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### Aimé Forest and Liberty of Spirit

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## Aimé Forest and Liberty of Spirit

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The philosophical necessity for taking up a study of man's thought and of his whole spirit is clear from the very definition of philosophy. All philosophy contains some sort of reflection, some turning back on self to discover what is ultimate in the primordial being-spirit relationship. As Aimé Forest, a leader in the "*philosophie de l'Esprit*" group, expresses it: "Metaphysics always appears linked to a certain form of spiritual experience, to the recognition of a value in the present, the actual... The metaphysical spirit expresses itself in the very consciousness we take of our relation to being."<sup>1</sup>

But this is not precisely the approach of the contemporary *philosophies of the spirit*.<sup>2</sup> It is not simply a question of "rounding out" the ontological side of the being-spirit relationship by adding on a discussion of the spirit's role. Rather there is a conscious preference and choice of the spirit itself as the primary subject for metaphysical research. In contrast to the objective emphasis of ancient and medieval philosophies, much of modern and contemporary work confers a definite priority on the spirit as the field par excellence for its investigations. Forest brings this point out: "Medieval realism proposed to maintain the objectivity of norms in all domains. It was left to today's thought to show how the submission of the spirit becomes creative of the values of subjectivity and of existence."<sup>3</sup>

This preference for the spirit is illustrated by the negative criticisms proposed today against the rigidly objective — or objectivist — ontological philosophies. For example, a purely ontological study of the spirit's intentionality seems incapable of showing how the object of thought, even when immanent in the subject, is still opposed to the subject. Moreover, with their stress on the objective truth of being, ontologies often have a decided tendency to treat thought

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1. A. FOREST, *Consentement et création* (Paris, 1943), p.5. See also Forest's preface to P. Fontan's *Adhésion et dépassement* (Louvain, 1952), p.v. All translations from the original French in this article are by the author.

2. The French word *esprit* is very difficult to translate accurately into English. For authors such as Lavelle, Le Senne, Madinier, Nédoncelle and Forest, it signifies not only the spiritual component in man, but especially what is *universal* in this spiritual reality. Thus, for example, Forest has lectured on "l'Âme singulière et l'esprit universel." See Le Senne's article "La Philosophie de L'Esprit," in *Philosophic Thought in France and the United States*, ed. M. Farber (Buffalo, 1950), pp.110-112.

3. "La Pensée de Jacques Paliard," in *Études blondéliennes* (Paris, 1954), III, p.139. See below, however, for a precision on this general contrast.

itself as primarily a passive process — a recorder of outside, objective truth “already there.”<sup>1</sup>

This critique obviously has in mind a narrow objectivism which, it must be admitted, is unfortunately not too rare. The effect such objectivism can produce is profound: “Values proper to the spirit cannot find a place in the world of being which remains only that of objects.”<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to this objectivist perspective, today's philosophy of the spirit tries to prevent the reduction of the spirit to just another type of objective being. For the life of the spirit, the very activity of thought, is misconstrued in a philosophy of ‘truth’ which cannot be proposed to man except as external obedience and renouncement of self.<sup>3</sup> From the new effort to grasp what is proper to the spirit as spirit, the relation of the spirit to being is naturally transformed. The correspondence between being and the subject's spiritual élan is brought under new light. A new power of spiritual discernment is activated which reveals values in being that had formerly passed unnoticed. The characteristic of the spiritual life is that it cannot be shut up in any narrow objectivity, for the spirit can be defined by its affinity with all being.<sup>4</sup>

The dispute between ontologies and philosophies of subjectivity cannot be reduced to a question solely of emphasis, or a mere difference of terminology. The concern to protect the spirit from objectification, the distrust for the purely notional presentation of philosophy, adds up to something more than a clash of preferences. There is question of a basic recognition of certain values, a fundamental openness to, and awareness of, the subjective dimension of being, which is all too frequently passed over in the standard courses of ontology. This explains the noticeable hesitation, not to mention outright hostility, which many contemporary philosophers have shown toward the philosophy of being.<sup>5</sup> To preserve the originality of the spirit,

1. FOREST, *La Vocation de l'Esprit* (Paris, 1953), pp.156-157; confer also a much earlier article, “L'Esprit de la philosophie thomiste,” in *Revue des Cours et Conférences*, XXXIV (1932-33), pp.357-358.

2. FOREST, “Le Biranisme de Le Senne,” in *Les Études philosophiques*, X (1955), p.440.

3. The need for new categories to comprehend more adequately the perfection of the spirit is stressed by Forest in his article, “Grâce et liberté,” in *Les Études philosophiques*, XIV (1959), p.53, and more recently in his long Preface to G. Madinier's *Vers une philosophie réflexive* (Neuchâtel, 1960).

4. This is one of the major themes in Forest's superb article, “Signification du recueillement,” in *L'Encyclopédie française*, ed. G. Berger (Paris, 1957), XIX, Sect. A, chap. iii, cols.19.08-10 to 19.08-14. See also his “Connaissance et amour,” in *Revue Thomiste*, XLVIII (1948), p.118.

