implication of this new and 'adult' form of Enlightened thought when directed to the question of religion.

In the French context, the religious problem [*le problème religieux*] would enter into parlance, first as a means to understand how to relate religion to a society that had just recently enacted "a state-sponsored assault on Christianity . . . unlike anything in the European experience since the early Roman Empire," (Tackett 2006, p. 536) but also more fundamentally for those religious partisans to reconsider their own faith, and their own understanding of the practice and teachings of their own religion in light of advances in science and human understanding more broadly. As one contemporary put it:

The religious problem, in the 19th century, has only one or the other of the following four solutions:

Disappearance of the faith before science; Appearance of a new faith; Conservation of the old and traditional faith in France and in Western Europe: the Catholic faith; Evolution of the transformed Catholic faith. (Alaux 1890, p. 1)

The spirit of the times is well captured by this author, who suggests that the option of conserving the traditional form of the Roman Catholic faith to be both “fanciful” and something to be “dismissed.” (Alaux 1890, p. 2) The nineteenth century in France sustained a fertile period of intellectual inquiry directed precisely at this question, and, as the author suggests, the only option between a total negation and an impractical conservatism was “the transformation of the traditional faith, of the Catholic faith, by philosophy.” (Alaux 1890, p. 2). As a man of his times responding to the call of destiny, Maurice Blondel would open up the subject of this debate and deliver a conceptual framework for just such a philosophical transformation that would then become normative for generations of intellectuals. For his own part, Blondel would frame the crisis in the following way:

The present crisis unprecedented perhaps in depth and extent—for it is at the same time scientific, metaphysical, moral, social and political—is not a ‘dissolution’ (for the spirit of faith does not die), nor even an ‘evolution’ (for the spirit of faith does not change), it is a purification of the religious sense, and an integration of Catholic truth.<sup>1</sup> (Blondel and Valensin [1907] 1957, p. 338)

The philosophical work that would emerge from this rich ferment would, in its own way, provide the Catholic Church the means for understanding its relation to the modern world, particularly in the dogmatic proclamations of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>2</sup> The hoary legacy of Blondel’s philosophy owes much to the tradition of French spiritualism, providing him an intellectual matrix and the precise conceptual tools for understanding how to philosophically understand ‘religion’ and how to relate it to ‘spirituality.’ However, beyond this, the philosophical tradition of French spiritualism would help to reorient the broader understanding of religion and spirituality more generally, not merely in the sense of any confessional religious tradition, but rather in terms of the nature of spirituality more broadly and how to relate this spiritual understanding to modern conceptions of the human being.

In this paper I seek to highlight how the contributions of this philosopher and this school of philosophy can be employed to great advantage in the contemporary context, where the topic of religion has again become a central question. I wish to frame my argument around the post-Enlightenment intellectual context, where the interpretation of so-called religious phenomena has become beset with difficulties. The conceptual models to be applied, as well as the data they are to be applied to, are all hotly contested. On the one hand, this could be considered to pertain to the concrete objects of culture in established ritual practices and instituted doctrines and creeds. While on the other hand, it may be seen to relate to a personal domain of interior life, expressed in a rich and varied account of spiritual and mystical experience.

With the advent of Enlightened reason and the critiques of the radical enlightenment, it has often been the case where the latter domain of priestcraft has been censured from rational reflection, while the former dimension of inner experience has been relegated to the domain of mere personal sentiment. Inroads have been made for a clear-sighted description of the objective facts of religious culture, in the clarification of religious practices, the systemization of religious symbolism, and the characterization of certain ritual and initiation forms—most notably with the school of phenomenology of religion and the field of comparative religion (Eliade, van der Leuw, Otto, Burkert, and the Cambridge School of Anthropology et al.).<sup>3</sup>

Equally so, the subjective dimension of religious life has been robustly treated in academic circles, with the florescence of the phenomenological tradition and its induction into a religious register, here, with most notable influence of French phenomenology and the so-called theological turn (Lévinas, Henry, Marion, Chrétien, Lacoste, Falque, Romano et al.).<sup>4</sup> The advancement of each of these domains, however, only seems to lead towards a widening void in the understanding of their unity, as the objective facts of religious culture and the subjective experience of spiritual life are inherently and historically bound together.<sup>5</sup>

The current study seeks to bridge the gap between the two with a focused look at how spirituality may serve as a focal point in seeing how concrete religious phenomena relate to human interiority. I wish to argue that greater emphasis needs to be placed upon the framework of human thought, and particularly how ritual practices and engagement with material culture interact with the structures of human consciousness. This argument is intended to sustain the critique of phenomenology of religion delivered by Henry Duméry,<sup>6</sup> while also aiming to advance the vision of philosophy of religion as prompted by his teacher, Maurice Blondel, both of whom operated in continuity with the philosophical tradition of French spiritualism.

In the end, this paper seeks to underscore the importance of drawing from both the objective facts of religious history and the subjective dimension of human interiority—and developing a methodology adapted to each of these domains—for any philosophy of religion to be fruitful and relevant. This task could be summarized as the need to develop a method for treating human spirituality and discovering the link between metaphysics and anthropology.<sup>7</sup>

In the conceptual aftermath of Kantian philosophy, the link between metaphysics and anthropology has been severed; and with the advent of the masters of suspicion (Freud, Marx, Nietzsche),<sup>8</sup> this severance has been sustained in a variety of domains, most notably in anthropology and the human sciences.<sup>9</sup> This conceptual paradigm can be understood where the ultimate truth of human reality—in the question of metaphysics and the absolute—has been placed outside the bounds of human reason, in turn leading to a profound indignity in the modern conceptualization of *being* in itself.

This has expressed itself most notably in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries most distinctly in the field of anthropology, where certain theories of the development of human civilization took on a decidedly materialistic form, under such renowned figures as Gordon Childe (1892–1957). During the latter half of the twentieth century, and up until the present decade of the twenty first, a movement within cultural anthropology and cognitive archaeology has sought to overturn these outdated materialistic models in favor of conceptual paradigms open to the idea that religion has served more than just a derivative or secondary role in human and cultural development.

In the 1960s, the French archaeologist Jacques Cauvin (1930–2001) was at the forefront of this paradigm shift, particularly in his assertion that the then dominant theories concerning human sedentation, in the transition from hunter-gatherer to domestic human communities, had been overwhelmingly materialistic, where theoretical priority was primarily given “to the food needs of the human group and the resources available in the natural environment, and which interprets the changes in all the other domains (social, cultural, etc . . . ) as the counter-effects of a necessary adaptation to an imbalance occurring between these two fundamental factors.” (Cauvin 1978, p. 4)

He argued how these materialistic models had poor results in interpreting the actual data of early human life, as more recent discoveries of more ancient prehistoric artefacts and sites have increasingly stripped these models of any credibility, as the complex social structures that are now known to have existed before the advent of agriculture, and even the use of pottery, has led to a change in these ideological and materialistic tendencies that once dominated the field of cultural anthropology.

Cauvin’s early critique of this materialistic trend in cultural anthropology has, in recent times, won out, particularly in regard to the recent discoveries of the pre-historic settlements of Göbekli Tepe and Çatalhöyük in the Anatolian peninsula, where a broad consensus has formed in affirming the central role of some form of religion or spirituality in what is inferred as primitive rites and rituals.<sup>10</sup> Multiple leading scholars, including the leaders of these archaeological sites, have come to recognize the importance of the process of symbolization evidenced in these sites, with suggestions that these elements were critical in the advancement from primitive to advanced societies.<sup>11</sup>

This has led to a shift away from materialistic anthropological paradigms in favor of approaches more sensitive to the religious or spiritual dimension apparently put on display

in the rich symbolism present in these ancient sites. The growing recognition of religion in the process of human evolution is well characterized by the preeminent archaeologist Ian Hodder: “The assumed primacy of the singular focus of ‘it’s the economy stupid’ has been replaced by a singular focus of ‘it all began with ritual.’” (Hodder 2018, p. 3)

I wish to argue how the philosophical tradition of French spiritualism may play an important role in helping to articulate the cognitive dynamics at play in these early expressions of symbolism, and the religious rites and rituals to which they appear to be bound. In what follows, I wish to articulate a methodological stream in the tradition among those *masters of sympathy* characterized best by figures, such as Maine de Biran (1766–1824), Félix Ravaisson (1813–1900), Jules Lachelier (1832–1918), and chief among them Maurice Blondel (1861–1949) and one of his closest and most productive commentators, Henry Duméry (1920–2012).

This philosophical tradition helps to provide a cohesive model for understanding both the role of spirituality in human thought, and the role of thinking in spirituality. In conclusion, I wish to argue that philosophy of religion is an important discipline in helping to address these issues, but *only in so far* as it can provide a coherent methodological framework by which the data of human life, particularly as it relates to religion, may be rendered intelligible as phenomena of human consciousness. I wish to concentrate on how the French spiritualist tradition has helped to bridge back this severed metaphysical connection, an operation that could be considered a movement of sympathy, centered upon the profound connection between the human being and the absolute—and the unity of all beings.

I wish to outline the methodological parameters of this philosophical paradigm, with particular attention as to how the question of religion may be rendered within a post-modern critical framework. In conclusion, I will point to how the contributions of these *masters of sympathy* in the French spiritualist tradition, principally in reference to Blondel and Duméry, may offer an alternative critical paradigm where a more profound insight, and more clear description of religion and spirituality may be given, most notably in the cognitive aspect of symbolization that is indicated in the mysterious and persistent presence of ritual objects and religious rites that is now being discussed within the field of cognitive archaeology and cultural anthropology.

## 2. Critical Method in Philosophy of Religion

In the first volume of Jean Greisch’s encyclopedic trilogy in philosophy of religion, *Le buisson ardent de la raison: l’Invention de la philosophie de la religion* (2002), he identifies Henry Duméry as furnishing a “critical paradigm” in philosophy of religion and for helping to contribute greater clarity into the precise meaning of the term. (Greisch 2002, pp. 443–72) One major contribution in this regard is the distinction Duméry makes between *philosophy of religion* and *religious philosophy*.<sup>12</sup> (Duméry 1957a, pp. 7–12) Greisch suggests that, while the borders between these two philosophical approaches are not always clear, and the sense of this terminology may fluctuate, this distinction remains “of great heuristic fruitfulness and possesses an undeniable methodological interest . . . .”<sup>13</sup> (Greisch 2002, p. 39)

*Philosophy of religion* refers to the effort—without any confessional witness—to make the various manifestations of religious phenomena philosophically intelligible, that is, to render religious phenomena in all their depth and obscurity while bracketing the presence, or absence, of any particular religious conviction. *Religious philosophy*, on the other hand, is the effort to philosophically come to terms with one’s own religious experience, and to philosophically explore a personal orientation towards a particular religious expression.

Greisch continues to note how Duméry provides “one of the best discourses of method in philosophy of religion that we have today.” (Greisch 2002, p. 448) He positions Duméry as archetypical of the *critical* paradigm in philosophy of religion, tributary to the broader stream of Kantian critique, though unique in its extension of this critical project. Duméry’s paradigm in philosophy of religion is itself founded upon the spiritualist tradition of Maurice Blondel, whose philosophy is permeated with the themes and topics of French

spiritualism and is of particular interest in its capacity to critically engage and ultimately surpass this Kantian framework without abandoning or negating it in undue measure.

The tradition of French spiritualism can be viewed, in broad strokes, as the philosophical framework initiated by Maine de Biran in the early nineteenth century. What is most particular to this tradition can be understood, perhaps, with recourse to the ideas of the primitive fact [*le fait primitif*], the interior fact [*le fait interieur*], and the intimate sense [*le sens intime*], which all represent a philosophical focus upon interiority, with these providing a methodological starting point for a description of human consciousness. The historian of philosophy Jacques Chevalier, characterized Biran's contribution in terms of "the discovery of the interior man" and noted how Biran helped to reorient philosophy towards inner experience, where the existence of the subject is recognized through a reflexive method. (Chevalier 1966, pp. 189–211)

The reflexive method as put forth by Biran was developed in response to the "the greatest philosopher of the French enlightenment" Étienne Bonnet de Condillac. (Vieillard-Baron 2000, p. 16). The sensualist philosophy of Condillac is perhaps best summed up in his *Traité de Sensations* (1754), and best typified in his metaphor of a statue, where the passive state of the frozen and lifeless marble is analogous to the human being, where: "Judgement, reflection, desires, passions, and so forth are only sensation itself differently transformed." (Condillac et al. [1754] 2014, p. 307)

Here, we find that the fixed orientation upon sensation is of prime importance, and though, for Condillac, this terminates in a reductive ideological system, for Biran, sensation is linked more to spirituality particularly where "the intuition of the soul has more to do with the sensory instinct than with the labors of discursive reason."<sup>14</sup> (Maine de Biran and de La Valette Monbrun [1823] 1927, p. 319) Following this logic, Biran writes in his *Essai sur les fondements de la psychologie* (1812–1813), that there are two types of abstraction, the first is where reason abstracts from sensible things, and the second where, through contact with sensible qualities or impressions,

the self, which exists or perceives itself internally as *one, simple, identical* . . . abstracts itself from them by the act of internal apperception that distinguishes and separates to a certain extent the individual or the one from the collective and the multiple; the acting force or the cause, from the produced effect; the action, from the passion; in a word, the subject which resists and undergoes the various modifications.<sup>15</sup> (Maine de Biran [1812–1813] 1982, p. 272)

