The Religious Dimension of Experience: Gabriel Marcel and American Philosophy

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Boston College

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Department of Philosophy

THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF EXPERIENCE: GABRIEL MARCEL AND AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY

By

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The French philosopher Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) was deeply influenced by the classical tradition of American philosophy. Marcel’s first essays focused upon the philosophy of Josiah Royce (1855-1916). Royce impressed Marcel due to his ability to engage in bold, imaginative construction and yet remain “faithful to the empirical tradition, which he deepened and enriched….” Marcel was also deeply influenced by William Ernest Hocking’s (1873-1966) major work, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience* which, for Marcel, not only reaffirmed the religious dimension of human experience but also served as “an advance in the direction of that metaphysical realism toward which I resolutely tended.” Lastly, Marcel had a sustained personal and philosophical relationship with Henry G. Bugbee Jr. (1915-1999) of the University of Montana. Marcel first met Bugbee at Harvard University while delivering the William James Lectures in 1961. Willard Van Orman Quine described Bugbee as “the ultimate exemplar of the examined life” and Calvin Schrag described him as “the most marginalized philosopher in America.”

Part I consists of a comprehensive examination of Marcel’s philosophy, focusing upon the manner in which his thought exhibits a strong sense of “ontological continuity” – establishing a fundamental relationship between human being and the transcendent. According to Marcel “Finite thought is continually attracted by a beyond which eternally escapes it.” Part I will be followed by three sections (Parts II-IV) devoted to the relationship between Marcel and the thought of Royce, Hocking, and Bugbee.
respectively. The relationship between Marcel and these philosophers is based largely upon their mutual critique of abstract thinking and a shared belief in the presence of a decisive connection between human being and the transcendent. The thesis concludes with Part V entitled “The Religious Dimension of Experience,” which explores the manner in which a select cadre of American philosophers has successfully developed the philosophical implications of Marcel’s work. As Marcel indicated, “Perhaps the most important task on the plane of speculation is to deepen once again the notion of life itself in the light of the highest and most genuine religious thought.”
Acknowledgement

Despite its characterization as a culminating event, the Ph.D. dissertation – especially one in Philosophy – is destined in some degree to incompleteness. As Kant stated at the outset of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, we are implicated in a series of questions which we can neither answer nor ignore. This dissertation bespeaks incompleteness for the very reason Kant identified and for reasons of a more personal nature. As Wittgenstein said: “My spade is turned. This is simply what I do.”

This project is the fulfillment of a life’s work. Beginning graduate studies late in life requires a significant amount of sacrifice. Failure to recognize this would constitute naïveté of the worst kind.

I wish to thank the Philosophy Department at Boston College for acceptance into the Ph.D. program. Graduate seminars with David M. Rasmussen, Oliva Blanchette, and William J. Richardson, S.J. will be remembered as highpoints in my philosophical education. I also would like to express appreciation to David Rasmussen for showing an interest in my work, directing this dissertation, and providing support throughout a long, arduous process. Oliva Blanchette’s careful reading of the penultimate draft helped remove several typographical and textual errors. Any remaining errors are my responsibility.

I wish to dedicate this work to my Mother, Vivian H. Rodick (1932-2008), who made this moment possible.

Portland, Maine
August 2009
You would not find out the boundaries of the soul, even by traveling along every path: so deep a logos does it have.

Heraclitus

A philosopher is a human soul which remembers its own divinity and behaves as becomes a god.

Étienne Gilson

There will be no saying, “Look, here it is! or there it is!” For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

Luke 17:20-21

Truth is simple
But seldom ever seen.
Let nothing come between
Simple man, simple dream.

John David Souther

And then in the desert, when the sun comes up, I couldn't tell where heaven stopped and the earth began.

Forrest Gump

I saw a highway of diamonds and nobody on it.

Bob Dylan
# Table of Contents

**Introduction: The Religious Dimension of Experience: Gabriel Marcel and American Philosophy** ................................................................. 1

**Part I: From a Broken World to Circulating Being: The Transcendent Trajectory of Marcel’s Thought** ................................................................. 30

**Part II: From Idealism to Communitarian Fulfillment: Marcel’s Royce Interpretation** .................................................................................. 102

**Part III: Gabriel Marcel and William E. Hocking: Companions of Eternity** ...................................................................................... 171

**Part IV: An Inward Morning: The Experiential Philosophy of Henry G. Bugbee, Jr.** ................................................................. 227

**Conclusion: The Religious Dimension of Experience: Fertile Ground in the Recent American Landscape** ................................................................. 290

John E. Smith ........................................................................................................ 291
Robert O Johann, S.J. ........................................................................................ 297
Carl G. Vaught ........................................................................................................ 303
John M Anderson .................................................................................................. 310
Robert C. Pollock .................................................................................................. 316
The Future of Philosophy: A Brief Prospective .................................................. 321

Bibliography: ....................................................................................................... 324
Introduction

The Religious Dimension of Experience: Gabriel Marcel and American Philosophy

“Perhaps the most important task on the plane of speculation is to deepen once again the notion of life itself in the light of the highest and most genuine religious thought.”

“A kind of magnetic field stretches around my life … one of the poles of this magnetic field was and remains, in spite of everything, America.”

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Investigational Context

The fact that Marcel’s philosophy has largely been relegated to the dustbin of philosophy bespeaks a very sad state of affairs. Despite his great popularity in the 60’s and 70’s as a “Christian existentialist,” Marcel’s thought currently claims few followers. Due to his emphasis on concreteness and his antipathy to abstraction in any form, Marcel’s writings are often misread as effeminate, unsophisticated, and lacking in philosophical rigor – even by continental standards! Unlike Derrida and other recent French writers, Marcel’s thought has failed to attract a subsequent generation of readers.

This is unfortunate because Marcel’s thought is rich both in its content and its relevance to inter-disciplinary investigations. One aspect of Marcel’s thought that has yet to be explored is its relationship to classical American philosophy. The fact that American philosophy is driven by an appeal to experience in its rich dimensionality allows for an immediate synergy with Marcel’s thought. The purpose of this study is to present Marcel’s thought and its relation to three important American philosophers: Josiah Royce, William Hocking, and Henry Bugbee.