5. This hostility toward many presentations of traditional ontology is examined in Forest's survey of contemporary metaphysics, “Orientations actuelles en métaphysique,” in *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, XLIX (1951), p.681.

they seek a new approach, founded in new terminology, new categories that are specifically geared to the experience of the spirit. In this, they are following in the footsteps of Maine de Biran who wished to "seize the interior reality in categories proper to it, such as those of act, genesis, constitution."<sup>1</sup>

## I

This new approach, at least as presented by Forest, does not pretend to be all of philosophy. Rather there is admittedly a concentration on those truths which are uncovered by reflection on man's own spiritual experience. Although this experience obviously does not constitute all of reality, it does represent an essential moment in the philosophic effort, for the totality of the real comes to man through his spiritual experience. This new subjective approach represents a type of introductory metaphysics which presents itself as a method in which the truths to be established are prefigured.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, modern philosophy has emphasized the reflection on the nature of the act of intelligence by which man poses things in themselves and distinct from himself. The focal point or point of departure in this reflection is man's consciousness of his very act of existence. The essential task for philosophy remains the same: to seize the correlation of being and spirit, of existence and knowledge; but now there is a clearer recognition of the essential condition implied. Briefly stated it is simply that a return to the interior universality alone permits the grasp of the full originality of what is proposed from outside.<sup>3</sup>

The type of reflection or return to self which is demanded by this subjective approach is the result of an *option* by which the philosopher consciously chooses to turn his attention back on the primordial relation of his spirit with being, that is, on his primitive situation before being. This option is not a negation of the power of the human spirit to reach being, nor does it constitute even a halt or limitation of its natural élan, but it does show a greater esteem for the reflexive element intrinsic to any adequate realism. The

1. "Le Biranisme de Le Senne," p.439. Forest sees modern philosophy as a reflection on the subject itself rather than on *ens qua ens* and its transcendentals, on the characteristics of the spiritual life, of belief, of action and of morality, rather than on substance. See his "Le Problème historique de la philosophie chrétienne," in *La Philosophie chrétienne* (Juvisy, 1933), pp.48-49.

2. This idea is developed in Forest's contribution to the symposium on metaphysics published in *Giornale di Metafisica*, XI (1956), under the title of "E possibile una metafisica?". Metaphysics is still envisioned as the search for the essential, the foundation of all reality, but this search is now focused on the "originating experience" of the subject, which is considered to be the unique method of access to metaphysical reality.

3. See "Orientations en métaphysique," pp.659-660; also *La Vocation*, p.160, and *Consentement*, pp.196-197.

spirit, through this philosophic option, is provided with the means for separating from all partiality and narrowness ; this option thus becomes the effort of the spirit to possess itself, to be present to itself in a new way, to win an equality of self with self which goes beyond the common spontaneity of ordinary activity.<sup>1</sup>

The innovation of modern and contemporary philosophy compared to classical philosophy thus consists in this analysis of the attitude of the spirit in the metaphysical affirmation, and in the constant effort to reveal its full spiritual signification by uncovering the primitive source of all man's activity. Philosophy takes on an interior meaning, which though not necessarily excluding what is exterior, nevertheless studies the truths of being by analyzing the interior preparation needed to recognize such truths.<sup>2</sup> Metaphysics, by plumbing the depths of the spirit's fundamental situation before being, reveals the spirit's absolute truth as a *lived* intentionality.

Contemporary analyses of metaphysical experience illustrate this point clearly. Their principal aim is not to work on objective truth-in-itself, independent of all consciousness of the act by which the truth is grasped, but on the metaphysical affirmation of truth. Not being itself, but *how* man goes to being, is the point of concentration. The work of contemporary phenomenologists, stressing the problem of significant expression, has prompted a change in focus from the idea of being — *ratio entis* — to the manifestation of being, a "sense of being."

Modern or contemporary philosophy, then, can be described as the *science of the spirit*, the research for what is fundamental and primary in the subject's revelation of himself.<sup>3</sup> It wishes to arrive at the conquest of the subject in the very act by which the subject seizes its reference to being and the finality of its will. Its task is to construct a philosophy of conscience which will be able to reveal a type of truth and certitude that is proper to the spiritual life. For it is the nature of conscience, or the being of the state of consciousness, not to be a thing among things.<sup>4</sup> Its absolute truth cannot be represented, conceptualized, as an objective nature. There is a dimen-

1. Forest's idea of option leans heavily on Blondel, whose doctrine in this matter is contrasted by Forest with the idealists' option. See *La Vocation*, pp.216-218.

2. *Consentement*, p.112. In a conference given at the Faculté universitaire Saint-Louis, Brussels, Nov. 6, 1962, Forest characterized contemporary philosophy as an effort to dominate the tension between "*habiter en soi*" and "*habiter au monde*."

3. This theme is developed in Forest's "La Philosophie dans l'ordre du salut," in *Lumière et Vie*, No. 23 (1955), pp.104, 108-109.

4. See Forest's description of R. Le Senne's work which he calls a "spiritual psychology," in "La Pensée de René Le Senne," *Revue Thomiste*, LIV (1954), p.385. The French *conscience* covers two English meanings: "consciousness," i.e. the exercised state of being conscious, and "conscience" meaning not the faculty of judging moral goodness, but the *being* of the spiritual nature capable of exercising consciousness.

sion of being proper to conscience that is above all objectivity in the empirical sense. Hence one basic aim of the philosophies of the spirit is precisely to define what is the metaphysical consciousness of self, to determine what form of experience presents the spiritual life in its purity, what interior élan can lead man to the first certitude of interior experience.