The reflexive method here introduced by Biran helps to illustrate how the demarcation of the subject and object can only be separated in terms of an abstract logic, and how that, in reality, they are practically united in the human interface with the sensible world. This sense of interiority is designed as a criticism of Kant, particularly in terms where "the self is no longer a transcendental subject, but an individual being which manifests itself in the concrete, and the method of reaching this concrete being is not a method of transcendental reflection . . ." (Chevalier 1966, p. 180)

The method that Biran proposes is rather "to get closer and closer to the real unity, or to the very truth of the primitive fact [*le fait primitif*]." (Maine de Biran [1812–1813] 1982, p. 269) In this way, Biran proposes that the human being has access, and is practically united, to the *real*, to *being*, and therefore to the *absolute*. This profound sympathy, where the human being has access and connection to the truth of reality and to *being itself*, is understood in terms where the reality of existence is given to the subject as a primitive fact [*le fait primitif*]. This insight is of prime importance, as Chevalier notes:

From then on, it can no longer be a question, as with Kant, of the conditions of the possibility of experience, but rather it becomes a task of deepening our experience of being: not the sense of being as required by the mind, but the being that is and that imposes itself upon us. Instead of an abstract metaphysics, the source of interminable disputes, one is led to institute 'a positive science of ideas,



or of the use and circumscribed object of human faculties.<sup>16</sup> (Chevalier 1966, p. 183)

This leads Chevalier to label Biran—who was known since his early and lauded reception as the ‘French Kant’—to be in reality “the French anti-Kant” as Biran opens the way towards metaphysics, “while Kant and his successors up to phenomenology . . . engaged it [metaphysics] in a dead-end, from which it tries to reach the truth of being, or as according to the terms of Heidegger, to reach beyond the ontic ontological, behind the given being and the cause of being.” (Chevalier 1966, p. 184) Another way of understanding this paradigm can be viewed where Biran blames Kant for having abstracted the categories from just that—abstract categories—and, as Chevalier notes, not from “the living action of the intelligence which reflects on them.” (Chevalier 1966, p. 197) In this way, the French spiritualist tradition sought to recover a sense of the concrete life of action, and to never content itself with logical abstractions at the expense of the lived experience.

This is the starting point of Duméry’s rendering of philosophy of religion, as he seeks to frame the entire enterprise of understanding religion through its positive historical expression. This approach enters into clear relief in the effort to minimize a tendency in philosophy of religion that seeks to relegate religion and faith to “a simple cry” and an “emotional appeal” or “heartfelt impulse.” (Duméry 1957b, p. 13)

Duméry argues that “history only knows positive religions: without cultic celebration, without common faith, there is perhaps a possible religiosity, but it is vague, unclear, not very effective. It is always by the rite and the myth, by the attitude and the representation, that the human being prays, invokes, adores.” (Duméry 1957b, p. 10) This is what makes philosophy of religion a difficult task, as Greisch notes, as it requires “giving a philosophical meaning, a properly rational intelligibility to a positivity which seems to be at first sight devoid of it.” (Greisch 2002, p. 444) The tradition of French spiritualism, and particularly its iteration in the philosophy of Maurice Blondel is precisely the conceptual reserve that makes this possible for Duméry.

The methodological paradigm that Duméry articulates, in treating religion as, first of all, a historical and institutional reality, places the philosopher of religion in a delicate situation. Duméry identifies certain challenges that this critical approach to religion can present, which are characterized by Greisch as three forms of “pure immediacy untainted by positivity” that the philosopher may be lured to take. (Greisch 2002, p. 445) The first is in reducing religion to a kind of subjectivism, “which reduces religion to a state of mind, or a raw affect” that forgets how religion often takes on an “intentional” and even “institutional character.”<sup>17</sup> (Duméry 1957b, p. 11)

The second form of immediacy would be in treating religion merely in terms of a pure “event” and instead argues how that, even in the first act of faith, there is already included certain “doctrinal norms” and that it would be “futile to aspire to recover a first proclamation, freed from all cultural baggage.” (Duméry 1957e, p. 24) In this sense, “tradition and institution are primary.” (Duméry 1957b, p. 192)

The third form of immediacy is found in a sense of historical positivism, “which believes that the most effective way to reach the true meaning is to appeal to the raw facts, historical or sociological, disregarding the meaning that the witnesses concerned have given them.” (Duméry 1957b, p. 198) This requires moving away from a disembodied or even bracketed position from any such phenomena, but rather calls for a certain recognition of the human element, entailing an “entering into” and recognizes that “the emergence of religious meaning requires something other than a material relationship.” (Duméry 1957b, p. 198) This outlines the opening for a methodological operation of sympathy.

Positioning the positive historical facts of religion, with the living reality of the human beings with which they are related, is the key task for philosophy of religion and is most fundamentally an operation of *sympathy*. The process that is then described in relation to these facts must be registered in terms of the cognitive dynamics, or the logical processes of mind [*l’esprit*]—and thought—which engender them, here involving an interior approach to the human mind, a process that can be understood as *spiritual*. Such an approach is made

philosophically intelligible in the work of Maurice Blondel, as his entire effort was aimed at linking together the facts of religious history with the truth of human consciousness.

Duméry takes note of Blondel's contribution and says that "thanks to him, a philosophical reflection on religion is possible, and even necessary, without the specific content of religious life being confiscated, without the mysterious realities reached by religious man being in any way threatened." (Duméry 1954, p. 3) The philosophical effort is concerned only with "the intelligibility of the religious given, not its reality." (Duméry 1954, pp. 3–4) It is not the duty of the philosopher, Duméry argues, taking his cue from Blondel, to make claims about the truth or the reality of any given phenomenon, but rather to articulate if "its notions and its internal relations are perfectly coherent." (Duméry 1954, p. 4) From here, Duméry proclaims that "Blondel has really founded the philosophy of positive religion, or at least he has established it on solid foundations." (Duméry 1954, p. 4)

### 2.1. Maurice Blondel and the Tradition of the Masters of Sympathy

While Maurice Blondel has come to be recognized as 'the philosopher of action', this appellation is not very accurate, as his renowned 1893 thesis *Action* represented for the author only "a fragment" or "a chapter" in regards to the totality of his thought, (Blondel and Lefèvre 1928, p. 106) which he wished to be considered as a philosophical realism, more precisely an *integral realism*. (Archambault 1928) A more comprehensive analysis of Blondel's thought could safely divide it into three thematic parts or phases. The first part is based on his 1893 thesis, where he sought to develop a rational philosophical method open to religion, or "the religious problem" and is centered on the question of action—typified in what he calls a "Science of Practice."<sup>18</sup>

The second part concerns his intermediary years, where he developed a positive ontology of human life—typified in terms of a "moral psychology."<sup>19</sup> The final part of his philosophy is focused on developing a metaphysics around the relation between Thought, Action, and Being, this constituting a kind of metaphysical anthropology, here founded upon a "Science of Thought."<sup>20</sup> Through the arc of his philosophical life—from a science of practice to a science of thought—Maurice Blondel was able to construct a methodological paradigm sufficient for clarifying the nature of spirituality in which the link between human intelligence and religious inspiration may be made apparent.

In this way, Blondel's thought is truly constitutive of a *philosophy of religion*, which, while being built upon a Roman Catholic Christian philosophy, nevertheless, contains the necessary elements for discussing the spiritual nature of the human being in a general way—in terms of the structures of thinking and willing. This takes the form of a moral psychology and subsequent metaphysical anthropology—and through these, Blondel's thought offers the conceptual material for a general theory of ritual, which can illustrate how cognitive faculties are exercised by way of direct material engagement with the sensible world.

The moral psychology that Blondel develops is aimed at understanding how the individual subject relates to the objective world, considering the impossibility of the one being entirely reduced to the other. The ontological problem of human identity thus posed is taken up in terms of metaphysics and spiritual realism, which altogether constitutes a distinct anthropological paradigm. In the construction of his philosophy in this way, Blondel is able to describe what he terms the "pedagogy of thought", which holds together both the individual structure of human consciousness and the influence and rapport with the structures of social and political life. (Blondel 1934b, pp. 113–208) He uses the model of pedagogy to also show how the human being, through their physical participation with the material world may achieve an understanding of transcendent ideas—ideas ranging from the very idea of eternity to the knowledge of salvation in encounter with the divine.

Before moving to the heights of theological reflection,<sup>21</sup> Blondel first lays out a rigorous philosophical method attentive to the critical limits of the discipline and of human rationality. The philosophical movement, from the immanent awareness of the thinking subject to the consideration of transcendent being, is conducted according to a pattern of sympathy.

### 2.1.1. Immanence

The method of Maurice Blondel largely follows the basic reflexive design of Maine de Biran's thought, though he innovates this tradition of French spiritualism in a number of ways. The first major contribution is Blondel's effort to direct his full philosophical attention to 'the religious problem.' In tackling the question of concrete religion, particularly in his devotion to the tradition of Roman Catholicism, he ran into trouble among the French philosophical establishment for breaching the requirements of rationalist philosophy—in breaking with its sole condition: immanence.<sup>22</sup>

Blondel replied to these charges by remarking that his entire philosophical plan was to remain within the domain of immanence, and that his major effort was to bring rationality "back to a part of her domain to which she has abandoned." (Blondel [1894] 1997a, p. 50) He goes further to suggest that his philosophical intention was merely to "fix the relation of the order of knowledge with what is beyond it, without abusing either the known or the unknowable, without positivism or mysticism." (Blondel [1894] 1997a, p. 51) Blondel was interested in how the truth of religion can be understood philosophically, and as such he was focused upon understanding how to situate the idea of the supernatural; however, his task as a philosopher required him to focus on how "what seems to be imposed on consciousness from outside springs forth from consciousness, from within." (Blondel [1894] 1997a, p. 53)

In the effort to defend his philosophy of action, Blondel went further to inscribe his own philosophical project within the framework of Spinozism and through a paradigm of immanence: "if I speak of the supernatural, it is still a cry from nature, a call from the moral conscience and a demand from thought that I make heard." (Blondel [1893] 1997, p. 53) Blondel found, in Spinoza, a philosophical rationalism that affirms the power of human understanding to arrive at a positive knowledge of the Absolute. This is in stark contrast with the critical philosophy of Kant, which has the effect of closing the door to such metaphysical cognition. There is, in Spinozism, a radical affirmation of the capacity to conceive the ultimate nature of existence, and what we may precisely do about it.<sup>23</sup>

Blondel takes issue with this as a doctrinal position, in the tendency to disregard anything that is not available to immediate human awareness; nevertheless he seeks to build on this understanding of immanence along methodological grounds. This allows Blondel to remain rigorously philosophic—in a high rationalism—while still engaging the question of religion *as a deeply religious person*. This understanding of Spinozan immanence, which seeks to treat the ultimate question of human life "by the sole resources of human thought" serves as one of his key methodological starting points. (Blondel [1894] 1997b, p. 64)

The basic contours of Blondel's method of immanence are laid out in his *Letter on Apologetics* (1896), which bears the full title of *A letter on the Requirements of Contemporary Thought and on Philosophical Method in the study of the Religious Problem*. This text has been rendered simultaneously "the easiest and most complete general introduction to this difficult philosopher" while also being "not likely very intelligible . . . without a context." (Dru and Trethowan 1994, p. 119) This context is, first of all, his renowned 1893 dissertation *l'Action* as well as the ongoing tradition of French spiritualism and its effort to develop a non-confessional spiritual philosophy.<sup>24</sup>

The key problematic of Blondel's thought, and the intellectual context with which it was embedded was simply to determine the possibility for a philosophy of religion, and to understand the capacity for philosophy to engage questions of religion without violating the integrity of either philosophy or theology, as Blondel was himself a devout Roman Catholic but was, nevertheless, not a theologian and was, in fact, a professional philosopher operating under the bureaucratic apparatus of the French state, then the Third Republic, and, as such, he bound himself to respect the demands of the prevailing philosophical establishment. From this vantage point, the main theme of Blondel's early work was to establish a methodology that could overcome the barriers in modern thought most resistant



to the entry of questions of religion. The most distilled treatment of his solution to this problem, in methodological terms, is to be found in the *Letter*.

The innovation of both Blondel's and Duméry's conception of philosophy of religion may be seen to emerge precisely within the context of this essay and under the rubric of immanence, as here Blondel treats the question of religion within its positive historical, and confessional, manifestation—and not merely as an abstract category—but with the intention of decoupling the interior reality of religious content (*subjective faith*), through a method of immanence, from its exterior associations (*objective faith*).

The complexity and somewhat paradoxical circumstance of this situation is brought to clarity when viewed in light of the historical context of the Third Republic, primarily between 1870–1914, as there was a “philosophical and moral crisis” based upon founding the new Republic upon something other than confessional religion, but something still within the purview of a “moral” and, therefore, socially responsible philosophy, which was considered to depend on some specific religious ideas, such as a general notion of God. (Loeffel 2000, p. 231) The crisis was compounded by a general confusion or conflation between the heritage of the French Enlightenment and the traditional religious culture, which had dominated French society for over a millennia: Roman Catholicism.