The lines of connection between Marcel and these thinkers are various and rich. Few readers of Marcel are aware that the first philosophical position he embraced was objective idealism. This idealistic orientation gave Marcel a unique vantage point from which to understand and evaluate Royce’s thought. For this reason, the essays that comprise the Royce monograph – perhaps the least known of all Marcel’s writings – remain to this day a gold standard in Royce studies. Yet despite the idealistic tenor of his work on Royce, Marcel was clearly moving away from his idealistic orientation towards what he referred to as “metaphysical realism.” This shift in perspective was a direct result of his exposure to Hocking’s *The Meaning of God in Human Experience* – a monumental work emphasizing the primacy of intersubjective relations. Perhaps the closest thing to an American equivalent to Gabriel Marcel is Henry Bugbee. Marcel’s important notions of *ontological exigence* and *secondary reflection* are given concrete testimonial in Bugbee’s work, approaching a level of experiential intensity not seen in American thought since Edwards and Thoreau. According to Marcel, “Henry Bugbee and I inhabit the same land … [a land] illuminated by a light of its own.”

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**Thematic Orientation**

The religious dimension of experience provides an ideal theme around which to orient Marcel’s thought in its American context. Experience in its religious dimensionality is multivalent, requiring a series of interconnected perspectives for its proper disclosure. While any phenomenological description of experience must remain

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incomplete, the following themes represent the most integral dimensions of experience in its manifestation as religious.

**A Broken World**

The recognition of experience in its religious capacity occurs within the context of what Marcel aptly refers to as a “broken world.” In the course of day to day living, our primary mode of relating to the world is functional. Marcel characterizes this mode of relatedness as “primary reflection” – things are abstracted from their animating context and visualized simply through the immediate function they serve within a restricted network of efficient causality. Despite their role within a causal chain, things disclosed strictly from within a functional context appear fragmented. In religious terms, the experience of the pragmatization of human beings and relations is referred to as profane. According to Marcel, “what is indeed meaningful, what reveals a spiritual life, is always a variation in habits, the breaking of a rhythm which seemed inalterable.” Religious experience – in its binding capacity as religio – discloses the entire telic context within which a thing persists. Since this context is ultimately spiritual – reflecting an animating source that is inexplicable in simply materialistic terms – a thing is spiritually disclosed when it is revealed on a plane that is other than material. Experience of this kind is deemed sacred – reflective of being. From a Marcellian perspective, being reveals a surplus that cannot be dissolved or explained away by mathematical-physical explanation – “a tension which could only … be resolved in an illumination [that] comes from some point much higher than man”. As one commentator has insightfully remarked: “the vitality of [Marcel’s] work … has to do, I think, with the intuition that the infinite is

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5 *Awakenings*: 109. Marcel will refer to this tension as “the exigience of Being.”
reflected in one’s private life. “6

Marcel’s view of the world as broken stemmed from witnessing the devastation resulting from two world wars – worlds at war are necessarily broken worlds. But a world can be broken in ways other than physically. The sense of homelessness that results from large displaced populations, bureaucratically administered social policies, and overcrowded mega-cities all contribute to a broken, fragmented type of existence. This darker side of modernity tends to be explained away callously through such trite phrases as “efficient and effective,” and “the law of large numbers” – but Marcel will not tolerate any “spirit of abstraction” whose goal is merely to blind us to the horrors inhabiting the concrete. The peripatetic nature of Marcel’s thought – sinuous and winding – enabled him to experientially grasp these horrors of modern life. Marcel’s appeal to secondary reflection in its recuperative capacity – a radical maneuver according to the standards of contemporary philosophy – constitutes an attempt to heal this sense of fragmentation by reconnecting human existence with its animating source in being: “remaking, thread by thread, the spiritual fabric heedlessly torn.” 7 The sense of fragmentation that weighs upon the human species is the material expression of an infinitely more essential degradation having to do with the fact that humanity has been cut off from what Marcel refers to as our “ontological roots.”

Royce died in 1916, shortly after the beginning of World War I. His philosophical corpus reflects an acute sense of the volatile state of world affairs – in fact, the rapid deterioration of his health has been attributed to the outbreak of the war. The Roycean notion of “prophetic pragmaticism,” as exemplified in his writings on loyalty and

community, is a direct response to the looming prospect of a world teetering on the brink of destruction.

A broken world, from a Roycean perspective, is a world that has lost its reverence for the relations of life. It is commonly known that Royce grew up in a mining town in California during the gold rush era. This experience gave Royce a deep sense of relations, both natural and communal. From his earliest writings his objective is to reunite a world torn asunder by truncation. Nowhere is this monumental effort at reconstruction more evident than in the First Series of his Gifford Lectures entitled The Four Historical Conceptions of Being. Realism, Mysticism, and Critical Idealism are doctrinally incapable of accounting for the infinite series of relations that constitute the real – they simply cannot mend a broken world. In order to reunite the world in terms of the full scope of its relationality, one must embrace either a system of Absolute Idealism – as depicted in The World and the Individual – or, perpetually engage in the interpretive disclosure of the divine Logos à la Apostle Paul – as stated in The Problem of Christianity. Royce’s thought underwent definite stages to be sure, but each stage was a response to a broken world.

Hocking was also profoundly aware of the existence of a broken world – his notion of a “coming world civilization” reflects his attempt to reunite humanity through a peri-Christian, albeit non-sectarian, approach to solidarity. A world civilization must overcome the brokenness and fragmentation of the present – a condition tragically exacerbated by what is currently referred to as globalization. For Hocking, the key to achieving the unity required for a genuine sense of community lies in disclosing experience in its intersubjective integrity – “I” and “Thou” existing as co-knowers of a
shared world. This sense of sharedness provides the “refractory kernel” of Hocking’s metaphysics – the cement needed to repair our sense of brokenness: “[I]t is God from the beginning who shares all of our objects and so is the real medium of communication between one person and another.” Religious experience, for Hocking, is realized within the foreground of experience, under a “cloud of witness.”