This task can be fulfilled by means of studying the characteristics proper to the experience which translates a truly spiritual élan. Now self-consciousness is proper to man's spiritual experience, a consciousness whose strange mixture of light and darkness is explained ultimately by its incapacity to attain its own proper ideal : intuition of self.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, reflection becomes the unique tool in the effort to dominate this paradoxical situation, for it is only through reflection, working on the act rather than the object of consciousness, that the originality of the spirit can be recognized and preserved against the "objectifying" habits of thought.<sup>2</sup>

Modern thought is frequently characterized in opposition to medieval philosophy as the discoverer of the world of interior reflection and of conscience. Such a broad generalization is not exact. This does not mean to deny that there is no difference between the medieval and modern attitudes, but simply to point out that the difference is more in the *method* of approach than in doctrine. For on closer analysis, modern thought appears as a prolongation of certain doctrinal movements in medieval times. For example, there are the medieval themes of man as the image of God, the study of the notion of the person (comparable to the modern stress on interiority), the prolonged struggle to assure the individuality of the soul and the proper, personal efficacy of its spiritual powers. Many of the currents against which the best of medieval thought struggled appear very similar to the tendencies which menace the modern philosophy of conscience.

The difference between the two appears especially in the method : "medieval thought wished to conclude in affirmations, modern thought is a constant research ; the truths which are attained are nothing but the translation of experience."<sup>3</sup> Modern thought, though it has abandoned the letter of medieval doctrine, has nevertheless preserved its spirit, especially in its search for true interiority under the notion of existence.

More specifically, however, the modern stress on the subject dates back to Descartes who first made the change from a predom-

1. This was the favorite theme of Jacques Paliard. See Forest's "La Pensée de Jacques Paliard," pp.133-135.

2. See Forest's, "S. Bernard et notre temps," in *Saint Bernard théologien*, Actes du Congrès de Dijon, Sept. 1953, published in *Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis*, IX (1953), p.289.

3. *Consentement*, p.195.

inantly objective vision of reality to a reflective approach. Despite his theory on substance for which Maine de Biran severely criticized him, Descartes placed the primacy squarely in subjectivity.<sup>1</sup> Thought was understood not as mere intellection but as the complete interiority of the subject. Characterized by its transparence, its interiority, always in act, thought is in man, or is man himself. It is not seized as some static structure, but as an élan, an aspiration, a force of going-beyond, which defies all efforts to circumscribe it within definite limits.

## II

With Descartes consciousness of self is realized primarily in man's experience of liberty, which constitutes the very soul of Cartesianism. For through his analysis of the different forms of the will, Descartes sought the true value proper to the spirit. Today, however, the approach to liberty, to consciousness of self and to the values of the spirit in general, has radically changed under the influence of the dominating theme of *negativity*.

What is most typical perhaps of many of today's doctrines, is what can be called a climate of negation. The extreme importance of the Hegelian formula becomes evident: "the spirit is the negative." It is not a question of constructing a philosophy of nothingness (*néant*) or what can be called a negative ontology, but rather of recognizing an interior nothingness, and the fact that we are "under the mode of not-being." The movement of thought consists, it seems, in finding beyond being, beyond the realism of the intelligence and the will, the pure affirmation of liberty considered as an absolute, and then to surpass even that to recognize finally that spirituality is negativity.<sup>2</sup>

Thus a veritable primacy is conferred on negation, not precisely the concept of nothingness whose relative nature has been illumined by Bergson, but negation as act. Seen in this light, negation cannot be simply reduced to a recognition of man's limitation. For beyond its strictly methodological value, negativity is seized as value, a pure form of the metaphysical experience, revealing the absolute conscience itself. In general, the underlying idea may be summarized as follows: the spirit's proper task is to pose values; these latter cannot be founded on being since, according to present day theories, this would destroy the liberty of the spirit. Consequently negativity

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1. See Forest's "L'Augustinisme de Maine de Biran," in *Mélanges offerts à Étienne Gilson* (Paris, 1959), p.251. Maine de Biran criticized Descartes for treating thought as if it were substance, abstracting it when he should have reflected on it.

2. Taken from Forest's article, "Situation des philosophies actuelles devant la foi," in *Foi en Jésus-Christ et monde d'aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1949), p.50.

is deduced as the core of value, and therefore as the central point of the spirit posing value.<sup>1</sup>

Forest finds three forms of philosophy of negation among his contemporaries : negation as *absence*, as *refusal*, and as *conflict*. Each shall be taken up briefly in order to indicate how these contemporary theories attempt to explain the central value of the spirit or conscience.

Negativity, taken in the sense of *absence*, is one of the key themes among the existentialists, notably Sartre. Sartre poses all problems on the plane of human conscience. The attitudes of conscience consequently take on an absolute, metaphysical meaning. The real task of man is to give himself being, to return to the fullness of the *en-soi* in the clarity of consciousness. But the proper characteristic of conscience is its duality, by which it separates itself from all its objects, and by reason of this distance, from the plenitude of being *en soi*. Thus man's inner exigence is seized as useless ; conscience is able to measure its own deception. Human conscience is thus defined by Sartre as that which it is not and is not that which it is ; this means there is simply no interior consistence.<sup>2</sup> Negation, identified with the rise of the *pour-soi*, is not a particular experience but the very original structure of conscience. Conscience is even described as the refusal to coincide or adhere to that which is. It is by nature, according to Sartre, *néantisante*. From conscience "*néantisante*" is born liberty, the absolute of man's being, preceding all essence, whose own essence consists in being other than that which man is. Liberty draws its origin from this nothingness which comes into the world through conscience. It is in the spirit's anguish that its negativity is revealed, an absolute anguish which Forest contrasts with the anguish Kierkegaard uses as a means to conduct the spirit to faith and finally overcome anguish itself.<sup>3</sup> But for Sartre, negativity as absence is seen as the recognition of man's proper nothingness, of his existence whose modality is precisely non-being, absence of being.