The terms of this circumstance cohered around the idea of founding a natural religion upon the Enlightenment critique against “dogmas and rituals” viewing them as merely superficial elements, which would, in turn, lead to the idea that religion must be purified “of all its supernatural aspects in order to preserve only its natural and universal essence, which makes it accessible by the light of reason and of conscience alone.” (Loeffel 2000, p. 4) Beyond a general ideology, this was a programmatic philosophy bent on informing the educational policies of the Third Republic, as “it was no longer the Church whose mission was the moral formation of children, but rather that of the Republic.” (Loeffel 2000, p. 5)

In this way, it was the duty of the newly constituted state to “organize and diffuse Enlightenment thought throughout the schools.” (Loeffel 2000, p. 5) Such was the precise job, at least officially, of Blondel as a philosopher. The fundamental issue was the actual coherence of the intellectual content of the French enlightenment, which vacillated between two incompatible currents whose only agreement was in a criticism of confessional religion, as noted by Laurence Loeffel:

The atheistic materialist current resolutely directs speculations on morality towards a scientific and social morality; deism and theism seek to unite morality and religion in a sort of natural catechism of human conscience. What unites these tendencies, beyond their disparity, however, is the criticism of religion. In other words, the systems of non-confessional morality were able to assert themselves all the better in the eighteenth century because they were built up in relation to their opposite: religious morality. Indeed, they were built as an alternative to religious morality. (Loeffel 2000, p. 5)

These observations help to frame the intellectual context that occasioned Blondel's *Letter on Apologetics*, as he had just finished his studies to become a government functionary, a philosopher, whose task was to propagate this new vision of secularism [*laïcité*]. Blondel's masterstroke may be found in the diplomatic finesse of managing this situation—and providing a grammar for both sides to negotiate with—with Blondel as, foremost, a devoutly religious man, but, secondly, a faithful son of France and a patriot, with loyalty and respect for the imperatives of the state.

Here, in Blondel's letter, we find the first rigorous attempt to at once sustain the effort to develop a non-confessional sense of religion, or religious investigation, without committing violence to confessional religion in itself—this would eventually open up the question to articulate the spiritual and moral contents of religion without the official language of confessional or dogmatic theology, which had, up until the time of Blondel, dominated much of the philosophical reflection on ‘religion’ within the intellectual culture of the Church. The impact of Blondel's philosophical enterprise would ultimately lead to

‘the modernist crisis’ where the identity of the Church was itself called into question in light of transformations within the intellectual culture of the Church, which would only come to be resolved with the Second Vatican Council—and this, perhaps only partially.<sup>25</sup>

Another way to understand the historical context and intellectual value of the French spiritualist tradition may be found in grappling with the sense of the term “the moral” [*la morale*]. It is far too easy to lose the meaning of “the moral” if the term is only taken at face value, as the word in this French context was charged with a nuanced meaning absent in the English language, if only to be found in the term *ethics*. Where often the French use *la morale*, this is most naturally translated into English as *morality*, though the precise sense would be *the moral*, which is an uncommon manner of employing the term, at least in American English.

While the word for *morality* exists in French, *la moralité*, the sense is more circumscribed around the sense of right and wrong, where, on the other hand, *la morale* refers more to the sense of *mores* [*mœurs*], of habits, customs, and patterns of behavior—to lifestyle. One notable philosopher of the time, who we know Blondel to have read during his formative years,<sup>26</sup> Jean-Marie Guyau (1854–1888), would encapsulate the rich sense of this term and also its evolving sense with his, *A Sketch of a Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction* (1885) [*Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation ni sanction*], which would set itself to modify the traditional understanding of ‘the moral’ to encompass the activity of life more generally, rather than being the index to a system of ideas centered around the idea of right and wrong. With this text, he typifies the *contemporary* understanding of the term most plainly: “The moral ideal will be *activity* in all its *variety of manifestations* . . . .”<sup>27</sup> (Guyau [1885] 1898, p. 76)

This understanding of the moral is of central importance in the interpretation of Blondel’s thought, as his original philosophy of action was itself an understanding of “activity” with this moral consideration in mind, most particularly in light of the Aristotelian sense, where action taken as *πράττειν* highlights a particular form of human action designating “that which has for cause human effort and for consequence the vital and moral order [*l’ordre vital et moral*].” (Blondel 1946b, p. 1)

With this understanding of the intellectual environment contemporaneous to the writing of *The Letter on Apologetics*, we can better assess such judgements by Henry Duméry to claim this essay as Blondel’s “masterpiece,” (Duméry 1954, p. 1) and that of Jean Trouillard, who remarked that “if Blondel has ever written ‘a discourse on method’ it is there.” (Virgoulay 1993, p. 45) The *Letter on Apologetics* can be considered a safe point of departure for understanding the methodological thrust of Blondel’s philosophy, at least in its earliest manifestation, as here we find “the most clear” presentation and definition of the ‘Method of Immanence.’ (Virgoulay 1993, p. 44)

Blondel developed this method with the intention of remaining faithful to the “requirements of contemporary thought,” and states, in the beginning of his essay, that “it would be in the general interest to examine, with all possible rigor and without aspect of persons, the legitimate requirements of modern thought about apologetics,” and that “. . . in order to determine exactly as possible what conditions must be satisfied when such delicate problems are in question . . . .” (Blondel [1896] 1994, p. 128) Ultimately, Blondel summarizes his position by stating

. . . we are trying to see on what terms one can purchase not just a reasonable conviction but one which is strictly and, if I may so put it, technically rational. How can the enquiry be brought to the critical point where the debate can be decided, without falsifying the proper objects either of reason or of faith? (Blondel [1896] 1994, p. 128)

In utilizing the term “immanence”, Blondel would situate his position in the light of Spinozism and, in doing so, find a way in which he could sustain his philosophical paradigm so as to found a religious philosophy in the face of the most radical Enlightenment critique.<sup>28</sup> He would articulate a critique of Spinozism by saying how “the master idea of Spinozism is the notion of immanence,” (Blondel [1894] 1997b, p. 63) and would argue that

Spinoza supplied the first instance in modern times of “this principle that the mind can find in itself and by itself alone all the truth necessary for life.” (Blondel [1894] 1997b, p. 63) In seeking to amend this focus, he goes on to remark that:

In all modern philosophy there is in effect a radical vice which is to believe, without even recognizing it, that the speculative solution of the problem of life—in whatever form it presents itself—is equivalent or superior to the effective solution. (Blondel [1894] 1997b, p. 85)

Blondel found, within this Spinoza notion of immanence, a germ of thought that would come to act as a leavening agent, transforming and even characterizing the formation of certain dominant strains in modern philosophical thinking. The evolution of this notion of immanence, and the reduction of speculative thought to within the structure of subjective immanence, developed into a doctrinal norm, a “doctrine of immanence”, which Blondel emphasized must be distinguished from the “method of immanence” that he would instead seek to develop.

The notion of immanence, with which rationalism wishes to dominate ‘modern thought’ has made this the basis and the condition of any philosophy, and far from excluding requires, if it is to be fully developed, the transcendent truths to which it seemed at first radically hostile. (Blondel [1894] 1997b, p. 63)

Here, Blondel highlights the need for “fully developing” this so-called “doctrine of immanence” into what is, in effect, a “method of immanence.” (Blondel [1896] 1994, p. 178) We can find here, another angle into the insufficiency of classical metaphysics, as it reduces *the real* to what is attainable to the speculative intellect operative in such a ‘doctrine of immanence’, as Blondel states that “the monism of Spinoza or of Hegel had restricted more and more precisely the problem of metaphysics to the conditions of knowledge, and of human knowledge.” (Blondel [1894] 1997b, p. 80) This, in turn, loses the sense of action that he was originally keen on emphasizing, in its moral and vital dimensions. In pure terms, perhaps the best and most compact description of Blondel’s method of immanence is offered to us by Maurice Blondel’s close friend August Valensin, with whom Blondel first gave and developed his “method of immanence” and whose treatment of the idea Blondel remarked to be “perfectly exact as possible.” (Blondel and Valensin [1912] 1965, p. 9)

That which does not correspond to a summons, or to a need,—that which does not have its interior point of contact, its prefiguration or its foundation (*pierre d’attente*) in man, that which is purely and simply from without, which can neither penetrate his life nor inform his thought, is radically inefficacious and at the same time is unable to be assimilated.<sup>29</sup> (Blondel and Valensin [1912] 1965, p. 233)

For Blondel, the method of immanence is simply to “equate in our own consciousness, what we appear to think and to will and to do with what we do and will and think in actual fact . . . .” (Blondel [1896] 1994, pp. 156–57) This requires a so-called genetic phenomenological approach where “all the phenomena which make up our inner life” must be criticized and brought into description as best as possible, with this being the “special business” of philosophy. (Blondel [1894] 1997b, p. 157) Blondel is here advocating for a turn towards *life* itself as the terrain that philosophy works upon in order to yield its results, and this is specifically in contrast to any abstract metaphysics that begins and ends in concepts. The interior dimension of life is to be the focal point, and this requires a methodology for the description of personal interiority. Such a descriptive method is not tasked with advancing claims of truth or arguments in favor of any sort of intellectual position, as Blondel explains:

. . . it is not the business of philosophy to provide us with the absolute of truth, with the truth which is substantial and salutary, whereas its duty is to investigate the conditions in which this truth can be made known to us, it follows that it is not its business to elaborate the principles of faith as if these were, in the ultimate analysis, nothing but the discoveries of reason or more or less symbolic and mythical intuitions. (Blondel [1894] 1997b, p. 191)

Blondel makes clear that, in order for there to be a credible account of the religious dimension of human life to any possible transcendence, it is absolutely essential to make a distinction between the object of a religious thought or to any presupposed transcendent reality, and the subjective experience of it “for our ideas of transcendent truths or beings, whether real or imaginary, is always immanent in so far as it is our own . . . .” (Blondel [1894] 1997b, p. 156) In other words, it is not the job for any philosophy of religion to make a judgement about the reality of a religious idea, but rather, its task—at least in part—is to provide an account of how any such religious idea comes into being. Such a distinction is clarified when he remarks that:

. . . the immanent affirmation of the transcendent, even of the supernatural, does not prejudice in any way the transcendent reality of the immanent affirmations—a radical distinction which no one, perhaps, has preserved with complete consistency, and which enables us to construct in a scientific manner, without distracting preoccupations or fruitless or premature discussions, the entire phenomenology of thought and of action . . . . Formally identical with objective faith, subjective faith is entirely at the mercy of rational criticism, while objective faith remains untouched . . . . It remains to show—perhaps to the surprise of certain philosophers and equally of certain theologians—that the only possible religious philosophy, which is truly religious and truly a philosophy, results from these principles. (Blondel [1894] 1997b, p. 157)

While Blondel speaks here of the “entire phenomenology of thought and action”, we must be careful not to get trapped in the labyrinthine paths within the *École de Phénoménologie*,<sup>30</sup> but instead understand that Blondel had a nineteenth century conception of phenomena, linked to the understanding of human experience within empirical terms and, consequently, in terms of science and positivism, in what could be understood as phenomenism [*phenomisme*].<sup>31</sup> This is also not to exclude the loose phenomenological ‘program’ of Hegel, of which Blondel was certainly influenced.<sup>32</sup> Blondel desired to express how his method of immanence is designed to show the connections of those phenomena which are available for discrete objective analysis. In this way, right at the start of his career, we find that Blondel was careful to position his thought between phenomenology and ontology, understanding the distinct nature of the two—being at once incompatible and obliged to one another.

According to Blondel, philosophy, in its full sense, cannot be a mere description of phenomena, but must concern itself with the nature of being in itself, the reality of what is and not just what appears; but any investigation into being must begin with an examination of phenomena. In charting a way between phenomenology and ontology, Blondel was forced to recognize an inherent duality to mental life: “For from the moment real value is expressly attributed to facts [*données*] by proposing to find what is in what appears, already by this very act, the duality of the real and the known is posited before the mind.” (Blondel [1908] 2000, p. 75)

Here, in his essay *The Idealist Illusion* (1898), Blondel indicates that any philosophy of action or science of practice must necessarily employ both a realist and idealist tendency, adopting an “integral attitude” in its philosophical method. (Blondel [1908] 2000, p. 83) This leads Blondel to posit that, just as “we are led by a first movement to take our immediate representations for real truth, so by a second step, inseparable from the first, we are obliged to look always beyond what seems directly presented to consciousness, and beneath, behind, or in reality itself, for a reality even more real.” (Blondel [1908] 2000, p. 75) Blondel here develops his method to recognize that these two attitudes—of either taking the immediate phenomena as a given reality (realism), or in holding to an understanding of the deeper meaning behind the phenomena (idealism)—are “both equally well grounded and equally deceptive.” (Blondel [1908] 2000, p. 75)

In turn, the philosophical focus should take for granted the solidarity between these two approaches and that one should not hold firm to any “formulas” generated from a reflective thought but rather fix oneself upon “the sense that they impose on consciousness”

and to identify “the internal dynamism” that results between these two approaches, which he argues acts as “a spring for the dynamism of mental life.” (Blondel [1894] 1960, p. 7) At this point, Blondel leads his “method of immanence” to the identification of the dynamics internal to the thinking subject, “to know what actually is in consciousness” an operation that represents not only “the analysis of the very conditions of our mental life” but also a task “towards a progressive matching of thought with action” recognizing that “to know better one must use something other than knowledge.” (Blondel [1908] 2000, pp. 81, 83)