Henry Bugbee writes sparingly about the details of a broken world, although he does make occasional references to growing up in New York City “within the yearning bleakness of solitariness and milling multitudes.” Bugbee’s life and work, however, provide a compelling testimony as to the importance of the leading an examined life, offering a courageous example as to how one might pursue living so as to recover a world that is no longer broken. Having been denied tenure at Harvard University for lack of scholarly output, Bugbee migrated to Montana – the mountains and river providing phenomenological evidence as to the continuous nature of being. Authentic living, in a Bugbean sense, recognizes that the real is non-inferentially given and the need to “weigh everything by the measure of the silent pressure of things, clarified by the cry of the hawks, solidified in the presence of rocks, spelled syllable by syllable by waters of manifold voice, and consolidated in the act of taking steps.”

A Return to Experience

The traditional empirical conception of experience is inadequate when it comes to demonstrating the rich dimensionality of experience. Lockean empiricism simply cannot register the syllables made by “waters of manifold voice.” A re-conception of experience

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10 *The Inward Morning*: 139.
is required. Marcel recognized this very early in life when, in the wake of the death of his mother, he confided to his aunt that he would “find out” about the nature of the spiritual afterlife. As he reflected later – “It would be a mistake to take those childhood words lightly, in some ways they determined the course I was to take.”1

Marcel’s course consisted of traversing experience on multiple levels. Parapsychology, music, and drama provide just a few examples of the unconventional routes Marcel explored in order to illuminate the vast potential of what experience is capable of yielding when examined in depth. In fact, Marcel remains adamant that experience resists spatial and ocular representation:

I am not a spectator who is looking for a world of structures susceptible to being viewed clearly and distinctly, but rather I listen to voices and appeals comprising that symphony of Being—which is for me, in the final analysis, a supra-rational unity beyond images, words, and concepts.12

Despite his being labeled a dyed in the wool idealist, Royce displays a profound appreciation of experience. Perhaps no greater compliment can come from anyone other than Marcel: “Royce, with an eclecticism which by no means implies feebleness of thought, searched for his solutions wheresoever he found authentic and profound intellectual experience, wheresoever he felt a direct contact with that reality in which we bathe and outside of which we are nothing.”13 Royce possessed a catholic intellect – the poetry of Browning, Eastern mysticism, the latest developments in mathematical logic – little escaped his voracious capacity for assimilation. Unlike those who have used the tools of logic to narrow the scope of philosophical investigation, Royce stands out as one

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12 Ibid.: 82-83.
13 Royce’s Metaphysics: xvi. See also “Author’s Preface to the English Edition,” in Metaphysical Journal, trans. B. Wall (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1952), p. vii: “[B]eing cannot be indicated, it cannot be shown, it can only be alluded to….
who was able to appropriate the developments in logic for speculative purposes. Take, for example, his creative use of Dedekind’s notion of a “self-representative system.” A self-representative system is able to capture the Absolute \textit{totum simul} by virtue of its ability to “contain a complete and perfect image or view of itself. Hence it is, in structure, at once One, as a single system, and also and endless \textit{Kette} [i.e. series]…..”\footnote{14} Royce argued that the Absolute – far from being completely other-worldly – was susceptible to concrete representation. This characterization of a self-representative system as “One” and “endless” at the same time serves as the basis upon which Royce develops the notion of an individual as a fulfilled life plan – a unique and complete teleologically-defined moment of existence.

Hocking refers to his brand of empiricism as \textit{absolute} because experience grasps the world as “one stupendous fact.” Despite his training as an engineer, Hocking preferred biological explanations over mechanical accounts. Religious experience qualifies as religious to the extent that it consists of “in-letting, or osmosis, between the human spirit and the living tissue wherein it is eternally carried.”\footnote{15} This process of experiential osmosis is a result of our capacity for feeling – feeling and ideation are organically continuous. Through the satisfaction of feeling, ideas are given the capacity to stretch and coalesce with their object, allowing for a “\textit{perfect continuity} between prophecy and fulfillment.”\footnote{16} While he recognizes the valuational capacity of the subject to shape our understanding of the real, Hocking remains ultimately a realist by

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\footnote{16} \textit{Ibid.} 68. See also p. 135: Feeling “constitutes the very \textit{tour de force of objectivity}.”
\end{flushleft}
emphasizing the priority of being. Reality is ultimately spiritual, but “the finite knower knows realistically; the being of the object is prior to his own.”

Bugbee views experience intuitively as an act of sympathetic engagement that is able to penetrate the deep recesses of the world: “When we place our ears close to the stream of life we do not hear the ticking of segregated consecutive instants but rather a constant hum, a mingling of harmonies interposed by epoch changes in key and imperceptible blends.” The subject is naturally open to presence. The world does not “stand against” us in the form of an object (Gegenstand): “Experience is permeated with meaning by invasion.” This notion of experience is counter to the traditional conception of a passive tabula rasa in which a detached spectator registers images upon the film-like membrane of consciousness. A subject undergoes a process of immersion “with complete absorption … being comprehended and sustained in a universal situation.” Experience assumes the character of an interactive, reflexive process – in Dewey’s phrase an “affair of affairs” – through which subject and object are so co-constituted that human being and knowing are brought to bear most directly on the development of one another.

**Reflexive Capacity of Experience**

The reflexive capacity of experience is a discovery of major importance for each of these thinkers. Experience is bi-directional – possessing both centripetal and centrifugal axes. Traditional accounts of experience have focused upon its centrifugal axis, serving as a source of connection between the subject and the “outside” world.

However, reflexive experience also exhibits an interior, centripetal axis which is

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17 Ibid.: 571.
19 *The Inward Morning*: 41.
20 Ibid.: 51-52.
extremely rich in its disclosive capacity. When the subject is experientially impacted by an event, a mental response of some kind occurs – an image, sensation, idea, or thought. Qua mental (Geistigkeit), these affective responses potentially elevate the subject into the realm of spirit (Geist), revealing a vast reservoir of being that exceeds the reach of the material. At the spiritual level, life gives birth to something more than itself. When a self becomes vivified by an idea – stung by it – a quickening of self-consciousness occurs. Through the reflexive act of reflection our ideational capacity is enhanced. This human capacity for perpetually increasing the scope of reflexion constitutes the cognitive side of mystical experience – a grafting of the flesh onto the spirit. As Emerson said, “Let a man fall into his divine circuits, and he is enlarged. Obedience to his genius is the only liberating influence.”