In this view of negativity as absence, there clearly can be no question of the spirit rising to a state of self-possession. This impossibility, moreover, is not accidental but definitive, dependent on the

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1. A basic Hegelian influence is evident in this approach, despite the existentialists' claim to be in revolt against Hegel. Forest has traced a pattern from Hegel to Marx's theory of labor, and then to Brunschvicg's idealism, which ultimately explains man's freedom as resistance to the real world. See Forest's "De l'idéalisme au spiritualisme," *Giornale di Metafisica*, X (1955), p.435.

2. FOREST, "L'Essence et l'existence," in *Témoignages*, no.13 (1947), pp.219-220. The same point is made by Forest in his "L'Acte et l'Absolu," in *Travaux présentés aux Rencontres universitaires internationales* (Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, 1953), p.54.

3. *La Vocation*, pp.22-26. Another comparison Forest draws is with Simone Weil's notion of the "absence of God." See "La Doctrine spirituelle de Simone Weil," in *Rassegna di Scienze Filosofiche*, nos 3-4 (1952), pp.174-175.



human spirits's nature, which consists in always being in exile from itself and from being. There is no interior richness in man, no tension to an *au-delà*. The selfsame spiritual acts which in the Augustinian tradition testify to the spirit's perfection and appeal, Sartre perceives only as witnesses to man's interior nothingness.

To other contemporary philosophers, however, negativity appears more as an experience of *refusal* taken as the ideal experience of liberty, but with an absolute and definitive value all its own. In the current of philosophies of existence, it is the refusal of nature and of all objective contamination that preserves the pure liberty of the spirit's activity. What is proper to the spirit is its ability to withdraw from any engagement, even to take up its contrary. But the refusal goes further and separates the spirit from everything that is stable, fixed, since this exposes the spirit to the danger of being represented along the lines of an objective nature. Man's finitude appears to these authors as a characteristic of his nature, not properly of his existence in its spiritual sense. Only man properly exists, while nature seizes itself in the limited category of being. Man's task therefore is to situate himself on this side of his limitation in the fully spiritual experience attaining existence and liberty.<sup>1</sup>

In a metaphysical rather than a moral sense, refusal is described as the authenticity of our existence, translating the law of life, the interior exigence of always remaining capable of being other, resting unattached. Liberty's very essence is defined by this essential alterability. P. Valéry's work exemplifies this approach to negativity. Strongly influenced by Hegelian thought, Valéry speaks of the spirit as pure availability, seizing itself in the indefinitely repeated refusal to be that which it is, always rebellious, ever above all its works. Knowledge for Valéry is not a process of becoming another, but rather the means for distinguishing self from the other, from the real, and even from oneself. "To know means not to be at all that which one is."<sup>2</sup> Man's final truth is that of refusal, the act by which the spirit takes cognizance of itself by freeing itself from all objectivity.

Finally negation is also described by some authors, J. Wahl for example, as an experience of *conflict*, based on the principle that man is destined to become that which he is not. The spirit is viewed more as a *complexus oppositorum*; its life is a constant oscillation between contrasts, its fundamental truth consists in the coincidence of opposites. It is difficult to fix upon the final truth toward which negation in this sense leads, because two different procedures are possible. Negation

1. FOREST, "La Liberté existentielle," in *La Liberté*, Actes du IV<sup>e</sup> Congrès des sociétés de philosophie de langue française (Neuchâtel, 1949), p.93.

2. See Forest's description of Valéry's doctrine in "La Tradition philosophique en Languedoc," in *Existence et Nature*, F. Alquié (Paris, 1962), p.16; also *La Vocation*, pp. 28-29.

as conflict could result in an existential dialectic, or it could issue in a negative ontology. In the former case the dialectic leads by means of the divisions and conflicts in the spirit to the ultimate values of existence, namely those of an interior tension, labor, effort unceasingly undertaken. In the event of a negative ontology or meontology, however, there is an attempt to get beyond thought's constant swing between contrasts to reach something of the realist order of mystery, silence or contact. But mystery in this light can only be grasped negatively, that is, through the denial of everything that is presented to man.

The difficulty here is how to harmonize the two different directions of modern ontology : one, a research for the absolute, something felt at the base of being, and the other, an orientation toward nonexistence, an ontology of transcendence and negation.

The common ground of all three variations of negativity proposed here is the effort to elevate negation to a real primacy, to the completion of the spiritual life of man, a type of fulfillment achieved at the term of the process of rising above objective nature. The deficiencies of this approach appear in a deeper study into the nature of negative thought, and even more in the reflection on the structure of the spirit which this thought presupposes.

The basic objection against the philosophies of negativity is the fundamental sufficiency claimed for negation. For what is proper to negation is that it cannot stand completely by itself but always and necessarily is founded on an anterior affirmation.<sup>1</sup> Sartre's definition of negation as the refusal of existence is illustrative of this point : existence must in some way be posed anteriorly if one is to have the possibility to refuse it. "If we could not know anything in a positive manner, we could not by the same token deny anything."<sup>2</sup> Moreover in order to grasp the particular negation itself, some idea must be had of the definite term toward which it tends. Thus thought can never be seized as a pure negation for the principal reason that it cannot be detached from its orientation toward being and truth.

Even as regards man's experience of value in which negativity plays an important and necessary role, value's precarious state does not destroy its ultimate basis. Once again the negative moment is inherent in a profounder affirmative process.