### 2.1.2. Moral Psychology

In a text written contemporaneously to his freshly minted 1893 thesis, Blondel described how he was attempting to understand “the laws which govern thought and action.” (Blondel [1894] 1960, p. 1) In this way, he lays out the ground for what could be considered a moral psychology and which he would later come to develop. In a series of essays entitled *The Starting Point of Philosophical Research* (1906), Blondel delivered an account of his vision for philosophy. Building on the methodological theme of immanence, and now wishing to determine the “laws” that structure psychic life, Blondel established a model of philosophy centered upon the different ways human knowledge functions in the ontology of the life of the individual:

... philosophy is the integration, special and technical in its form, universal and popular in its subject matter, of the ordered efforts of human life, to produce our being by producing being and beings within us, that is to say, by knowing them, by adapting ourselves to them, by assimilating them into ourselves. (Blondel [1906] 2000, p. 144)

With this vision of philosophy in mind, Blondel would argue that philosophy needs to expand its scope beyond a mere reflective approach to encompass a broader range of cognitive realities. He suggests that reflection, while being necessary, tends to minimize the role of spontaneity in consciousness and that the spontaneous activity of life is just as essential a part of our consciousness as the well-considered reflexive parts. Blondel suggests that this dynamic represents two modes of knowledge both “inseparable and irreducible.” (Blondel [1906] 2000, p. 129) He goes on to clarify these two modes of thought by suggesting that the spontaneous aspect of conscious life has been overlooked within the philosophical tradition. This leads him to develop the concept of “prospaction”, which he contrasts to “reflection.” (Blondel [1904] 1994, p. 236)

After having laid such methodological parameters, he sought to apply this philosophical paradigm to the facts of religious history. The major hurdle he would have to overcome was in articulating the subjective reality implied in the facts of religious history.<sup>33</sup> He acutely deals with this, in reference to the biblical tradition, in his essay *History and Dogma* (1904), where he implores the historian to see “the spiritual reality, the activity which is not wholly represented or exhausted by the historical phenomena . . . .” (Blondel [1904] 1994, p. 237) This leads Blondel to address the need for an approach whereby this inner spiritual reality may be reconciled with the objective facts of religious history.

What this entails is a method to draw out the “psychological and moral problems” implied in the historical data. (Blondel [1904] 1994, p. 237) From this perspective, one is required to understand that “[r]eal history is composed of human lives; and human life is metaphysics in act.” (Blondel [1904] 1994, p. 237) He articulates the fundamental challenge involved in this reconciliation, and says that there are in fact “two histories” where, on the one hand, there is “technical and critical history” that relies on the concrete facts available for scientific examination, and, on the other, there is “the life of humanity.” (Blondel [1904] 1994, p. 241) Between the historical data that is present as a phenomenal reality open to critical analysis and the “genuine reality” of the people with which these data were originally concerned, “there is an abyss.” (Blondel [1904] 1994, p. 239)

It is the duty of the philosopher to traverse these depths, and the task that Blondel sets out to accomplish is to provide an account of this subjective element innate to the human being, which he identifies as being “entirely at the mercy of rational criticism.”



(Blondel [1904] 1994, p. 158) The work this entails is to be found in the description of the perennial psychological and moral problems implied within human life, and through a methodology attuned to the modes and operations at work in the human being, from within the patterns of tension that emerge in both acting and thinking. In this way, Blondel continues along the spiritualist impulse to develop ‘a positive science of ideas’ but bends it more towards the effort to understand precisely “the organic complexity of life” and the logic “immanent to life.”<sup>34</sup> (Blondel [1903] 2000, p. 95)

In rendering a philosophical method capable of expressing this inner logic of life, Blondel developed a critique of rationality and of discursive reasoning, intending to broaden the scope of what is typically held in abeyance in strictly analytical thinking: “we need therefore a real logic containing what formal logic excludes . . . a science which discovers, through reflection, the *nexus* of all states . . . , the intrinsic law, the immanent norm which renders intelligible all the opposing developments of life . . . .” (Blondel [1903] 2000, p. 105) This pushed him to develop a kind of moral psychology where he developed an ontology of the mind based upon the generative power of the will, which recognized the solidarity of all states. This effort pushed Blondel away from his original method of immanence in favor of an approach capable of an ontological affirmation concerning not only the solidarity of being—or an *integral realism*—but also the laws and principles that govern their relations.

Blondel introduced his reflections upon his sense of moral psychology in his, *The Elementary Principle of a Logic of the Moral Life* (1903), where he states that “to live is to bring about the unity of thought and action” and asks the following question: “In what sense does the introduction of idea into facts, facts into idea, modify the logic of abstract thought and the determinism of concrete reality?” (Blondel [1903] 2000, p. 96) He responds to this question by affirming that the “dynamo-genesis of our ideas and our feelings forms a total indissoluble whole.” (Blondel [1903] 2000, p. 106) In this way, he seeks to establish “an integral dialectic of living reason,” which, far from being reduced to a merely analytic discursive logic, seeks instead to include the totality of life—from its material conditions, to the deep pathos of being—in a gesture to arrive at the truth of the moral life. (Blondel [1903] 2000, p. 109)

One way this takes shape is in the synthesis composed of all the varying elements implied in life. This requires the philosopher “to grasp not the material diversity of facts, but the unity of the bond” as Blondel affirms that “the moral fact is caught up in the mesh of physical and psychological forces,” which, in turn, may only be understood coherently from a unified philosophical approach that is sensitive to “the solidarity of the most varied states.” (Blondel [1903] 2000, p. 98)

The method required for developing this logic of the moral life can only be found in “the positive methods of observation and induction, methods alone capable of gradually clarifying its universal relations with the milieu giving rise to it, methods alone capable of examining the very repercussions which reverberate infinitely from our actions into states of mind [*consciences*] . . . .” (Blondel [1903] 2000, p. 97) Blondel is here prompted by a major stream within the French spiritualist tradition, as found in the dissertation and *discourse on method* of Jules Lachelier, *The Foundations of Induction* (1872). (Séailles 1920, p. 1) Most simply put: “Induction is the operation by which we pass from knowledge of facts to knowledge of the laws which order them.” (Lachelier and Ballard 1960, p. 1)

This methodological framework pushed Blondel away from the ‘relationalism’ of his method of immanence and instead directed him towards a positive ontological affirmation concerning the laws of psychic life. In this sense, the philosophical impetus is driven towards the understanding of a “universal relation” that forces philosophy to move beyond a mere phenomenological approach, which would only be focused on seeing how “phenomena are related within our observation” towards the more fundamental task of understanding how our experience “must always and everywhere be related in the same manner.” (Lachelier [1872] 1960, p. 1) This movement towards the universal, in the

philosophical method of induction, “is the only available means for eliciting from the facts the general truths which they may contain.” (Lachelier [1872] 1960, p. 9)

Jules Lachelier, Blondel’s professional and intellectual superior,<sup>35</sup> would here elevate Kantian thought to a spiritualist key, laying out the basic parameters of a metaphysical anthropology constituted by a reflexive philosophical method. Through this influence, the Blondelian stream of spiritualist philosophy can be viewed as an extension of the Kantian project, particularly in methodological terms, as the reflexive method that developed from Maine de Biran to Jules Lachelier—the *analyse réflexive*—is the translation “in good French” of the Kantian “transcendental analytic.” (Duméry 1963, p. 171) Lachelier brings this into clear relief by discussing the “hypothesis which Kant brought into philosophy:”

Whatever may be the mysterious foundation beneath phenomena, the order in which they follow each other is exclusively determined by the requirements of our own thought. According to this hypothesis, the most elevated item of knowledge is neither sensation nor an intellectual intuition but a reflexive act by which our thought achieves an immediate grasp of its own nature and the relation which holds between it and phenomena. From this relationship we are able to deduce the laws which thought imposes on phenomena. (Lachelier [1872] 1960, p. 21)

Here, we find the key point brought into clear view: “the conditions of the existence of phenomena . . . are the very conditions of thought . . .” (Lachelier [1872] 1960, p. 23) This leads to the recognition of two essential conditions for the possibility of thought, the first is “the existence of a subject which is distinct from our sensations” and the second being “the unity of the subject amid the diversity of sensations.” (Lachelier [1872] 1960, p. 23) Here, we come to the heart of French spiritualist tradition, as “thought finds itself to be an insoluble enigma to itself, for it can exist only if our sensations are united in a subject distinct from these sensations, and a subject thus distinct appears as the result of that very fact to be incapable of uniting them.” (Lachelier [1872] 1960, p. 24)

This unity, he argues, “is not the unity of an act but the unity of a form, and that, rather than establishing an external and artificial bond among our sensations, this formal unity follows on a kind of affinity and natural cohesion among these sensations.” (Lachelier [1872] 1960, pp. 24–25) This gives ground to the broader point, “knowing how all our sensations are united in a single thought is precisely the problem of knowing how all the phenomena compose a single universe.” (Lachelier [1872] 1960, p. 25) The conclusion to this line of thought, is that there must be—between the diverse matter of sensation and the form of absolute unity present to thought—, “an intermediary”, which is nothing other than the “continuity of movement.” (Lachelier [1872] 1960, p. 32)

This understanding of movement is conceived in terms of force, and thus “every phenomenon is the development and manifestation of a force.” (Lachelier [1872] 1960, p. 48) The logical conclusion of this philosophical paradigm is that “every being is a force, and all force is thought which tends toward a more and more complete consciousness of itself.” (Lachelier [1872] 1960, p. 48) For Lachelier, this means that any genuine philosophy must be a “spiritualistic realism” that comes from the idea that “consciousness resides in a special force”, and we are “perfectly at liberty to call this force a soul.” (Lachelier [1872] 1960, p. 52)

It is here, with Lachelier’s notion of the soul, that we can link together the chain of the spiritualist tradition in French philosophy. Here, we find that Lachelier produced a doctrine directly within the lineage of his own superior, Félix Ravaisson. As “the only direct student of Ravaisson”, it could be argued that Jules Lachelier represented the genuine protégé of the French school of Spiritualism originating in Maine de Biran. (Le Lannou 1999, p. 12) We can find a clear sense of this multi-staged spiritualist tradition, in the definition provided by Lachelier in the philosophical dictionary of Lalande:

We can call, in a general way, spiritualism, any doctrine that recognizes the independence and the primacy of the spirit, that is to say of conscious thought. There is a kind of spiritualism of the first degree, which consists in simply placing

the spirit above nature, without establishing a relationship between the one and the other. But there is a deeper and more complete spiritualism, which consists in seeking in the mind [*l'esprit*] the explanation of nature itself, in believing that the unconscious thought that works in it is the same one that becomes conscious in us, and that it works only to produce an organism that allows it to pass (by the representation of space) from the unconscious form to the conscious form. It is this second spiritualism which was, it seems to me, that of Ravaisson. (Lalande [1926] 1960, p. 1020)

Another approach for understanding the distinct nature of the French spiritualist tradition can be found in its unique niche within the framework of modern thought. The particular doctrine of the spirit that would emerge, which certainly remains distinct within each individual thinker, nevertheless remains a kind of response to the contemporary demands of thinking: both in terms of the realist empiricism in a reduction to science and nature, or the idealist trend towards monism and pantheism. Ravaisson's notion of the spirit would allow him to position an alternative philosophical framework to these other dominant paradigms in modern philosophy. As indicated by René Berthelot,

According to Ravaisson both the empiricists as well as the intellectualists, the English school as well as Kantianism itself, are only able to know the outside of things; they understand things only by their limits; they do not know the interior, the interval: the living work being done in the interior of these structures, the living activity that connects the limits through their intervals. (Bethelot 1913, p. 85)

It is here with the notion of "the interval" that we may begin to discern the meaning of "spirit" within this tradition in French philosophy. Here is where the tradition of French spiritualism may be seen in its unique splendor, as it helped to address a very acute philosophical problem at the heart of modern thought, a problem posed most adroitly by Andrea Bellantone:

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, in the milieu of French-speaking philosophy, there was a question endowed with an urgency difficult to evaluate in all its nuances: was metaphysical knowledge *still* possible after the skeptical outcome of the Enlightenment, after the gnoseological despair of David Hume and the phenomenalism attributed to Immanuel Kant?<sup>36</sup> (Bellantone 2012b, p. 5)

For Maine de Biran, Félix Ravaisson, and Jules Lachelier, the answer was a resounding yes. The possibility of metaphysics was wide and open, and its new development represented more of a *renewal* than a *reconstitution*, as, for Ravaisson, Bellantone notes, "It was from this renewal of Aristotelianism that Ravaisson had wanted to accomplish his project of restoration of metaphysics." (Bellantone 2012b, p. 19) The decisive turn in the French spiritualist tradition would, in a certain way, be marked by Félix Ravaisson's *La philosophie en France au XIXe Siècle* (1867), where he heralds the coming of "a future philosophical epoch", which he labels "a realism or spiritualist positivism." (Ravaisson [1867] 1889, p. 275)

This new school of philosophy would not only be founded upon a renewal of Aristotelianism but would also represent just as much a *recovery* of Aristotle from the hands of scholastic philosophy, which, he argues that, in believing itself capable "to explain everything," in fact "explains nothing." (Ravaisson [1867] 1889, p. 5) He developed this critique around the dominance of precise logical determinations, which he considered to be "vain promises of a logic which thinks it can take hold of objects in words" suggesting instead that the renewal of philosophy rests more along the line of Leonardo da Vinci "the great initiator of modern thought, the lover of nature and reality (*le bugiarde scienze mentali*)." (Ravaisson [1867] 1889, p. 5) Ravaisson would lay out the terms of what should be negated within this philosophical tradition,

The vain and interminable disputes of the scholastics did not come . . . from the fact that they used regular forms of reasoning, which would, to the contrary, only

help in contributing to better understanding and agreement, but rather from the fact that they spoke of badly determined principles, of only apparent definitions, which one could always evade by distinctions. (Ravaisson [1867] 1889, p. 5)

From here, we see some of the core conceptual ground being laid for an understanding of the French spiritualist tradition, as it was linked to the precise deficits of the western intellectual tradition, both within the currents leading up to and within the new streams of modern philosophical thought in British skepticism and German criticism. The effort was not a reversion to a dead conservatism, but rather a call to renew the questions of *metaphysics*, of *being*, and of *reality*, through an appropriation of the ancient perennial philosophy of the Greek world.