Marcel’s emphasizes the fecund relationship existing between reflexivity and what he refers to as coesse – interactive participation in being. Participation consists of an active reception or “inward relaxation” in which the subject becomes de-centered, fused with a “fructifying,” ontological dimension which defies any form of articulation from within the restricted register of primary reflection. Secondary reflection consists of the intra-experiential attempt to trace these intrauterine contours of experience to their furthest reaches – a dimension which can only be conceived dynamically: “[This] recurring … inevitable spiral character of intellectual motion … is one of the constants of my thought.”

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Royce turns to the reflexive dimension of experience to counter the fragmentation resulting from our quotidian tendency to combine narrow thinking and vigorous action. Intricate series of relations are truncated. Finite consciousness must become unhinged from its functional limitations in order to fulfill its complete realization. For Royce, “every single power sends us beyond itself for the interpretation of the meaning of the whole.” The significance of the “Fourth Conception of Being” – Absolute Idealism – lies in its ability to conceptually envision the entire relational expanse that is spread before us in the form of the unique life-plan of a human being. If the “upshot” of a particular experience consists of the qualitative impact it exhibits within the course of one’s life, then the experiential upshot of experience, from a Roycean perspective, consists of the apex of meaning derived from an infinite weave of possible relations. This ability to articulate the infinite in finite form discloses the divine aspect of human existence: “The sun of true Being has risen before our eyes … and we shall enter at last the homeland.”

Hocking and Bugbee are also attentive to experience in its reflexive depth. What is deemed to be merely “subjective feeling” exhibits a universal resonance across the experiential spectrum. Hocking once remarked that “man is born in the freedom and unity of the Spirit, but everywhere he is in the chains of bodily separation….” Through traversing the reflexive contours of experience, one is able reestablish one’s primordial unity qua spirit: “[T]he kingdom of philosophical truth is within…. A recall to such self-

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knowledge … is one of the perennial functions of philosophy.”

For Bugbee, experience exhibits its reflexive capacity in the form of a movement beyond. By returning to the rich depths of experience reflectively, we are able to recollect a sense of unity that consists of being radically sustained in being with being – “[a] light dawns upon us in the light of which we become enlightened in our relationship with [things], as they dawn on us as given in that light.”

The self emerges within this reflexive happening – spirit reveals itself perspectivally through limited acts of self disclosure. For both Hocking and Bugbee, reflexive experience is a function of a heightened consciousness of the self. As Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 6:19 – “You are not your own … your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.” In Hocking’s terms, “I am in thy great room of thy soul; and I experience thy very experience.”

The Primacy of Intersubjective Being

The primacy of intersubjective being constitutes a vital concern for each of these thinkers. For modern philosophy beginning with Cartesian dualism, intersubjectivity posed an almost insurmountable problem. Husserlian phenomenology, with its primary emphasis upon the intentionality of consciousness, was initially seen as offering a solution. Husserl conceived cognitive intentions are primary – being is identified with the object qua known within the transcendental ego. Intersubjective being becomes, at best, a second level, derivate type of intention. For Husserl, intersubjectivity is a thematic problem to be phenomenologically overcome as opposed to a fundamental datum existing.

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28 *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*: 266. See also p. 542: “[P]sychical categories are complementary to physical categories.”
ontologically prior to any attempt to solve it as a problem. Instead of a problem requiring a solution, intersubjective being is a given, or *Gegebensein*, to be embraced.

Royce provides an example of the approach to intersubjectivity as a problem by viewing intersubjectivity as possible only on the condition of the existence of a “third” – either the Absolute, *à la World and the Individual*, or the set of universal symbols through which the Absolute was disclosed, *à la The Problem of Christianity*. According to Royce, we have no direct empirical knowledge of ourselves or of other minds. As one commentator remarked, “For Royce, individuals are like the monads of Leibniz except that they are not entirely windowless. They have a skylight to the Absolute…. The line of communication between Royce and his neighbor is always indirect.”

Royce’s position was deemed untenable by both Hocking and Marcel. While still under Royce’s tutelage at Harvard, Hocking argued for an extended conception of empirical knowledge that includes an awareness of oneself as well as another “and so admit an element of realism within the ideal totality.”

Marcel would seize upon this fundamental insight of Hocking as well, claiming that this “provocative accent on intersubjectivity … challenged Proust’s monadism.” Both Marcel and Hocking proceeded to emphasize the sheer immediacy of intersubjective being that resides “out front” within the foreground of experience. Marcel describes this immediate feeling of togetherness as: “We become simply us.” According to Hocking, “I can imagine no contact more real and thrilling than this.”

31 *Awakenings*: 72.
33 *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*: 266.
From his years spent at sea, Bugbee realized that human beings are deeply susceptible to existing in communion with others. To use a term of Marcel’s, we are *disponible*. As Kant indicated, our dignity as human beings elevates us to a level surpassing that of phenomenal being, allowing the self to exceeding its physical boundaries and to participate in the wider dimension of spiritual life. The Gospel according to John 3:8 expresses this diffusive aspect of spirit in the statement: “The wind bloweth where it listeth.” For Bugbee, our capacity for spirit enables the subject to exist intersubjectively by “partak[ing] in thought of the closed circuit of reality in which we live and move and have our being.”

