La philosophie [...] commence seulement lorsque [...] elle comprend et pratique le devoir d’épeler lettre par lettre le livre de vie qui s’écrit en nous, d’en dégager les idées directrices, d’en atteindre et d’en assimiler les réalités composantes, de prévoir et de préparer le dénouement.

Blondel

ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the possibility and the statute of the philosophy of life, analysing the problematic relation between conscience and life. This theme, indirectly approached through the theoretical contribution of Blondel, thus focuses on one of the main theoretical topics of French philosophy, shared by Personalism, Existentialism, and Phenomenology of life. From the considerations contained in Le point de départ de la recherche philosophique about the different kinds of knowledge in relation to the human active dimension (prospection and reflection), Blondel reflects on the moral stake and the epistemological essence of philosophy, by considering the alternative interpretations of the relation between life and thought, questioning the possible adaptation of knowledge to the peculiar dynamism of existence. So, the gnosiological issue debouches into a conception of existential auto-conformation, and it shifts the problem of the relation between conscience and life, essential in the light of a definition of the philosophy of life, to the conditions of a lived adequation to truth, thus justifying the affirmation by Jean Lacroix that all “philosophers of existence” implicitly have been Blondel’s continuers.

INTRODUCTION: BLONDEL AS A PRECURSOR OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF EXISTENCE

In What Is Existenz Philosophy? Hannah Arendt¹ poses, at the starting point of the “philosophy of existence”, the idea of the impossibility of the identity of thought and being, as a consequence firstly of the Cartesian lack of faith in their natural harmony, and secondly of the Kantian separation of thought and knowledge.² The breakdown of the “sympathy” between thought and reality inaugurates a deeper task for reflection as a clarification of existence, like in

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the line of Jaspers, in its irreducible tension in relation to thought. However, the centrality of existence in reflection is differently shared by two philosophical approaches, between which it is necessary to make a distinction: existentialism and philosophy of existence. While the first one identifies existence with its mere “act”, with its immediate fact, the second one, in a more complete gnosiological attitude, considers the constitutive openness of existence to a transcendental horizon of sense, to be disclosed by its demand of authenticity. This distinction is useful here to establish the correct ground of the issues to be discussed. The article focuses in fact on the Blondelian conception of the relation between thought and life, thus pointing at his role in the increasing philosophical interest in the essence of philosophy and its possible intrinsic link to life.

The central body of this brief study consists in examining some of the main features of the Blondelian conception of the essence of philosophy of life, thus highlighting an idea of knowledge in terms of lived “adjustment” to truth. In order to do this, the article will follow three main steps: first, the emergence of the question about the reciprocal correspondence of thought and life; secondly, the reformulation of the statute of knowledge in connection with the dynamics of existence; third, the exigency of the idea of personal self-adjustment, as a criterium of truth. These steps highlight respectively the essential features of the problem, the method and the solution to the question about the essence of philosophy, as they emerge in the Blondelian perspective.

THE PROBLEM: HARMONISING THOUGHT AND EXISTENCE

In the Blondelian point of view, the two problems of the relation thought-life on one hand, and the relation human conscience-existence on the other, are part of a larger problem, that is the object and the possible scientific claim of philosophy. The exigency of clarification of the essence and the aim of philosophy implies two different consequences: the examination of the object of philosophical thought and the elucidation of the method to be assumed in order to empower its coherence. As a preliminary step, this question requires us to weigh up the pretension of philosophical knowledge, that is to evaluate the condition of the possibility of thought and its “adherence” to the “world”, in other words to the “genetic” horizon of the phenomenon. Let us consider Blondel’s ideas as they are exposed in Le point de départ de la recherche philosophique (1906).

The central question is put by Blondel on the source of philosophy, its “starting point”. According to a first interpretation, philosophy seems to spring from the need to catch the intrinsic features of the world data. According to another interpretation, philosophy seems structured as result of the application to the conscience of a specific method. Blondel’s solution consists in the attempt