But what is most at issue here is whether the original dignity and value of the spirit before being, that is, the structure and dynamism of

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1. P. Ricœur, in a penetrating article, "Négativité et affirmation originaire," in *Aspects de la dialectique, Recherches de Philosophie*, II (Paris, 1956), p.114, expresses the same reservation : "Now the task of reflexive analysis is to show that the inner core of refusal, of recrimination, of contestation, and finally of interrogation and doubt, is fundamentally affirmation ; that negation is never anything but the opposite side of a more basic affirmation."

2. *La Vocation*, p.33.

conscience, are truly assured by negation under its forms of absence, refusal and conflict. Now what is characteristic of all three themes is that the proper "going-beyond" élan of the spirit is viewed in terms of possibility. This is illustrated in Valéry's definition of the spirit as the "substance of possibility," or again in Sartre's description of conscience under the modality of non-being. If the proper act of the spirit is to consent to non-being, then its final truth can best be described as an existential possibility.

But this "existential possibility" as the spirits's final truth marks the failure of the philosophies of negativity to preserve the distinctive value of the spirit relative to objective being. Instead of raising the spirit above objective being, they have virtually lowered it beneath objectivity. Negativity and possibility by themselves then clearly cannot supply the ultimate explanation of man's interior being.<sup>1</sup> Beyond the negative experience there is always the positive affirmation of value based on the correspondence between spirit and being. Values only appear in being when this affinity is recognized. Moreover the spirit, in affirming, assuming — making its own — the values it recognizes in being, actually manifests what is proper to itself: its universality, amplitude and openness. These are precisely the traits distinguishing the spirit from the world of objects — which is the purpose proposed by the philosophies of negativity themselves. The recognition of these values demands going beyond the immediate, narrow limits of objective nature, and, from the subjective side, a readiness, adaptability and availability on the part of the spirit which is achieved only in a new attachment to things. What is proper to the spirit in posing truth and value is not the experience of negativity, but rather the power of affirmation, the generosity supposing a zeal for being and perfection. The spirit gains access to its own interior truth in its recognition of that in itself which permits the force of its adhesion to being.

Nevertheless negativity does play an essential role in grasping the interior force of the soul and in forming the positive virtues of generosity, receptive openness and consent. Negation in its various forms frees the affirmation from a certain rigidity and over-immediacy. Values are not simply given as objective facts, they must in a sense be conquered, earned, as modern philosophies of value have shown. Negativity, then, represents an effort to find what is essential to the spirit.

The idea of negativity, then, is closely linked with that of spirituality, for negation translates the essential project of the spirit, which is to always go beyond what is given and surpass all limits in its unending search to perfectly attain itself in values proper to itself. In refusing to found negation on an anterior affirmation, these philosophies

1. "L'Acte et l'Absolu," p.55; *La Vocation*, pp.36-37.

of negativity only enclose the spirit in a new narrowness, cutting it off from the possibility of corresponding to the universal appeal directed by being to the spirit. A closer analysis shows how the inverse attitude of affirmation can better found the spiritual values sought, while at the same time preserving the rightful place which negativity holds in the life of the spirit.

### III

The positive spiritual value which these various doctrines on negativity have tried to reveal, is undoubtedly *human liberty*. Liberty is viewed as that which actually defines the spirit.<sup>1</sup> For just as the spirit is always in search of itself, so liberty cannot be experienced as a possession immediately assured. Rather it is an unceasing movement towards fuller possession of self, not in a purely indetermined manner but in a progressive search guided by an ideal of genuine, spiritual plenitude. Liberty aspires to equal the spirit itself as known and affirmed in consciousness. Thus the conquest of liberty goes hand in hand with the conquest of the spiritual life ; liberty becomes the soul of man's spiritual development.<sup>2</sup> The experience of liberty is a progressive conquest of spiritual plenitude.

Liberty is thus considered as a dynamism always tending toward a higher form than itself, ideally terminating in an accord between existence and liberty which is characteristic of "spiritual existence." "Liberty proceeds from the depths of the spirit, it is nothing but a return to what is pure in us, what is authentic, fundamental. In what liberty has of completeness, it is nothing else but our existence itself. Liberty is not situated in us in some way ; it is that which we are or that which we are called to be in the truth of our being."<sup>3</sup>

Yet this link between liberty and existence would seem to ring the death-knell for the higher aspirations of liberty. For if liberty is essentially linked with existence, it must needs submit to the same limitations and restrictions characteristic of the latter. Man's situation in this world is obviously one of determination, limitation, contingency. Liberty would consequently seem to be inescapably hedged in by the finite limitations of the actual conditions for its exercise.

But a simple description of the spirit, its content and concrete situation, does not exhaust the potentialities of philosophy. By reflection, metaphysics constantly seeks to uncover the conditions of possibility for an entirely "spiritual" liberty, a liberty that would be

1. See Forest's "Grâce et liberté," pp.53-54.

2. FOREST, "La Liberté existentielle," pp.92, 95 ; also "Signification du recueillement," p.19.08-13, col.2.

3. FOREST, "Obéissance et liberté," in *L'Église et la liberté* (Paris, 1952), p.236.

characterized by its totality and interior plenitude, thus in a way escaping the limitation and determination of man's nature. The first step towards this end is to distinguish the liberty of spontaneity from the liberty of choice.<sup>1</sup> The liberty of choice presupposes a more basic reality of the spirit which provides the very possibility of choice — a more profound movement of the spirit which is determined and imposed in no way by anything outside of itself. To be free in this deeper sense is to return to self and to recognize a certain spontaneous, profound élan of the spirit.