The Quest for Wholeness

Each of these thinkers views philosophy as an activity of synthetic reconstruction. This is not to say that they are simply against analysis *per se* – analysis is seen as an important technique for enabling things to be viewed in their isolated particularity, extracted out of the larger context within which they exist. This process of isolating a particular from its larger context of associations is referred to as abstraction – from the Latin verb *abstraho*, meaning “to drag away from or remove forcibly.” Abstraction strips an object of any characteristics other than those which are conventionally deemed to constitute its essential identity. But a thing cannot be reduced to a set of defining characteristic – a thing is able to assume an essential character only on the basis of its wider associations. This tendency towards abstraction assumes the character of

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34 *The Inward Morning*: 169.
viciousness when the qualities that are eliminated through the act of abstraction are viewed as a minor form of collateral damage or, worst of all, the recognition that any qualities have been eliminated is completely lost.

An appeal must be made to a sense of the whole in order to protect the complex relational character of being from excision under the knife of abstraction – a thousand deaths by one cut! Marcel’s approach to reconstructing a sense of the whole is through the vehicle of secondary reflection. Whereas primary reflection analyzes data for the purpose of analysis and segmentation, secondary reflection is *recueillement* or recuperative – seeking higher unities associated with overall structures, organic wholes and intelligible syntheses without which physical being would not be recognizable. Marcel was very much influenced by the philosophy of Louis Lavelle who viewed the finite self as primordially inscribed within being – “la présence actuelle et inévitable de la totalité de l’être en chaque point.”35 This sense of being inscribed within being must not be conceived in otherworldly terms. As Marcel once remarked, it is a “[r]eturn to the here and now, which recover an unparallel dignity and worth.”36

Royce’s appeal to a sense of the whole is initially adumbrated through his emphasis upon the internal meaning of an idea and its *whole fulfillment* when viewed within the context of an infinite series of relations. The significance of an idea is completely fulfilled through a process of tracing the infinite series in which it is implicated – culminating in the Absolute. At this elevated vantage point, truth and being are defined in one stroke: “All finite experience must be regarded as a fragment of a

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whole, whose content is present in the unity of consciousness of one absolute moment."37

The later Royce will abandon the notion of a whole conceived *totum simul* within the conspectus of the Absolute’s eternal regard. Adopting a more historical approach, Royce came to view the Absolute as revealed developmentally by virtue of its ongoing interpretative disclosure through the acts of finite minds *sub specie aeternitatis*. As a result of Its perpetual diversification at the hands of finite interpreters, the Absolute becomes a perfectly ordered system over an extended period of time.

Hocking’s thought is thematically centered upon an understanding of the whole. Displaying his prior training as an engineer, Hocking equates “the whole” to a textile loom: “In the beginning was, at least, *the Loom*; and always remains the simple-total frame of things….”38 The loom weaves a fabric that exhibits an intricate texture but, once produced, the weave exhibits no visible sign of the loom. For Hocking, the loom’s presence is felt as a “non-impulsive background.” An understanding of the whole is not derived genetically, it is felt *all at once*: Reality, in its full infinity and wholeness, is now before me and has been so from my conscious beginning.”39 By re-tracing the guiding threads contained within the intricate texture of experience, one can recollect a sense of “*the Loom*” – the source of created being. As Hocking expresses this process: “We are looking for man and we found God.”40

Bugbee’s sense of the whole is reflected through his use of the concept of the sublime. The sublime is disclosed in those instances in which experience conveys a looming sense of the infinite. Being is not susceptible to systematic comprehensiveness –

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40 *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*: 301.
categories of limitation are simply not applicable: “The mystery of each thing is the mystery of all things; and this … is the foundation of the universe: the omnirelevance of the experience of something as sacred.”41 Since his days as an undergraduate, Bugbee wrestled with the problem as to how to articulate the importance of the sublime as a philosophical category. Recognizing the limitations of philosophy narrowly conceived: “I am afraid I will have to break the confines of the medium, for images and a full conscious life beckon me more than their purified reflection – ideas.”42 Bugbee makes an heroic appeal to the splendor of things in their simplicity. By experientially appealing to the fundamental vividness of things, we are able to witness the incarnation of meaning at a foundational level:

Not such as this, but this. So long as this is taken as such as … one has not yet responded to this. This, indeed only sinks in as we are involved with it at a level or depth appreciative of its mystery.43

**Being as Creative**

The difficulty of articulating the whole representationally can be overcome through the capacity of the human being to exist creatively. Here it is best to begin with Royce. Perhaps the most vexing issue with which Royce had to contend during the period of *The World and the Individual* was the problem of how to reconcile the idea of personal freedom with the notion of the individual as a completely fulfilled life plan – a plan consummated in the Absolute. Much is at stake in whether or not a “total accord” between the Absolute and the individual can be realized. This issue would ultimately force a shift in Royce’s thought, but his initial solution to the problem involved having the individual life plan qualitatively effect the countenance of Absolute being: “[T]his

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41 *The Inward Morning*: 209.
42 *In Demonstration of the Spirit*: 5.
43 *The Inward Morning*: 225.
individual’s experience … when metaphysically viewed is a *unique* experience, and consequently a unique constituent of the Divine life … and therefore metaphysically necessary to the fulfillment of God’s own life….”

In short, if I were otherwise, then so too would be God be!

Marcel is critical of Royce’s attempt to meld a realistic personalism with an idealistic monism: “[Does] this theory not leave us with a ruinous dualism by reestablishing on a higher level … the barriers it claimed to have broken down forever … [making] individuals proceed from God and … in the end reducing them to being nothing but Ideas, no longer Acts, i.e. ends which in the deepest sense create or deposit themselves.”

From Marcel’s perspective, Royce must modify his theory by jettisoning the notion of divine omniscience. For those who are familiar with the course of Royce’s thought, this modification assumes the form of a shift from a notion of an all-inclusive Absolute to a more historically mediated conception. As Marcel’s remarkable conversion to Catholicism at the age of 41 exhibited, the relationship between God and a person is one of individual to individual and “this act partakes more of faith than of abstract thought.”