Bellantone continues to note how “Spiritualism, the new realistic metaphysics was thus a new Aristotelianism,” though, here, the central focus was upon “the thought of action and individuality.” (Bellantone 2012b, p. 19) Here, we must not view ‘individuality’ in terms of the closed off human person, uprooted and alienated, but rather the unified center of being within the human subject, profoundly connected and rooted in the totality of life and being. Here, the notion of activity, and of individuality, can only be understood in reference to the notion of the *soul* and the activity of the *spirit*, as expressed by Ravaisson:

When we enter into ourselves, as we say, we find ourselves in the middle of a world of sensations, feelings, imaginations, ideas, desires, wills, memories, a boundless and bottomless moving ocean, which remains all ours, which is none other than ourselves. How ours, how ourselves? Because, at each moment and in each place of this multiple interior whirlpool, we form assemblies and sets from all the elusive diversity, whose link is a unity which is nothing other than the very operation by which we form them. If, in fact, we look for the way in which this cause, which is ourselves, does what it does, we find that its action consists in the determination, by the thought, of an order or of an end to which concur and adjust unknown powers that envelop, latent within our complex individuality. (Ravaisson [1867] 1889, p. 259)

Here, in the final chapter of Ravaisson’s essay, we find what Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron, the leading authority of the French spiritualist tradition, calls “a true treatise on spiritualism.” (Vieillard-Baron 2021, p. 322) This sense of subjectivity is precisely what gives sense to the meaning of the spirit, and the ultimate question of the link between these various states is what remains the keystone within this sense of being—in terms of the metaphysics of the thinking subject. Another way to frame this can be done with reference to the words of Paul Janet, who represents a kind of dogmatic voice of a different branch within this tradition of French spiritualism, who would remark upon a similar sense of the same conceptual orientation:

Thus, the problem was posed in quite the same way by Kant and by Biran. Both thought that there must be a middle term between the thing-in-itself, inaccessible to experience, and the phenomenon, added and juxtaposed in time and space; both agreed again in seeking in the thinking subject this middle term, this root of a new metaphysics.<sup>37</sup> (Janet 1873, p. 293)

In this way, we find that the focus upon interiority becomes the center upon which all spiritualist doctrine would gravitate. Ravaisson helped to cement the notion of movement as the core principle of his spiritualist doctrine, upon which he would enshrine the notion of effort and of resistance as the *primens movens* and *raison d’être* in the development of life. This line of thought is precisely the trajectory upon which some of Blondel’s most substantial contributions may be made manifest, and is the intellectual lineage in which his philosophy is best interpreted, as noted at his faculty of philosophy at Aix-Marseille Université on the centenary of his birth,

There is here a tradition whose origin Ravaisson related to the thought of Maine de Biran in the famous *Report on philosophy in France* of 1867 where he announced and defined the work of his successors under the name of ‘spiritualist positivism.’

Seen from afar, there is indeed a tradition that manifests the resistance of the conscience to the scientism of the century. Seen closely, the story is less simple, and it is in this less simple story that the originality of the young Blondel appears. The Biranian discovery of the *I* had inaugurated a philosophy of the spirit. Certainly, it was not a question of *an I thinking even if my body does not exist*. This *I incarnated* was however posing itself as an *I* distinct from its body within its very embodiment. And by that, *it became the first fact of a philosophy of the spirit independent of a philosophy of nature*. (Gouhier 1961, p. 25)

Here, we can position Blondel most squarely within the tradition of French spiritualism, which, while Blondel goes along with Biran and Ravaisson in situating subjectivity in “the origin of consciousness and the formation of the personality according to the ‘law of effort’ in the ‘victory of resistance’” as argued by David Mubenga Kayembe, the main novelty of Blondel within this tradition is in showing how “the essential of this law is not in the victory over the organic resistance, but on the psychological tension which inhabits our will.” (Kayembe 2016, p. 57)

Within the backdrop of this Ravaissonian tradition of effort, the moral psychology of Blondel finds its full sense. Here, we see that Blondel moves the sense of effort, of habit, of action, into a more psychological register (hence, his identification as an idealist). (Gunn 1922, p. 89) From this point Blondel would seek to establish an integral realism where the solidarity between willing and thinking find their root and full intelligibility within an ontological, even metaphysical, paradigm. Far from establishing an intellectual system, Blondel sought instead to illustrate “the living dialectic of life”, which he found to be superior to any discursive systematic model that may be applied to it:

... in order to understand doctrines in depth, which were a matter of soul and principle of life, one would expose oneself to ignore the main thing if one limited oneself to the linkage of concepts, to the external form of systems: if it is good not to offend against scholarly exactitude and against dialectical intelligence, it is still better to go beyond the letter, beyond the very organization, to the spirit of doctrines, to the soul of thoughts. (Blondel 1932, p. 34)

### 2.1.3. A Science of Thought

Blondel would strive for many years to anchor his reflections upon *thinking* within the philosophical framework that he had been developing from the beginning of his career. One major step, before the founding text of his philosophical trilogy *La Pensée* (1934), can be found in his *Le process d'Intelligence* (1922). In this text, he directs his attention to the active aspect of human intelligence, building upon his earlier essays on the *Starting point of Philosophical Research*, he would sustain the distinction he makes between “two ways of knowing or of judging”, which he claims are “heterogenous” and “incommensurable” to one another:

There is a way of knowing and affirming according to notions which are acquired by study, by theory, by science, *uno modo per modum cognitionis, secundum quod per studium habetur*. And there is another way, whose specific characteristics, and normal procedures we must describe; a concrete, synthetic mode, which is based on the very disposition of the subject who judges as much as on the intimate nature of the object that is affirmed and appreciated. As distinct as these two modes are, let us notice that the second one is no less ‘knowledge’ than the first one, and that the clarity which accompanies this kind of sure and palatable ‘judgment,’ to be quite other than the light of a logical analysis, is still a no less lucid view; on the contrary, we can say. (Blondel 1922, pp. 253–54)

In this way, Blondel draws attention to the subjectivity involved in thinking, particularly in the active and engaged mode that often employs “a reserve of previous experience” based upon “immediate knowledge.” (Blondel [1906] 2000, p. 116) He describes this sort of knowledge in terms of an “initiation” in which the practical activity, in the sensible engage-



ment with sensible content, provides the ground by which a peculiar type of intelligence may be generated.

This type of knowledge he considered to be “real knowledge”, which is not made of “representations, images, symbols, specimens, phenomena” but rather this knowledge is “the living presence, the effective action, the intussusception, the assimilating union.” (Blondel 1922, p. 237) He asserts that this is conducted according to a specific process, “an intelligence by affinity *cognitioper affinitatem*.” (Blondel 1922, p. 255) He says that, parallel to the development of analytical thinking, there is “a knowledge of presence and direct action” that “lives in the very being.” (Blondel 1922, p. 237) In this way, Blondel states that “sensibility itself remains penetrated, in man, as an immanent reason” that represents “the principle of our normal growth.” (Blondel 1922, p. 257).

Blondel would later clarify this sense of intelligence, drawing upon the ancient tradition of the *σπερματικός λόγος*, the seminal reasons, in which all existence is infused with a seminal activity, an intelligible thought. In his *La Pensée*, Blondel draws out what is a unique understanding of the unconscious, where he seeks to show how this seminal reason, or this ‘cosmic thought’ is already present “in what seems the most material, in what is immanent within nature, in what already arouses and organizes the stellar movement, in the principle of life and the appearance of the unconscious psyche.” (Blondel 1934a, p. 2) He suggests that while it is unable “to think itself” there is, nonetheless, a subsistent intelligible reality to the universe, itself representing “a noetic reality.”<sup>38</sup> (Blondel 1934a, p. xli)

He develops this doctrine under the idea of “cosmic thought” where these intelligible conditions of the composed universe, are described in terms where: “The conditions which make possible our thinking thought already have in themselves a thinkable reality, and they are really thought; by that they ground the objective value of thinking at the same time as they prepare its advent.” (Blondel 1934a, p. 60) Here, we come to the heart of Blondel’s doctrine of thought, as he intends to show how, from the intelligible conditions of the universe, in what can be construed as the unconscious, there resides the latent conditions that render the “thinking” of the human subject possible. He describes the point by which the human being achieves a “conscious thought” in terms of the “dawn of thought” and as “the invention of consciousness.” (Blondel 1934a, p. 83)

Blondel draws out this idea by discussing the then contemporary research in animal behavior, which he compares to child behavior, to illustrate the diverging modes of “thinking” employed between them. Explaining trials involving opening and closing various boxes where are hidden fruits and cakes, Blondel describes how primates demonstrate a far superior capacity for “associative memory” and are able to satisfy their needs “much quicker” than the children. (Blondel 1934a, p. 71) The decisive point arrives, however, when there is “a flash of reflection” where the child is able “to substitute the purely empirical agitations, with a curiosity of the obstacles to be overcome, a procedure founded on the search for causes and means, in short an explanation of an already reasonable and general character.” (Blondel 1934a, p. 71)

In this example, Blondel is able to make a point about how the human being has access to the fundamentally intelligible nature of embodied human experience, where, through thinking, they may *access* the *reality* in which they are operating, not merely according to the empirical order of phenomena but more fundamentally in terms of the higher intelligible principles behind the phenomena. In this way, Blondel developed what he terms “the spiritual realism of the thinking subject” upon which he would ground his final metaphysical philosophy. (Blondel 1934a, p. 151)

Blondel is keen to identify how the attainment of higher intelligible realities, indeed metaphysical truths, are themselves conditioned by our incarnate sensory experience. In this way, he strove to identify the mechanism by which such transcendent realities may appear to consciousness. He identifies this approach with recourse to his idea of “real” or “direct” knowledge, where “the real knowledge lets itself be made by the beings, such as they are, by putting itself in unison with their fundamental harmonics.” (Blondel 1922,

p. 260). He understands this in terms of, again, an “intelligence by affinity,” and he explains this in terms of another simple example:

If a note is sounded in a luthier shop, where the various instruments are all tuned in unison, the same note will spontaneously vibrate in all of them; among beings, there are likewise ready harmonies, not in the order of phenomena only, but in what concerns deep realities. (Blondel 1922, p. 256)

Here, in using an example of *sympathetic resonance*, Blondel suggests that, within the instinctive nature of the human being, there exists a kind of knowledge by affinity, and argues that “one is not ‘intelligent’ in the absence of this deep resonance, of this sympathetic divination, which opens us to the action and presence of other beings within us.” (Blondel 1922, p. 257) In this way, he likens the human being to “a living tuning fork.” (Blondel 1922, p. 266)

The fundamental paradigm upon which this doctrine of sympathy rests is to be found in the question of Unity, as Blondel remarks “it is not a question of unity without consciousness nor moral character and spiritual intimacy,” it is, he says “a knowledge by love . . . *cognition per unionem et caritatem*,” but not the mere sense of “affective love, subject to illusions, but a union of passion and action, an effective union, a union in which the supreme wish of all the faculties of our being and of the divine plan tend to be realized.” (Blondel 1922, p. 271) In this way, Blondel lays down the foundation for his entire doctrine of thought, in a doctrine of sympathy based upon a metaphysical anthropology, where the human being has a unique access to the fundamental unity of the being that subsists within all beings.