Present day research, however, is not concerned with investigating the possibility or the mechanism of liberty, which ordinarily provides the greater part of the subject matter in scholastic treatises on rational psychology. Contemporary thought rather focuses on the concrete exercise and experience of liberty, and its meaning for the man of today.<sup>2</sup> These contemporary doctrines can be grouped according to their insistence on one or other of three forms of experience: conquest, revolt or engagement.

The first group emphasizes liberty as taking the form of a task to be accomplished, a conquest to be won. A clear break in the form of a radical detachment or absence is necessary to see that liberty is not something "given," but rather constitutes an ideal set before man, a "*devoir-être*" — what man should be. His existence is thus characterized by this tension, this effort to equal himself, or more precisely, to equal or correspond to what he is called to be. Liberty in such a view is not an act but the idea, the pure form of an act that is never in fact realized.

This doctrine is inspired by the idealist thesis which raises liberty to an absolute position, resting on nothing but itself. This results in practice in the subordination of all essences to the spirit's free act. Idealists found the base of man's free will in the "sense of being" anterior to the whole of man's spirituality, for liberty is less the manifestation than the creation of man's essence and personality. Thus according to Lachelier: "It must not be said that we affirm ourselves such as we are, but that we are such as we affirm ourselves."<sup>3</sup> The personality that liberty constructs is not a definitive essence, but a progress in consciousness.

1. "La Liberté existentielle," p.93; also *Consentement*, pp.36, 39. An interesting similarity may be seen here with a contemporary theological interpretation of the nature of concupiscence, based on the different type of liberty enjoyed by an incarnate spirit versus a pure, angelic spirit. See K. Rahner, "Zum theologischen Begriff der Konkupiscenz," in his *Schriften zur Theologie*, 5th ed. (Cologne, 1961), I, pp.377-414.

2. "Obéissance et liberté," p.236; also "La Liberté existentielle," pp.92-93. Forest also speaks of the modernity of Saint Bernard precisely because the Saint's preoccupation was to lead men to true liberty of spirit. See his "Actualité de saint Bernard," *Giornale di Metafisica*, IV (1949), p.591.

3. J. LACHELIER, *Psychologie et Métaphysique*. Œuvres, I (Paris, 1939), p.217.

An unlikely similitude can be drawn, between this idealist doctrine and the existentialist concept of liberty. Both flee from an objectivity which is held to be powerless to give access to the principles of things. Moreover in both there is a precedence of liberty over essence, not only regarding the essence or personality of the subject, but even relative to objective being. Liberty, or the absolute spontaneity of the spirit, is held to be the sole force capable of founding truth *de jure* versus the mere fact of truth, and in this sense preserves objective existence from the dangers of dispersion, inconsistency and pure subjectivism.<sup>1</sup>

In the existentialist approach, liberty and temporality are the forms under which existence is seized. Taken rigorously, the act of liberty appears as the sole experience which cannot be conceived in objective terms. As such, the act of liberty is not distinguished from being posing itself, or Bergson's "*se-faisant*." Liberty is thus described as the "being of existence," the ultimate foundation of being, its *Ursprunglichkeit*. For in the posing of liberty, existence, identified with its manifestation, is seized in its own proper light. The basis for this existentialist principle lies in Kant's definition of existence as liberty, and his insistence that the spirit can be seized only as unending spontaneity, an active constituting force. Hegel and Bergson have clearly influenced existentialist doctrine especially regarding the importance of temporality.<sup>2</sup> Yet with all the influences manifested in their doctrine, the existentialists preserve a good measure of originality, strikingly exemplified in this matter of liberty by Sartre's theory of *conscience néantisante*.

This last remark indicates the correspondence between the idealist and existentialist positions on liberty, and the first interpretation of negativity described above which stressed the idea of absence. The other two interpretations of negativity also have their parallels in the current approaches to liberty. Corresponding to the explanation of negativity as a refusal is the doctrine which considers liberty under the concrete experience of revolt. It is basically a question not of revolt in one or other field of human endeavor — literature, politics, religion — but of a metaphysical attitude revolving about the notion of absurd. In the work of Albert Camus the absurd becomes the truth of the world in its strangeness, its opacity. The refusal of the world establishes man's proper dignity. This refusal or revolt is the true affirmation of value, the creation of sense over the non-sense which characterizes the world.

Others, on the contrary, see in man's very commitment in the world the true sense of man's liberty, a doctrine similar to the theory

1. See "L'Essence et l'existence," p.218.

2. FOREST, "Situation des philosophies actuelles devant la foi," p.51; also "Les Fondements de la temporalité," *Teoresi*, III (1948), pp.115-128.

of negativity as conflict. Thus Merleau-Ponty defines existence as the movement by which man is "*au-monde*," engaging himself in a situation which becomes his point of view of the world. Man's liberty is never pure or detached, but rather a liberty always engaged in a situation, incarnated in definitely limited works.<sup>1</sup>

These three approaches present serious attempts to plumb the hidden meaning of man's concrete experience of liberty. But in returning to an analysis of his own spiritual life, Forest finds a concept of liberty vastly different from that proposed by these contemporary doctrines. He uses the word "*acquiescement*" in describing the core of his positive approach towards liberty. Agreeing with the negative philosophic approach regarding the initial withdrawal of the spirit and its necessary effort of recollection, Forest nonetheless considers that this experience is but the condition for a positive act. Man's sole power is not that of negativity, of refusal. By reflecting on what is most fundamental in the spirit, conscience recognizes a universal, profound positive will rendering itself capable of consenting to what is offered to it. From that time on, nature ceases to impose itself on the spirit as something completely foreign, a force coming from without. Man's own nature, strictly speaking, does not limit a liberty which is capable of willing itself in a final consent achieved in an interior accord of self-possession.