At this juncture that the Roycean doctrine of loyalty takes center stage. The *act* of participatively engaging in loyal service – praxis – unconstrained by the categorical divisions of discursive thought, allows for a more concrete connection between finite and infinite being. The act of loyal participation is ontologically significant both in terms of the finite moment and the eternal life plan. Without participating within the context of a wider community, the finite individual would simply not *be* at all. If an individual does

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44 *The Conception of God*: 293.
45 *Royce’s Metaphysics*: 59.
46 *Ibid.*: 73.
not belong to a genuine community of some kind, the heart may emit a beat but otherwise it is effectively dead: “Individuality is like a ferment. Introduce a germ of it into your world … and the universe soon swarms as with yeast, and individuality bubbles out everywhere.” But what is most important in this context is the fact that the act by which a person determines oneself is the very same act by which God is. Human beings are now viewed as assuming a greater degree of control over the direction their finite plan takes. No longer absorbed within an eternal cycle, human beings creatively serve themselves, their community, and God at the same time. The synchronic characterization of eternal time as *totum simul* has now been replaced by a more developmental, diachronic conception. The dualism between finite and Absolute consciousness is overcome through a relationship of reciprocity – the Absolute is to the extent that I serve it loyally within the context of my community. Intersubjective being is no longer mediated through a skylight to the Absolute. Royce is attempting to merge metaphysics and ethics in a way that will emphasize relations between living beings beneath the wide and sunny heavens above – “We need a new heaven and a new earth.”

Marcel’s notion of creativity is built upon his concept of creative fidelity – the *pons aeternitatis* of his thought. Fidelity reveals the supra-temporal identity of the self: “the evidence of fixed stars in the heaven of the soul.” This identity is not given apriori – it must be creatively achieved. Our freedom is achieved during the course of those significant acts in which we re-create, or attest to, our being qua spirit: “Through fidelity

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47 *The Conception of God*: 258. Considered outside of its role in an animating community, the individual is “otherwise dead and [exhibits the] stubbornly universal categories of merely abstract theory.
I transcend my becoming and reach my being…. Fidelity creates the self, the self as non-object.”

From his work with Royce while a student at Harvard, Hocking was convinced that all ideas contain an “uncounted infinity.” Through its capacity for framing ideas, the self has the ability to extend indefinitely, always able to regain contact in medias res with a world of which it is pre-reflectively an integral part. For Hocking, “the real is permanent and ancient as well as germinal and creative.” The objectivity of nature is due to the fact that it exists as an “Other Mind” or a self-in-its-otherness. For this reason, nature shines by a reflected light, not by its own.” The objectivity of nature provides the “irruptive material” that is integral to creation of the human being as it develops spiritually. To the extent that the finite self interacts with nature in the latter’s capacity as a self-in-otherness, the finite self creatively advances through the infusion of spiritual capital. Within the region of Absolute mind “spirits wander as shapes embedded.”

The ontological dimension of human creativity is expressed as early as Bugbee’s undergraduate thesis. The “teleological autonomy” of the noumenal self is instantiated through a unity of moral purpose. The immense variety of creative attempts to forge meaning throughout history is the universal. The activity of creating meaning is “a unique and tremendously significant mode of communication rivaling pure conceptualization as an interpretation of Reality … for the aesthetic experience can be as intensely and widely synthetic as any consciousness of which man is capable.”

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51 The Meaning of God in Human Experience: 46.
52 Ibid.: 285.
53 Ibid.: 298.
54 In Demonstration of the Spirit: 54.
Bugbee’s empirical approach to metaphysics bespeaks a conception of being that is vivified through the rich infusions of sense perception. In order for something to be present, it must stand forth with a degree of impact, enabling it to stand out within the experiential field. Being may be constant but “through uneven stresses the even plane of being [becomes] tilted and faulted to meet the eye.” Sense experience must also exhibit a sense of poise able to modulate the intensity of impact. Impact and poise are complementary moments of our sense of being.

This sense of being puts us on the spot: “One is brought to realize one is held within the embrace of what is proffered in its being proffered… [We are] sponsored from within a depth underlying our own ability to respond.” The human capacity to respond from a greater source provides the foundation for a non-egotistical version of “self-respect.” As we attend to our kindred relationship with animating things, we emerge together in unison within being. According to Bugbee: “The truly creative deed of man seems to be that of which he becomes lucid to himself as a creature of creation. Creation can only be understood through participation in it.”

**Apotheosis of Human Consciousness: Human Being as Spirit**

This sense of mutuality engendered through “reflexive reflection,” between human beings, divine being, and the things of nature, has significant ramifications. Robert Pollock characterizes this process of moving from a closed world to an infinite universe as an all embracing drama:

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57 *The Inward Morning*: 222, 223. See also “Thoughts on Creation,” in *Essays in Philosophy*, eds. Members of The Philosophy Department of The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State University Press, 1962), p. 135: “We become ourselves—truly ourselves—in willing participation in creation. We cannot conceive of creation in terms apart from our participation in it.”
But what a drastic alteration in perspective when men can envisage a wide open world in which development, spontaneity and novelty are entirely at home! Given this new image of the universe, experimentation and creativity are endowed with a new dignity, for they have gained a status within nature itself. Now looked on as essential aspects of a growing world, they speak with an authority to which [human being] gladly responds.\footnote{Robert C. Pollock, “Process and Experience,” in \textit{John Dewey: His Thought and Influence}, ed. J. Blewett (Fordham University Press, 1961): 165. See infra, where Pollock states: “[T]here has taken place a kind of ‘nuclear fission’ within the human soul itself.”}

As the human being responds accordingly to its burgeoning creative potential, a major transformation occurs, ontologically speaking, placing a person at the liminal boundary between material and spiritual being. At this moment, human being approaches its teleological fulfillment as spirit.

Through a reflexive connection with spirit, one is able to re-establish one’s place within the eternal whole. Like Bergson, Marcel believed that “Something appears to overflow every part of the body … passing beyond it in space as in time…. The soul … being precisely a force which can draw from itself more than it contains, yield more than it receives, give more than it has.”\footnote{Henri Bergson, \textit{Mind-Energy: Lectures and Essays}, trans. H.W. Carr (Henry Holt and Company, 1920): 38, 39. See also, p. 56: “Put aside, then, artificial reconstructions of thinking; consider thinking itself, you will find directions rather than states…. [T]hinking is essentially a continual and continuous change of inward direction, incessantly tending to translate itself by changes of outward direction…."