One way to draw this doctrine out is to refer to Jules Lachelier, who was just such a man of sympathy, who once confessed, “to feeling within himself, by deep sympathy, all the forms of nature, explaining his emotion and tenderness before the beautiful oaks in the forest of Fontainebleau . . . he found in himself, underneath humanity, a kind of still living outline of what he jokingly called arboreality.” (Blondel 1934b, pp. 126–27). Leon Brunschvicg commented how, for Lachelier, “the unity of life and work can be seen, as if by the flash of an intuition,” and, with reference to this particular saying, which Lachelier was fond to repeat and that Brunschvicg “was permitted to collect and transcribe:”

It seems to me, when I am in Fontainebleau, that I sympathize with all my strength with the powerful vitality of the trees that surround me . . . by reflecting well on it, it does not seem to me unreasonable to suppose that all the forms of existence sleep more or less deeply buried in the bottom of every being, because under the well-fixed features of the human form of which I am covered, a slightly piercing eye must recognize without difficulty the more vague outline of *animality*, which veils in its turn the still more floating and more indecisive form of the simple organization or one of the possible determinations of the organization is the *arboreality*, which generates in its turn the *oakeness*. Where oakeness is hidden somewhere in my depths and can sometimes be tempted to come out and appear in its turn *dias in luminis oras*, although the humanity that has taken the lead over it forbids it and blocks its way. (Brunschvicg 1921, pp. 16–17)

### 3. Thinking in Terms of Ritual Practice

In developing his “science of thought,” Blondel suggests that the mentality of pre-historic and primitive cultures could provide a kind of “fountain of youth” offering the material for an “elucidating and stimulating exegesis, which can be used to link the supposedly prelogical and pre-conceptual thought to the highest forms of philosophical wisdom and religious tradition.” (Blondel 1934a, p. 388) Blondel remarks that the “superstitious acts” of primitive cultures may well identify an internal need, such as the need for food or reproduction, but here in the need for transcendence, for a deity, and for the supernatural. In his phenomenological study of action, he concludes that this need for Unity is manifest in the most primitive of human behavior, and could be discerned in the study of pre-historic culture:

... the religious feeling, always present even under the most aberrant forms, has recourse to rituals, beliefs, sacrifices, attesting the need, the hope, the confidence, the expectation of a possible alliance, of a desirable communion, of an intervention of the divinity regarding human beings. (Blondel 1937, p. 365)

Blondel would illustrate this by describing the intelligibility of action, or “a logic of action” that could demonstrate how higher transcendent ideas may enter into consciousness. He shows how a new consciousness may arise through material phenomena and in engagement with sensible objects. The notion of how, within the organic and physical world, there exists latent “thinkable thoughts,” helps to illustrate how there is a “real transcendence of the immanent order of the measurable things in space and time.” (Blondel 1934a, p. 113) Blondel suggests that a “science of the thinkable thought” may show how material elements can “contribute to our mental life.” (Blondel 1934a, p. 113) Blondel draws out the terms of the necessary conditions for the consciousness of thought, where the institution of a sensible sign, “appears as the decisive condition of any reflection however embryonic or learned as it may be: One does not think without a sign, Aristotle rightly said.” (Blondel 1934a, p. 101) He goes on to remark that:

Our human thought could not indeed be born, develop, or subsist without images or symbols. But it has a deeper cause; it therefore needs to look for and affirm, under the signs and the representative substitutes that only serve as clothing or vehicles, a present and hidden reality. (Blondel 1934a, p. 101)

To provide a concrete example of how these ideas may be demonstrated, Blondel brings up the example of Marie Heurtin (1885–1921), who being born deaf, dumb, and blind, had, by the time of reaching twelve years of age, been considered completely mentally incapacitated, as she was unable to communicate with anyone in the world. Blondel remarks that, in her story, it is possible to find “the native state of thought.”<sup>39</sup> (Blondel 1934a, p. 86) Blondel describes how, despite only being “subject to tactile data or those of taste,” she was nevertheless able to be educated by allowing her thought, which was “locked in a silence and night of death,” to be “fixed upon a precise point.” (Blondel 1934a, p. 91)

Marie was taken to the Larnay Institute, a school for the education of the blind, where Marie’s teacher, Sister Sainte-Marguerite, a nun of the *Sisters of Wisdom* [*filles de la Sagesse*], was able “to invent an expressive sign,” by fixing her attention to a singular point, a small piece of ivory that Marie often held in her hand. By employing this small piece of ivory to indicate the provision or deprivation of food, “a psychological miracle was produced.” (Blondel 1934a, p. 91) The miracle was simply that “the child had understood that there was a relationship between the sign and the object” leading, as Blondel remarks, to “an illumination of the darkness of her sleeping intelligence.” (Arnould 1904, p. 16; Blondel 1934a, p. 91) A psychologist who studied her case remarked that:

For an explanation to be successful, it was necessary above all that the child understood that a sign made by a tactile impression was related to a specific object, or that a specific tactile impression had the value of a conventional sign for a specific object . . . The child understood that there was a relationship between a sensitive sign and an external object. One will observe that the child already revealed thus an activity of soul, suprasensible and spiritual: here was already manifested an intelligence which rises above what falls under the senses and can draw abstractions from it. Because the tactile impression, the sign, is something which is under the senses; the external object is concrete and sensible. But the idea, that between the sensible sign and the sensible object there reigns a connection, according to which the one becomes exactly the sign of the other, that itself is no longer a sensible representation. (Arnould 1904, p. 53)

In this way, through a pedagogy of abstraction, Marie could be guided to the full range of education, from the basics of reading and writing to theological education and metaphysical knowledge. Blondel emphasizes the central importance of this example,

suggesting that it calls into question the entire understanding of sensation, and he goes further to remark that:

Thus, when one analyzes, in the case of a deaf-mute-blind girl from birth, the way to bring a trapped soul out of confused immediacy and to realize in it the conditions of the most rudimentary mental operation, one is led to complete Maine de Biran's views on the primitive fact and the intimate sense, and to see that the conditions on which he makes the reflective life depend are involved in the first really distinct sensation. (Blondel 1922, p. 282)

These insights may be employed to help illustrate a speculative view as to how ritual—in both its prehistoric *and* contemporary practice—may be seen to exercise certain faculties of human thought, where, in ritual practice, in direct engagement with signs and symbols, a kind of *cognitive traction* is exercised, and a *psychic medium* is formed. Blondel speaks of Marie's process of awakening, in first learning through the interface of a small piece of ivory, in terms of accessing "a latent energy seeking to be produced" which then follows "a movement of interior growth." (Blondel 1934a, p. 86)

This could be seen as one way to instantiate the spiritualist doctrine that sought to find the activity of the spirit in the process of awakening to consciousness from an unconscious slumber found in the state of nature. Blondel would remark that Marie was in exactly such a state, unable to communicate and lost in a world of sensations. It was only through the careful education using signs that she was able to be brought into a state of consciousness—through the "birth of intelligence"—where she was then able to discern the cause-and-effect nexus in which she could insert her own will in a productive way. (Blondel 1934a, p. 44)

I wish to argue that these insights into the nature of personal interiority, particularly in the process of awakening to a fully conscious thought, may be employed to address certain questions raised concerning the "psychological revolution" that has been proclaimed to have occurred just before the dawn of human civilization. It is worth speculating on the exact processes involved in the dawn of human thought in the development of a conscious rationality that could then be applied to the world with real positive benefits, not least of all in gaining mastery over the production of food, organized labor, and exercising substantial power over the natural environment.

My argument consists of seeing in the substance of ritual behavior, in the employment of signs and symbols—in the very process of symbolization itself—evidence of internal and external mechanisms capable of radically transforming human consciousness—mechanisms which may be defined as *spiritual* in nature. These signs and symbols not only demonstrate changes in consciousness but are also themselves the instruments of these changes. This stream of *spiritual realism*—as initiated by Biran, announced by Ravaisson, and brought into clear conceptual relief in Blondel's *spiritual realism of the thinking subject*—offers to philosophy a means for providing an account of human interiority, and of human thought, which can illuminate the spiritual dimension of human cognition in a clearly defined, concrete, and indeed scientific way.

These philosophical reflections may be squarely lined up to provide a philosophical justification for certain themes in cognitive archaeology, particularly in regards to one of the central claims made by the British Archaeologist Colin Renfrew, that "without artefacts, material goods, many forms of thought simply could not have developed." (Renfrew 1998, p. 1) Here, pointing to the material dimension of this cognitive process, Renfrew argues against a "mentalist" view in cognitive archaeology in favor of a position where "much of the story of the development of human culture and cultures, and with them of 'mind' . . . is inseparable from human interaction with the material world." (Renfrew 1998, p. 1)

To illustrate how there may be a concord among these disparate disciplines, I wish to help show how some of these conceptual tools may be applied to the material data within these fields of archaeology and cultural anthropology. I would like to begin this final discussion by situating a general sense of 'ritual' and 'religion' in reference to an

observation made by the American sociologist Robert Bellah, where he refers to the role of religion in human evolution in positive and efficacious terms:

Animals or pre-religious men could only ‘passively endure’ suffering or other limitations imposed by the conditions of their existence, but religious man can to some extent ‘transcend and dominate’ them through his capacity for symbolization, and thus can attain a degree of freedom relative to his environment that was not previously possible.<sup>40</sup> (Bellah [1967] 2006, p. 29)

With this description, we find that religion is not merely a set of ideas, a belief, or some abstract category, but rather it is a term that refers to a peculiar and effective process. As Bellah notes, the most basic element of religion that one can identify is to be found in the process of symbolization, and it is through this process of symbolization that we can link together ritual acts with a perceived religious dimension in terms of an effective power. Bellah’s observation is noteworthy as it speaks to the fact that religious symbolization functions as a kind of social power with definite communal effects. In this sense, Bellah reiterates the observation that ritual is “humanity’s basic social act.”<sup>41</sup> (Bellah 2011, p. 145)

From here, we can begin to understand what exactly rituals do, and how they are entwined with religious significance. Recent studies by archaeologists and cultural anthropologists do not hesitate to make claims, in reference to these early pre-historic time periods, that: “At the methodological level, it is clearly possible to note certain aspects of life that appear to us to have a religious or spiritual dimension.” (Hodder 2010a, p. 15)

In agreement with Jacques Cauvin’s conclusions about the indigence of materialist and solely economic-based theories about the origins of human civilization, Ian Hodder agrees in placing the question of religion and spirituality in central focus when coming to terms with the pressing question of why is it that, considering the fact that anatomically modern humans have existed for around 140,000 years, it has only been relatively recently, since about 12,000 BC, that “human groups began to settle down, adopt agriculture and take many of the steps that we associate with ‘civilization.’” (Hodder 2010a, p. 2)

One of the earliest and most striking examples of megalithic symbolization in the archaeological record may be found in the Anatolian peninsula, at “the Stone Age Sanctuaries”, known as Göbekli Tepe (See Figures 1 and 2). (Schmidt 2010) Discovered by the German archaeologist Klaus Schmidt in 1995, this site contains monumental structures dominated by T-shaped monoliths, which are arranged in large circular enclosures of between 10 to 20 meters in diameter. (Schmidt 2011)

These structures may be accurately dated to the 9th millennium BC and have been judged by Schmidt and others to represent some kind of sanctuary due to their apparent non-domestic use, their rich symbolism, and their prominent placement within the local environment, in addition to other unique characteristics.<sup>42</sup> What is most notable about this site is the fact that these structures have been reliably dated to before the emergence of agriculture, and thus indicate the presence of a social and ideological cohesion unprecedented for that time period.

Dated to the time of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic (12,000–6500 BC)—before either farming or the use of ceramic appears in the archaeological record—this site provides conclusive evidence of a form of human social organization and capacity that was, heretofore, thought impossible for the hunter-gatherers of this time. Numerous scholars have noted that this site helps *prove* that Jacques Cauvin “was right in his belief that the social systems changed before, not as a result of, the shift to farming.” (Dietrich et al. 2012, p. 684) This is particularly the case in his idea of there being a kind of “psychological revolution” to have happened at this period in human prehistory, where “the birth of the idea of powerful, anthropomorphic gods preceded and led the way to the beginnings of farming.” (Watkins 2019, p. xiv)





**Figure 1.** Göbekli Tepe, Enclosure D (Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons).

At the cusp of Göbekli Tepe's discovery in 1995, Jacques Cauvin would conclude his research into this 'psychological revolution.' After having extensively researched other pre-historic sites in the region, he would lay out his visionary theories about the cognitive changes involved in the transition from hunter-gatherer to sedentary societies with his classic work, *The Birth of the Gods and the Origins of Agriculture* (1994). He argues that ritual practice, symbolic images, and a religious imagination preceded the onset of agriculture in human societies, overturning the long-held anthropological views that these "religious" elements came after the economic development of complex societies, as Cauvin describes:

At this point in history, this system of representations evidently had nothing to do with a conceptual and discursive mode of thought. We can recognize that the 'symbolic forms' . . . that are then codified and socialized through mythology and religion relate to an intuitive and immediate intelligence. It is an intelligence that nonetheless has its own internal logic and above all its own ability to regulate certain aspects of fundamental human behavior. (Cauvin [1994] 2002, p. 209)

Cauvin's thesis, and the discovery of Göbekli Tepe that serves to instantiate it, have fueled speculation into how cognitive changes relate to the origins of human civilization. One major idea that has come into focus among archaeologists and anthropologists is the idea of "material engagement," where there is found "the constitutive intertwining of cognition and material culture." (Malafouris 2004, p. 53)

This approach represents a shift in focus "away from the isolated internal mind and the demarcated external material world towards their mutual constitution," this representing a so-called "ontological gulf" that has summoned a call in cultural anthropology to develop "non-dichotomous thinking in archaeology" and towards "cognition-oriented archaeological research." (DeMarrais et al. 2004, p. 53) At the forefront of this cognitive archaeology, and working to develop this new ontological turn in cultural anthropology is Colin Renfrew, who identifies the crux of the matter: "It seeks to overcome the mind/matter duality by stressing the knowledge-based nature of human action." (Renfrew 2004, p. 23)



**Figure 2.** Close-up of the central pillar in Enclosure D (Photo courtesy of Göbekli Tepe Project, DAI).

It is precisely within this framework that Blondel's philosophy (and the tradition of French spiritualism more broadly) may be seen to fit in to describe the workings of this active intelligence and its relation to the question of religion and of spirituality, and inversely, the concrete data of this archaeological research and the associated branches of cultural anthropology may help to develop these same concepts by providing both material data, and certain conceptual parameters, which may serve to demonstrate and condition further inquiry into the nature and function of human intelligence in relation to the question of religion. While the current article is only a rough sketch in this direction, it is worth noting the significance of these changes in human anthropology, and the models being developed within the fields of archaeology and anthropology to attempt to understand these changes.