The human spirit is not only detachment, it is also a force of domination. Its power of withdrawal, of questioning everything offered it, is but the preparation for an adhesion which is equally primordial. Forest can thus sift the chaff from the wheat in the following dense passage :

The existential liberty to which we have access, then, is not experienced only as a constant tension, then as pure availability, and of course, anxiety. Neither is this liberty, as Jaspers would have it, an abandon which has to be corrected by a resistance or even defiance ; it is not a sort of paradox and uneasiness in the impossible conciliation of an interior duality. Acquiescence gives to liberty the value of this abandon, but stops it from losing itself in a purely negative experience. The term of our spiritual effort is the conquest of a liberty which has become habitual and durable, the liberty of a state more than an act.<sup>2</sup>

#### IV

This positive doctrine on liberty agrees in its general approach with the Augustinian tradition which in fact, Forest has contrasted with the idealistic-existentialist doctrine analyzed above. The comparison is not based on the classic Augustinian concept of "Christian

1. "*Obéissance et liberté*," pp.238-240. Forest sees this conception of liberty in Marxism, as well as in Hegelian philosophy. See "*L'Essence et l'existence*," pp.218-219.

2. "*La Liberté existentielle*," pp.95-96. See also "*Obéissance et liberté*," p.240.

liberty," but rather on the natural basis which this liberty, or liberation of grace, supposes.<sup>1</sup> This natural basis is viewed by St. Augustine as the spontaneity of the will, which he identifies in turn with the proper movement of love. The essential distinction between the idealist and Augustinian views lies precisely in this point of love. For St. Augustine, love expresses a profounder reality than liberty itself because it constitutes the very foundation for the free act of the will. This negates the idealist principle that liberty refuses all reference to, and dependence on, anything outside the spirit. On the contrary, seen in the Augustinian perspective as founded on love, liberty contains a very definite reference to outside being. Values presented from outside are actually creative of a higher liberty by constituting an appeal to the spirit to enter into its inmost essence.<sup>2</sup> The special interest of this Augustinian doctrine is precisely its power of defining liberty by the very fidelity of the spirit to outside appeal, yet at the same time compromising none of the interior perfection of liberty so dear to the idealists. Forest translates this Augustinian doctrine in his own concept of consent : " consent is the pure response of our liberty to the attraction which comes to us from things . . . Consent proceeds from us, of course, but it has the originality of a response."<sup>3</sup>

In basing liberty on the movement of love, a profound impact on the whole conception of liberty is worked. One clear evidence of this is provided by the differences manifested in conceiving what is the perfection of liberty. Modern philosophy tends to put the essence of liberty in the presence of the total self in each of its acts. Thus as an ideal, liberty would lead to a pure possession of self where acts and nature would be one. Once the basis for liberty is established in the spontaneity of love, however, the notion of liberty's perfection shifts radically from that of pure self-possession to a gift of self.<sup>4</sup>

Liberty has a place in the very reference of thought to being, the very heart of philosophy. For philosophy always seeks the full signification of the act by which man posits being as object; this signification is found in the act of liberty. This does not indicate any renunciation of philosophy's essential aspiration for a universally valid knowledge. Its two characteristics — liberty and freedom on the one hand, and the search for universal truth on the other — are not by rights opposed to one another, because true objectivity that

1. *Consentement*, p.41 ; " Grâce et liberté," p.56. It is *homo liber*, not *liberatus*, that is the subject of this analysis.

2. *La Vocation*, p.136 ; also *Consentement*, p.41.

3. " Obéissance et liberté," p.242.

4. *Consentement*, pp.43-46. Forest ably demonstrates here this Augustinian concept of liberty by a brief analysis of some classical doctrines in the spiritual life : St. Bernard's doctrine on the *voluntas propria* versus *voluntas communis*, and Malebranche's " miserable power to sin " versus " authentic spiritual liberty."



finds universally valid knowledge is perfectly compatible with liberty. Liberty is inherent in the spirit's very orientation toward being, as Forest proves from his extended analyses of the spiritual life.<sup>1</sup>

Traditional Augustinian spirituality explains how the soul is carried toward its object by an interior motion which expresses the very essence of the soul itself. So in regard to this objective orientation, the submission of the spirit to being is not simply to an exterior constraint exercised on the soul by objective nature. What is realized at the end of the *philosophic* effort of asceticism is an open disposition of soul, a constant simplicity in which the spirit discovers it is by nature predisposed to the outside influence from being. By consenting to reality offered it, the spirit is only acting according to its essential perfection ; fidelity to being is fidelity to the very notion of spirit.<sup>2</sup>

This basic idea that liberty and the spirit's docility before being are interior to one another, directly contradicts many modern theories which condemn this docility as an alienation whereby man becomes the slave of outside influences and thus loses his most precious perfection : his own subjectivity. But by adapting the Augustinian doctrine of liberty and love, Forest has been able to show that this submission to the objective world of values is compatible with the highest ideals of human liberty.