\textit{Homo Viator}: 60. See also \textit{Being and Having}, p. 80: “Hope is perhaps the very stuff by which our soul is made.”} Our capacity for hope provides a concrete example of this phenomenon in which material causality is superseded. Unlike desire, where one focuses upon the pursuit of a material thing, hope consists of a process whereby the self grasps its being in its immediacy, interiorizing itself within the total spiritual economy: “I hope in thee for us.”\footnote{Homo Viator: 60. See also \textit{Being and Having}, p. 80: “Hope is perhaps the very stuff by which our soul is made.”} To truly exist, for Marcel, is to recognize the need to perpetually re-absorbing oneself into the realm of spirit. In Marcellian terms, telepathy allows for the traversing of space just as memory allows for the traversing of time. No longer simply a return to the past, an appeal is made to the future as well: “[T]his region where the now
and then tend to merge … could be nothing other than Eternity.”61 According to Richard Kroner, “… the present is the meeting point (Schnittpunkt) of time and eternity, the point in which time itself arises….62

The emergence of finite and infinite being is evident throughout Royce’s thought. What the finite self perceives in a fragmented, incomplete manner, the Absolute – through its capacity of appreciative apperception – is able to apprehend “both as a successive order and as a totality.”63 In order to understand the meter of poetry or the composition of a melody, the whole succession must somehow be present at once to consciousness. The beginning and the end – although not the same – are synthetically linked within one whole succession.

Levels of experience, integrally linked and teleologically ordered, lead to an appreciation of Absolute being. What appears to the stark realist as a world of opaque, “fragmentary givens,” now, upon reflection, appears as a universe that is experientially integrated – intelligent, albeit not always pellucid to the finite gaze. In World and the Individual, Royce conceived this integration speculatively, but his speculative solution to the relationship between the one and the many – the finite and the infinite – left many, including Royce himself, with a gnawing sense of inadequacy. A more concrete approach is necessary. This integration of the finite and the finite is no longer accomplished vertically in totum simul under the synoptic gaze of Absolute conspection. Integration is now achieved horizontally through interpretive disclosure. The self-representative

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61 Mystery of Being: Reflection and Mystery, Volume I (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company: 1960): 194. I am reminded of the line from the Lennon-McCartney composition Two of Us: “You and I have memories longer than the road that stretches out ahead.”
63 RM: 80. See infra: “[E]veryday experience, in the apperception of succession, gives us the image, almost the pattern, of what eternity may be.”
Dedekindian *Kette* is now dynamically reconfigured as the arrival of a universal community “in which the whole order of time, the process of the spirit, is … so interpreted that, when viewed in the light of its goal, the whole world is reconciled to its own purpose.”⁶⁴ This is a “living reason” unified and directionally inspired by the Holy Spirit – resulting in a kingdom of heaven on earth.

Taking his bearings from Peirce, the later Royce viewed the whole as achieved through a process of mutual understanding that “is in some fashion spanned by one insight which surveys the unity of its meaning … [embodying] the form of a Community of Interpretation….”⁶⁵ The essence of a human *being* is to be mutually implicated, through the power of interpretation, in the progressive odyssey of spirit: “The natural world [is] infinite in space and time and … the salvation of man [is] bound up with the interpretation of an infinitely rich realm of spiritual life….”⁶⁶ The teleological fulfillment of this process of self-interpretation – both human and divine – is a Beloved Community consisting of “the kingdom in which all hermeneutic acts receive immediate confirmation and seal.”⁶⁷ This sense of community is achieved through the reconciliation of diverse perspectives via interpretive mediation. At this prophetic moment, humankind stands within the horizon of a new dawn in which “self-realization and fulfillment pass from the sphere of ideality to that of concrete realization.”⁶⁸ Royce’s later philosophy can be seen as an attempt to integrate the essential teachings of Christianity into the life of a people in order to enrich spirit.

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⁶⁴ *RM*: 144.
⁶⁶ *PC*: 402.
Marcel once referred to Hocking as a companion of eternity. Like his colleague Whitehead, Hocking stressed the *vector* character of feeling – the forward, intentional direction feeling assumes as it strives to “meet the total object-over against-me.”69 This sense of something greater – the whole – constitutes our spiritual destiny:

The truth is the healing fact of which we are in search, a fact as simple, as ever-present, and as easily overlooked as the fact of one’s own existence. It is accessible to every man … on the same terms; yet it falls short of being notorious common knowledge because of the same single-eyed industriousness of inquiry which loses sight of the soul…. It is the truth that the world, like the human self, has its unity in a living purpose. It is the truth of the existence of God.70

In order to appreciate the spiritual dimension of Hocking’s thought, it is necessary to touch upon his appropriation of “field theory.” The field within which various sub-systems are related is not a function of events within any finite system. In other words, experience is the great matrix out of which all distinctions arise, but it is itself not wholly identical in nature with any of its contents. The mind serves as a *vinculum*, or link, between possible systems and, as such, cannot be a function of events within any one nature-system. Naturalism is unable to provide an ultimate description of fact. Metaphysical idealism provides the only adequate account of the self – not merely as a *field of fields*, but as a concrete event determining the field of fields: “The self is free from the single-series determination of whatever it makes its object.”71

Unlike the body which is situated within a natural field and subject to the laws of space, time, and causality, the mind is endowed with the gift of envisioning multiple spaces and a span of time that extends into the past as well as the future. Through the powerful reach of the mind, the self has unique ability to be “*space-free* … [and] time-

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71 SBF: 155.
free, as the body is not.”\footnote{SBF: 31, 35. See pp. 30-31: “[T]he mind is capable of thinking of not only all-of-space but, but also of more than one such space-total, as, let us say, the space of waking hours and the space of some dream…. Plural spaces are related only \textit{via} the self. The relation of the self to its space-worlds is not a spatial relation.”} It is through our ability to com-prehend – “grasping-things-together” – that holds the key to the \textit{potential divinity} of the individual soul. This potentiality is reflected in the meaning of the phrase “Thy Kingdom come.” Aquinas recognized this very fact when he stated that the purpose of the human being was to gather, or collect (\textit{colligere}), finite instances of knowledge so that the great chain of being could become \textit{universum} – turned towards unity. Without this ability to synthetically integrate experience at the spiritual level “we might forever pass in review our shard bits of knowledge as in some nightmare quiz show….”\footnote{Louis O. Mink, “History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension,” in \textit{New Literary History}, Vol. 1, 1970: 553.}