One way to understand this cognition-oriented approach is to investigate the early developments of human culture, when the human species transitioned from a nomadic hunter-gatherer existence to a sedentary one with innovations from farming and construction to complex mythologies and art, all happening within the period known as the Neolithic Revolution (circa 10,200–4000 BC).

It is within this context that "the making of the human mind has become a major focus of study", and Renfrew argues that it was "human engagement with the material world which turns out to have been the decisive process." (Renfrew 2012, pp. 125–26) Renfrew offers the unique formula "Symbol before Concept," to illustrate how "the symbolic role of . . . things is crucial," and how "the symbol did not reflect so much as constitute the perceived and conceptualized reality." (Hodder 2012, p. 138) He levies Jacques Cauvin in

support of his thesis, particularly as Cauvin helped to lay out the unique type of cognition implied in the material remains of this time period:

... it seems that 'religion', far from being purely irrational, first developed a sort of 'transcendental logic' at a non-utilitarian level, a logic that was then applied to the real world, imprinting on it new significances in a novel and different system of relations. This cognitive aspect of the Revolution of Symbols is fundamental. (Cauvin [1994] 2002, pp. 208–9, and p. 20)

Renfrew sustains Cauvin's theory and takes it further with the principal question: "why is it only in the past ten millennia that we see strikingly new behavior patterns—constructions innovation, inventions—which are changing the world?" (Renfrew 2012, p. 127) This so-called "sapient paradox" questions the very essence of what it means to be human, a *homo sapien*, a creature endowed with "wisdom." This question leads him to remark that "what distinguishes humankind most obviously from other species is the ability to use symbols," and he goes further to assert that "the symbol cannot exist without the substance, and the material reality of the substance precedes the symbolic role which is ascribed to it when it comes to embody such an institutional fact." (Hodder 2012, p. 131) Regarding this dynamic, Renfrew suggests that "this process lies at the nub of the development of human societies." (Hodder 2012, p. 132)

What remains, is to understand exactly how the material and the cognitive relate to one another, or in other words, what is the *modus operandi* of the mind in this process, or what is the symbolic logic in effect here? I wish to suggest that the metaphysical paradigm thus outlined of the French spiritualist tradition provides an intellectual matrix for understanding how a new form of consciousness may be awakened in the human being, from the most primitive state to a heightened understanding of their place in the world.

The main problem this poses to archaeologists and cultural anthropologists is to understand how "the symbolic role" functions cognitively, as he says that symbols do not "reflect so much as constitute the perceived and conceptualized reality" and he goes further to suggest that the answer must indeed be found in terms of "the role of the material symbol in the development of ritual and religion." (Hodder 2012, p. 138) Determining the lack of understanding in the anthropological community in this regard, Renfrew indicates the common theme of these efforts in cognitive anthropology in declaring the effort to "recognize the spiritual, religious, and transcendent in early time periods." (Renfrew 2011, p. 916)

Renfrew draws the conclusion that "neither cognitive archaeology nor interpretive archeology has yet succeeded in developing an entirely convincing methodology for the investigation and analysis of prehistoric ritual." (Renfrew 2012, p. 131) It will be impossible to understand the cognitive impact of these pre-historic ritual behaviors without a methodology centered upon the description of human interiority, and without a clarification of the nature and function of the various faculties employed in, and effective upon, the activity of human thought, no compelling theory of ritual may be produced.

These archaeological sites, and these latest reflections within the anthropological and archaeological community introduce aspects of human life which the modern period has not been very well adapted to address and which philosophy may help to orient better. One interesting aspect in this regard, is the fact that Cauvin, who has been hailed as providing one of the best interpretive models for understanding these unique cognitive changes, had studied philosophy and his work bears a clear trace of philosophical influence, as British Archaeologist, and translator of Cauvin's work, Trevor Watkins remarks:

What he meant by a 'psycho-cultural' revolution and his ideas about symbolic representation and the evolution of religion would be a juicy topic for research, for Cauvin had originally studied philosophy, and his thinking was certainly not the imaginative speculations. (Watkins 2019, p. xv)

Watkins continues to note how Cauvin's ideas have served to influence himself, as well as others in his field, particularly in their capacity "to understand the cultural ex-



pression of ideas in symbolic representations and practices in early Holo-cene societies.” (Watkins 2019, p. xv) Cauvin’s ideas of “non-discursive rationality,” the role of an “immediate and intuitive logic,” and the idea of “active intelligence,” with regard to the dynamic between action and thinking, are all uniquely represented within the French spiritualist tradition, to which Blondel gave unparalleled conceptual clarity.

While it would certainly be interesting to understand the sources of Cauvin’s ideas, it would be even more fruitful to determine how these concepts could be further elaborated as interpretive models for understanding how the ancient use of ritual forms, symbolic images, and the employment of primitive signs, could be understood as *crucial* elements in the advancement of human consciousness. The critical framework for the study of religion in philosophy as developed by Maurice Blondel and codified by Henry Duméry, as well as the acute analysis of human interiority as presented by the French spiritualist tradition, offer a robust philosophical approach for the investigation of how religion can be seen to impact the development of human consciousness, and of culture and society. Beyond a phenomenological approach that resists any normative ontological affirmations, such a philosophical paradigm may serve to fortify phenomenology in light of its well-known, and berated, limits. The future task for the methodological study of religious phenomena seems to be well said by Duméry, with the last of his suggestions being the most important:

- (1) to describe religious structures according to a method of understanding;
- (2) to not neglect, for that reason, any instruction from the positive disciplines, in particular that of history;
- (3) to join to phenomenology an ontology or an axiology, allowing its description to be rooted in the spiritual dynamism and to be justified by it. (Duméry 1957a, p. 203)

I would like to end these reflections by looking once again to the Anatolian peninsula, though this time moving ahead many millennia from the distant epoch of Göbekli Tepe. Here in reference to the *kolossos* tradition of Ancient Greece, with the appearance of this same general custom of human beings erecting monolithic standing stones—though here appearing in the literary record as well. The French historian and anthropologist Jean Pierre Vernant, discusses this practice, and poses what appears to be the fundamental question:

How could a stone, fashioned and set up by man’s hand, have the significance of a double that would relate it to such uncontrollable and mysterious psychic phenomena as dream figures and supernatural apparitions? How is it that a rough-hewn slab of stone can in certain circumstances appear double and ambiguous, with one face turned toward the invisible? What is it about the *kolossos* that makes it stand in such contrast to the world of the living that it seems to introduce into the earthly landscape where it has been erected not simply a stone, a familiar object, but the very power of death, in all its uncanny strangeness and terror? (Vernant 2006, pp. 327–28)

Vernant seems to touch the psychological core at work in these megalithic sites with reference to the *kolossos* tradition, where the standing stone pillar symbolized a powerful reality, with a profound spiritual and religious dimension, as he goes on to describe:

For the Greeks, therefore, the *kolossos* and the *psuchē* are closely related. They fall within a category of very clearly defined phenomena to which the term *eidola* was applied. As well as the *psuchē*, which is a shade, and the *kolossos*, which is a crudely formed idol, this category includes the dream image (*oneiros*), the shade (*skia*), and the supernatural apparition (*phasma*). These phenomena, which to us seem so disparate, are unified in the sense that within the cultural context of archaic Greece they are all apprehended in the same way by the mind and thus take on a similar significance. It is therefore justifiable, where they are concerned, to speak of a true psychological category—the double—which presupposes a different mental organization from our own. A double is completely different

from an image. It is not an imitation of a real object, an illusion of the mind, or a creation of a thought. For the person who sees it, the double is an external reality, but one whose peculiar character, in its very appearance, sets it in opposition to familiar objects and to the ordinary surroundings of life. It exists simultaneously on two contrasting planes: just when it shows itself to be present, it also reveals itself as not of this world and as belonging to some other, inaccessible sphere. (Vernant 2006, p. 325)

How is it that a stone pillar can invoke ideas of the soul, of spiritual experiences, of a beyond? How did these ideas become entangled with these objects? Did these objects serve to generate these ideas, and if so how, and why? In the rough sketch of this essay, I hope to have shown a methodological route for responding to these questions, and for understanding how these material cultic practices, fundamentally ritual in nature, can be seen to operate at a cognitive level—illustrating the dynamics involved in the spiritual realism of the thinking subject. This standing stone tradition, reaching to the deep recesses of human history, culture, and cognition, represent, in their own way, the manifestation of certain anthropological processes that are not very well understood, devoid of a spiritual understanding.

It appears that these physical structures lend themselves towards conceptualizing the nature of being, or in other words, these objects serve as a means of abstraction where a dissociation from the local environment may occur through an encounter with an enduring focal point. The fact of providing an immovable material object, with a commanding visible position, provides in itself a physical object for human eyes to fix themselves upon, and just as a steady and directed gaze—centered upon a singular object—is itself inductive to focus, concentration, and generative of attention,<sup>43</sup> we must also recognize that the human interface with this material object provides the condition for a particular kind of cognitive exercise, where new modes of consciousness may find a unique opportunity to be brought into development.

Here, we could consider these proto-ritual environments as physical arena in which aspects of human interiority may manifest themselves—appearing within the human beings themselves, but also leaving behind an indelible trace within the local environment. These standing stone monoliths can be viewed as instruments that stimulate cognition to the point where a new perception of reality emerges, opening new depths within the human being, thus, prompting a reflection on unity—a capacity perhaps unique to the human species. These monoliths, I would argue, serve as “cues” or “springboards” for cognitive processes of disassociation, abstraction, and reflection, which are all cognitive precursors to the consciousness of *being* in itself. This perhaps outlining the preliminary stages of spiritual cognition.

This all comes down to eliciting the question of: what is it? What is this thing? Even now, such a material object positively boggles the mind. One can only guess, at a time when language was only in a preliterate and primitive form, that such a material object—at once the work of human hands and the fruit of the earth—would engender a whole range of thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. We can surmise that these material objects have the capacity to help generate and condition specific thinkable thoughts, from the simple idea of duration to more complex ideas such as immortality, the afterlife, eternity, the Absolute, even God.

Of course, this is all speculation; however, the material facts of culture and the philosophical research into human interiority may help to serve one another in providing an account of how human thought may be exercised, brought into fruition, and developed. From the earliest origins of culture to the heights of civilized life, a power may be seen to work in and through the human species, where the human being no longer appears as an alienated material being but instead as the bearer of a spiritual vision and of spiritual life in the spiritual realism of the thinking subject.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Translation provided by (Dru 1963, p. 226).
- <sup>2</sup> Labelled as “the philosopher of Vatican II”, Blondel proved to have a lasting impact in the council’s official dogmatic declarations, particularly regarding the notion of “tradition”, and especially through one of the council’s intellectual architects, Yves Congar (1904–1995), who remarked that Blondel, in his *History and Dogma*, furnished “one of the finest descriptions of tradition that exist.” (Congar 1964, p. 26) For further literature on Blondel’s impact upon the intellectual life of the Church, see (Dru 1963; Henrici 1999; Portier 2011; Hannan 2015; Koerpel 2019).
- <sup>3</sup> See for instance, (Van der Leeuw [1938] 1963; Eliade 1958; Otto 1923, 1931). Walter Burkert, has noted: “The impact of ‘ritual’ on classical studies can be dated to the year 1890, when within twelve months there appeared those three books which inaugurated the ‘Cambridge school’ of anthropology: Robertson Smith’s *Religion of the Semites*, Jane Harrison’s *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens*, and the first—and slim—edition of *The Golden Bough* by James Frazer.” (Burkert 1979, p. 35; Smith 1889; Harrison 1890; Frazer 1894) Burkert remains one of the most productive scholars of religion when considering the advancement of these themes and methodologies, and the present article is a philosophical response to his suggestion that, “It seems promising . . . to see to what extent metaphysical ideas can be derived from ritual.” (Burkert 1979, p. 38).
- <sup>4</sup> This is in reference to Dominique Janicaud’s classic, *Phenomenology and the ‘Theological Turn’* (1991), which has led to a rich examination of the French phenomenological tradition. A recent work provides a comprehensive look at how one of the leading philosophers in the wake of this turn, Emmanuel Falque, has advanced the endeavor to employ phenomenological method towards the question of religious experience. (Koci and Alvis 2020; Falque [2013] 2016). See also (Horner and Romano 2021).
- <sup>5</sup> Christine M. Gschwandtner recently published an article that draws a very similar point, where she indicates this division between the tradition of French phenomenology and that of phenomenology of religion. She remarks that French phenomenology suffers from a lack of engagement with other disciplines, and suggests that “both fields might profit from more dialogue and that taking account of some of the insights developed by the religious studies approach to phenomenology of religion would help expand the French projects beyond their at times rather narrow focus without losing the real and unique contribution they are making to the discussion.” (Gschwandtner 2019, p. 48) I would emphasize her point that the method of interpreting experience from a first-person singular perspective “seems to miss something essential in the very nature of religious experience.” (p. 52) She argues how such an approach is “incapable of providing an account . . . of the ways in which religion has shaped and continues to influence communal identities in entire cultures.” (p. 52) She identifies how the French approaches “are curiously short on analysis of actual experiences or concrete religious phenomena.” (p. 52) While I would agree with her critiques, I might disagree with her if the conclusion is that phenomenology is itself a sufficient paradigm for responding to these methodological issues, as while her call for a “phenomenology of ritual practice” is certainly a fruitful suggestion, I intend to argue in this essay that an understanding of ritual requires more than a phenomenological approach, as there are certain ontological judgements concerning the nature of human thought that are necessary for understanding how it is that rituals function. In this article I wish to show how the earlier conceptual framework of the French spiritualist tradition, to which French phenomenology is bound in a number of ways, provides a philosophical model that may help to orient the contributions of the phenomenological tradition to provide a more complete understanding of religion, one that is sensitive to the ‘deep realities’ involved in ritual practice.
- <sup>6</sup> This position was prompted by, and this essay inspired in part from, the suggestion made by Jean Danielou that Henry Duméry had brought to “the phenomenology of religions the philosophical justification which it lacked.” (Danielou 1959, p. 68).
- <sup>7</sup> Henri de Lubac indicated the promise of Blondel’s thought in doing just this: “Maurice Blondel’s work, however much it is still fought over, has prepared the ground and created the atmosphere in which the close connection between the problems of the spiritual life and those of anthropology and metaphysics is made manifest.” (de Lubac and Ravier 1965, p. 9).
- <sup>8</sup> The term “the masters of suspicion” was coined by Paul Ricœur in reference to these three figures, who he characterizes as representing a general “opposition to a phenomenology of the sacred, understood as a propaedeutic to the ‘revelation of meaning . . . ’” (Ricœur [1965] 1970, p. 32) With the risk of extending this term beyond its immediate context, I wish to argue that this characterization nevertheless identifies a prevailing attitude and pervasive methodological orientation that has functioned to obscure the deeper realities of the spirit, to which I wish to argue a tradition of the “Masters of Sympathy” may be introduced to help remedy.
- <sup>9</sup> For a reflection upon his influence in the twentieth century, see (Harris 2000). As one scholar has noted: “Vere Gordon Childe, although dead since 1957, remains the most renowned and widely read archaeologist of the twentieth century . . . . Most European archaeologists recognized him as the leading expert on the culture-history of prehistoric Europe. In the United States, he was acknowledged to be one of the foremost cultural evolutionists of his time . . . .” (Trigger 2000, p. 9) Despite his vast influence, the materialistic orientation of his thought has been largely abandoned, nevertheless, he is still considered an essential predecessor of the field, particularly with “processeual archaeology.” (Trigger 2000, p. 20) His work also “helped to renew the relationship between archaeology and anthropology”, which his proteges have continued to develop, as with Colin Renfrew who will be discussed later in this paper. (Trigger 2000, pp. 20–21).