*Liberty and the Metaphysical Affirmation.* Spiritual liberty is found not only in thought's general objective approach to being, but even in the metaphysical affirmation of existence. There is always an élan in this primitive affirmation that carries it beyond the immediate given toward the absolute as universal ; there is, in short, an implicit totality present.<sup>3</sup> The movement toward being proceeds from a primordial gift, suggestion, appeal, intrinsic in being. Fidelity of the spirit to being is a response in which its passivity is inseparably mixed with its active élan, revealing the full universality of the spirit as affinity with all being. Now this act of affirmation, responding to the light offered by the presence of being, necessarily contains an attitude of spiritual liberty. For in order to seize metaphysical truth, there is a proven necessity for a certain detachment of spirit. The soul must be disengaged from the immediacy of action, desires, sentiment, in order to realize the purity of its conformity with metaphysical truth. As the condition for the metaphysical affirmation, this detachment, together with its positive counterparts, introduce this spiritual liberty into the very affirmation of being. The soul remains

1. See, for example, *La Vocation*, pp.12, 136, 163.

2. "Signification du recueillement," p.19.08-13, col.2; also "Obéissance et liberté," pp.244-245.

3. FOREST, "Convergences doctrinales en métaphysique," *Giornale di Metafisica*, II (1947), pp.364-365.

free, then, in its affirmation of metaphysical being because inherent in the very efforts of this affirmation is the experience of detachment, attention and recollection.

Clearer still is the link between liberty and metaphysics forged by their common characteristic of totality.<sup>1</sup> Liberty has been defined as the quality of the presence of the totality of the spirit in each of its particular acts. In consent to being, without excluding the particular individual determination, the spirit's orientation avoids all attachment to any isolated aspect of being, all partial, limited procedures. Instead, consent reaches the profound unity of the soul, a certain plenitude with a character of continuity and progressiveness which manifests the spirit's fidelity to everything that exists.

The true liberty of the spirit in its metaphysical affirmation is ultimately founded in this general movement toward the good, understood both as a total presence of the spirit to itself (the interior good of the soul), and the good of objective being (value). Malebranche explained this movement toward the good as the result of a stimulation impressed directly by God and entirely interior to the soul. Forest reasonably asks why the appeal of the good could not just as well be placed in things, which after all constitute the means of rendering God's appeal sensible to man's incarnated spirit.<sup>2</sup>

The originality of the experience of liberty is contained in the affinity of the spirit and being, epitomized in the character of totality intrinsic in each. To the appeal of being corresponds a process of the spirit, active as engagement, passive as receptive openness. This latter quality, perhaps better termed docility, permits a *véritable accord* between the spirit and being and illumines the true constitution of the spirit as "universal intimacy." For the docility inherent in consent to being is the spirit's effort to take cognizance of the infinity that characterizes its own essential movement.

## V

This exposition of Forest's approach to the spiritual value of human liberty through negativity and positive, interior reflexion, is admittedly incomplete; an adequate presentation would demand further development through an analysis of Forest's work on other essential characteristics of the spirit: its interiority, recollection and self-presence. However enough has been shown to offer a basic idea of Forest's general method as well as the subject matter of his predilection. Two observations suggest themselves. The first is simply to note the striking difference between Forest's type of meditative

1. *Consentement*, pp.47-49.

2. *Ibid.*, pp.48-49.

reflection on his spiritual experience, and the typical scholastic method of handling the same realities in question. Many will judge this difference almost entirely in favor of the scholastic approach: one looks in vain, in the preceding analyses, for clear definition of terms, logical progression in reasoning, delineation of the ontological structure involved.

Yet something *does* appear in reflection on Forest's work that is often absent in a more rigorously logical and structural presentation. It is question of a different type of awareness of certain fundamental values, a manner of conceiving them and appreciating their significance, a significance which does not lend itself easily to conceptualization. Moreover, the simple fact that authors publishing in the *Philosophie de l'Esprit* series, such as Nédoncelle, Marcel, Sciacca, Madinier, exert such a widespread influence on the continent, should be enough to deter any apriori rejection of this approach as valueless rhetoric rather than true philosophy.

The second observation can act as a confirmation of the former. For one particular value in Forest's approach consists in its striking capacity for openness toward other doctrines. There is an ability to draw the good and the valuable out of other approaches, often at first sight, seemingly diametrically opposed to his own, that goes far beyond the results produced by the common "honest effort" not to falsify another philosophic position. It is a capacity that cannot be portrayed truthfully by any facile comparisons such as studying an author to "understand" him rather than to "refute" him. In today's parlance one description would simply be "the power to carry on true, fruitfull dialogue."<sup>1</sup> The very effort to listen to another's insight, taking his position, his categories, his intellectual thrust toward what he sees, without the initial primary concern of siphoning off what is considered valuable and leaving behind the rest, is perhaps at least the psychological root of this capacity. Nor does the concomitant danger of relativism, of which we are warned so frequently in this age of ecumenism, seem to have gained any appreciable inroad into Forest's own philosophy. One final conclusion might be that the courage to carry on such dialogue may eventually lead toward a creative synthesis of scholastic structural explanation, and the more meditative, subjective approach of the philosophers of the spirit.

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1. For Forest's treatment of dialogue, confer his excellent study "La Communication," in *Relazioni introduttive*, Vol.I of Atti del XII Congresso internazionale di filosofia, Venezia, 1958 (Firenze, 1958), pp.159-170. Forest's work on dialogue is the subject of my study "A Philosophic Approach to Dialogue," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, IV (Dec., 1964).