- 10 A prime example of such a general consensus can be found in the summary conclusion of a study conducted by a group of leading natural scientists, archaeologists, philosophers, and theologians, brought together to work on a research project entitled, "Religion in the Emergence of Civilization: Çatalhöyük as a Case Study," where it was judged that, "Our overall conclusion, then, is that there is much both general and specific data to support the notion that changes in spiritual life and religious ritual are a prelude to or accompany the social and economic changes that lead to 'civilization'." (Hodder 2010b, p. 340).
- 11 These claims will be taken up in the third part of this essay.
- 12 For another branch on this tree with a rich and fruitful approach in philosophy of religion, see the work of Emmanuel Falque, particularly his *Crossing the Rubicon* (2016) and his *Tridum Philosophique* (1999–2013). (Falque [2013] 2016; Falque [2004] 2012; Falque [2011] 2016; Falque [1999] 2019) Cutting to the heart of where Falque stands within this tradition, Victor Emma-Adamah notes how Falque's work opens up "before two competing understandings of finitude: one defined by the Heideggerian tradition and the other represented by Blondel." (Emma-Adamah 2020, p. 176) Ultimately Falque has chosen to develop his thought more according to the framework of Heidegger in terms of the horizon of finitude, at the expense of Blondel's paradigm of immanence. Emma-Adamah raises the crucial question, "of whether a Heideggerian . . . determination of finitude as a closed horizon is the only or even most enlightening option for this experience of something beyond finitude." (p. 183) I would whole-heartedly agree with his suggestion that "there is more to be read from Blondel and the 'other phenomenologies' explored by Gabellieri as alternative accounts for finitude" and that: "[t]he direction opened for such alternatives must turn to a rich tradition informed, since ancient Greek philosophy, by a thought of an internal polarity in individual things and a resistance to coincidence." (p. 183; see also Gabellieri 2019) This is an acute characterization of Blondel's thought, which certainly accords itself along the lines of such a *philosophia perennis*, whereas many other trends in nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy, with Heidegger and 'the masters of suspicion' being prominent examples, represent a distinct and sometimes conscientious break within this philosophical tradition. Certain aspects of Falque's thought, it must be said, betray any attempt to pin him too firmly within any set school or tradition of thought. See in particular (Falque 2019a, 2019b, 2020, 2021). For my own critique of Falque's thought, see (Connelly 2020b, pp. 158–61).
- 13 The main works under consideration are (Duméry 1956, 1957a, 1957b, 1957c, 1957d, 1957e, 1958).
- 14 Cf. (Chevalier 1966, p. 176)
- 15 Cf. (Chevalier 1966, p. 179)
- 16 Cf. (de Biran [1802] 1988, pp. 8–11)
- 17 Cf. (Greisch 2002, p. 445)
- 18 Blondel's 1893 thesis was entitled, *Action: Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*. (Blondel [1893] 1984). This text would be rewritten into two new volumes as a part of his trilogy. (Blondel 1936, 1937).
- 19 This phase of his work would come together most clearly at the turn of the century with his 1903 essay, *The Elementary Principle of a Logic of the Moral Life*. (Blondel [1903] 2000)
- 20 Long in development since his 1893 thesis, this dimension of his philosophy is brought out most clearly in his two volumes published in 1934 entitled, *La pensée*. (Blondel 1934a, 1934b)
- 21 Blondel's philosophy may be, I would argue, cleanly divided between a *philosophy of religion*, and a *religious philosophy*, where the former is outlined above, and the latter is encapsulated in his two volumes of *La philosophie et l'esprit chrétien* (1944–46), in addition to his capstone work, published in 1950 just after his death, *The Philosophical Exigencies of Christian Religion*. (Blondel 1944; Blondel 1946a; Blondel [1950] 2021) The translation of this last volume would fatefully be published just before the death of one of the greatest Blondel scholars to have ever lived, Oliva Blanchette (1929–2021), whose *Maurice Blondel a Philosophical Life* (2010), is both the best biography, and commentary, of Blondel's life and work to have ever appeared. (Blanchette 2010) Beyond his extensive commentary and translation, Blanchette was able to synthesize his own insights from within this Blondelian lineage, with the 2003 publication of his, *Philosophy of Being: A Reconstructive Essay in Metaphysics*. (Blanchette 2003)
- 22 These critiques are typified in what was, at the time, an anonymous review of Blondel's 1893 thesis, written by Leon Brunschvicg, where he states that "for modern rationalism the notion of immanence is the base and condition of all philosophical doctrine" and proceeds to accuse Blondel of breaching this norm "by attaching himself to action in order to see in every act an inevitable transcendence." (Brunschvicg 1893, p. 49)
- 23 Blondel points to "On the Emendation of the Intellect" (Spinoza and Curley [1661] 1985, pp. 10–11) in addition to the preface to the second part of "Ethics," entitled "On the Nature and Origin of the Mind," (de Spinoza and Morgan [1674] 2002, p. 243) as the prime examples of the Spinozan doctrine.
- 24 To better understand the particularly fruitful dynamic between French philosophy and the administrative state see (Loeffel 2000, 2014).
- 25 For a contemporary overview of this difficult subject, see (Petit 2019).
- 26 See for example the "notes philosophiques," (Henrici and Raffelt 2005, p. 8; Blondel [1880] 2005, p. 6).
- 27 For a contemporary treatment of this philosophical history, see (McGrath 2020, p. 162).
- 28 It is worth noting that Blondel's assessment of Spinozism, drawn almost entirely from his close friend, the then leading authority of historical philosophy and of post-Kantian thought, Victor Delbos (1816–1916), in his *Le problème moral dans la philosophie de*

*Spinoza et dans l'histoire du spinozisme* (1893), lines up squarely with contemporary assessments of Spinoza and Spinozism, see (Delbos 1893; Beiser 2017, p. 34; Giovani 2011, p. 15; Israel 2006, p. 44). Blondel's shrewdness can be seen in isolating this development of Spinoza's thought, and showing how, in 'the evolution of spinozism', there was a movement away from the authors original doctrine, leading not only to a corruption of Spinozan thought, but of philosophical thinking more broadly speaking.

29 Translation provided by (McGuire 1976, p. 259).

30 This is to, once again, take the terminology of Paul Ricœur in his book concerning the French school of Husserlian phenomenology. (Ricœur [1986] 2016) For a contemporary treatment of this school, and its development into 'the theological turn' announced by Janicaud, see (DeLay 2019).

31 For a clear account of Blondel's understanding of phenomena, see the work of Michael A. Conway, and Claude Troisfontaines. (Conway 2004, 2006; Troisfontaines 1998).

32 For an account of how Blondel's thought relates to the more proper "phenomenology" of the twentieth century and especially in light of the 'theological turn' see my own (Connelly 2020a), and also the recent article by Jonathan M. Ciraulo (Ciraulo 2021). No major work has been done that would more formally connect the "École" of twentieth century French phenomenology with the "École" of nineteenth century French Spiritualism, with the latter—I would argue— representing a much more rich and perennial form of philosophy than the former. The beginnings of such a rapprochement has been started with the work of Christian Dupont. (Dupont 2014, pp. 21–97) Andrew Sackin-Poll has helped to show the influence of French spiritualism upon the phenomenological tradition, particularly in the work of Michel Henry. (Sackin-Poll 2020) Falque has shown interest in the tradition of French spiritualism, and clearly recognizes its influence upon French phenomenology, especially through Maurice Merleau-Ponty, though this influence remains largely muted. (Falque [2014] 2018, p. 49, and pp. 53–54; Falque 2016).

33 The meaning of "religious history" is here determined by the field of historical criticism which, by the early twentieth century, had become a dominant branch of theology. One of the leading historical critical thinkers of Blondel's time was Alfred Loisy (1857–1940), whose historical reflections upon the biblical tradition served to occasion Blondel's essay *History and Dogma*. For a penetrating analysis of Loisy, and the field of historical criticism more broadly, see (Morrow 2019).

34 Blondel develops this theme in terms of a "general logic" and conceives of it as an "ontological norm," which he argues goes beyond "abstract dialectic" and "the uses of thought" to focus instead more fundamentally upon "the internal cohesion and the constitutive laws of beings in themselves, from an ontological and realist point of view." (Blondel [1935] 1963, p. 468)

35 Jules Lachelier was the inspector general of education and directly oversaw the philosophical aggregation, or testing, which was and still continues to be the mechanism by which philosophers are inducted into the administrative apparatus of the French state to be public teachers.

36 See also, (Bellantone 2012a).

37 Cf. (Blondel [1880] 2005, p. 8)

38 For an account of how this kind of 'pan-psychic' philosophy is itself already represented in Neoplatonism and certain strains of Patristic thought, see the work of Kevin Corrigan. (Corrigan 2005, pp. 112–16; Corrigan 2009, pp. 39–51)

39 The story of Marie Heurtin has been recently made into into a film entitled, *Marie's Story* (2014).

40 Bellah also helps to show how modernity "entails a gradual erosion of the sacred as expressed in ritual" and further suggests that "anti-ritualism" is an important subject for the social sciences to grapple with, as he suggests there has been just such a bias, linked to Protestant anti-ritualism, that has skewed the academic study of ritual. (Bellah [2005] 2006, p. 165) This is another point of entry for the tradition of French spiritualism, as it is a philosophical tradition coming from philosophers who have kept alive the deep religious sense of ritual, in the Roman Catholic Mass.

41 Here, Bellah follows the lead of Roy Rappaport, whose book *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (1995), makes the claim that " . . . in the absence of what we, in a common sense way, call religion, humanity could not have emerged from its pre- or proto-human condition." (Rappaport 1995, p. 1) He lays out his major claim, saying that "religion's major conceptual and experiential constituents, the sacred, the numinous, the occult and the divine, and their integration into the Holy, are creations of ritual." (p. 3) Rappaport's book goes far to lay out the basic anthropological ground to warrant such a claim, though the real crux of the matter—it must be argued—remains within the domain of philosophy, with the current paper seeking to sketch out such a philosophical rapprochement. His notion of ritual is a solid starting point for an understanding of ritual, denoting it as "*the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers.*" (p. 24, and p. 137) Nevertheless, this definition appears to describe more the shell of ritual action, or its secondary or derivative aspects, and does not touch upon the internal states implied by these acts, these internal states being the vital core at the heart of "ritual."

42 For an overview of the scholarly discussion of Göbekli Tepe, see: (Peters and Schmidt 2004; Schmidt 2010; Banning 2011; Watkins 2019).

43 This is something well understood in applied psychology, particularly in the field of sport psychology, as the notion of "the quiet eye" represents a mechanism of eye control that can be measured and trained, with a major impact on focus, attention, and concentration. (Vickers 2007)

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