According to Bugbee, we must “steadfastly bend our minds to the conception of being….”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}: 217.} Such bending does not require engaging in abstract speculation or otherworldly mysticism. We must attend to our inclusive situation \textit{hic et nunc} through an intensive analysis of the concrete world. Ultimate features of experience must be elicited into view. Bugbee’s point is both simple and profound: We do possess knowledge of \textit{fact} and fact confronts us in its definiteness. But with Descartes and Kant, knowledge has lost its “empirical compulsion” – its ontological force of determination. Without any sense of empirical compulsion, our knowledge “is simply cast adrift unless we actually moor it to its proper mooring, which is supplied by the metaphysical conception of being.”\footnote{SCB: 277.}

Knowledge makes contact with the real through a direct awareness of presence – a presence which is indicative of being. Philosophy must begin, not with technical terms, metaphysical abstractions or “second order” levels of discourse – philosophy must begin

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{SBF} SBF: 31, 35. See pp. 30-31: “[T]he mind is capable of thinking of not only all-of-space but, but also of more than one such space-total, as, let us say, the space of waking hours and the space of some dream…. Plural spaces are related only \textit{via} the self. The relation of the self to its space-worlds is not a spatial relation.”
\bibitem{SCB} \textit{Ibid.}: 217.
\end{thebibliography}
with a consideration of the things themselves: “Lest the simplicity of being and the
abstractness of its conception be confused with vacuity or met with indifference, let the
sense of being reaffirm its significance in human experience.” Leaping trout in
Montana, a chapel bell ringing in Harvard Yard, a kamikaze pilot in the South Pacific –
all are indices of the intensive panorama of being: “The extensive wholeness of reality is
founded on an intensive wholeness.”

Bugbee focuses attention upon the dynamic tendency of experience: “A thing is as
much a center of energy as it is a center of qualitative definiteness … a creative advance
… hylicly singular and related beyond itself.” The story of Job consists of a case-study
of experience as tendential – singular and yet related beyond itself – an “aquiescence in
spirit.” The lesson to be learned from the story of Job is the need to transcend calculative
explanation and embrace the realization of an absolute source of things. The openness
exemplified by Job – a mode of comportment that we too can choose to embrace – is the
key to achieving a kind of grace which has a cleansing effect, recalling us to our senses:
“Thinking dedicated to essential truth seems consummated only as it is graced … [by] an
unanticipated precipitation of meaning.” Job is able to effectively regain a sense of
stasis within his life by reinscribing the sheer immediacy of the present – an immediacy
expressing what was there all along – within a context of the higher unity of spirit. As
Job realized at the end of his ordeal: “I have spoken about great things which I have not
understood…. I knew of thee only by report, but now I see with my own eyes. Therefore

76 SCB: 283.
77 SCB: 46.
78 SCB: 37-38.
79 IM: 170.
I melt away….” Thought is a foreign medium here. What is perceived at first per *speculum et in aenigmate* is later seen “face to face” – one becomes graced by responding to the call of a “non-contingent destiny” which is ours to fulfill:

Simply it is the vision of things: the things of heaven-and-earth, dramatized in their emergent majesty, wonder, and inviolable reserve. But seen in the mode of this, their being. And seen as if, for the first time, yet as belonging to a domain, in which dominion (not domination) reigns, forever and ever; the dominion of being itself. 81

Consciousness is unique by virtue of the manner in which it is able to synthesize a welter of elements within a unified personality. Spirit represents the supreme embodiment of both the one and the many, an integrally unified manifold of infinitely diverse particulars. Human being qua *imago Dei* exhibits this selfsame logic of spirit – writ small. According to Bugbee, this identity of finite and infinite spirit must serve as the basis of any authentic philosophy, balancing the human need to speak – articulating the deep *logos* – with the need to simply and quietly embrace the reticent mystery of being:

Perhaps some things need to be said; and it might even be as well to set out from a sustained reticence to speak…. [R]eticence also seems attuned to the quiet of heaven-and-earth, the unprejudiced silence of things…. [I]t is a measure that makes for reflection, and finding out what we make of things, in the course of having to do with them. In a mortal life. 82

Such a compelling moment of vision, an *Augenblick*, in which we recognize the autochthonous integrity of existence can – like the twinkling of an eye – occur almost at

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80 Job, 42:3-6.
82 *A Way of Reading the Book of Job*. In the midst of his meditations on Job, Bugbee, sounding much like Heidegger in *Aus der Erfahrung des Denken*, writes:

No wind stirs, At Zero Fahrenheit the flakes of snow are not at all large. Incredibly lightly and unwaveringly they fall. A myriad of them fills our meadow round the house. One sees them best by looking at the trees beyond. Their falling accentuates the still standing trees, the dark trunks. And the still of the trees is the nearness of falling snow,

Occasionally, in the meadow, a weed nods and lifts again.

The low fire of the hearth is even more discreet.
any time. In keeping with Bugbee’s remark, some things do need to be said – proffered in a spirit of reticence – while standing here, peering into a glimmer of eternity.
Part I

From a Broken World to Circulating Being: The Transcendent Trajectory of Marcel’s Thought

§

Marcel’s Experiential Basis: Life as Thought

“[S]ome circumstances … are situated in a kind of magnetic field that stretches around my life and that gives it meaning.”

“[T]he problem I consider essential [is] that of the relationship between philosophical research and life.”

With perhaps the exception of Nietzsche, no philosopher has demonstrated such a keen awareness of the relationship between life and thought as Gabriel Marcel. In additional to the numerous personal references that populate his many books and essays, Marcel published three autobiographical accounts. Before turning to the important connections that exist between Marcel’s life and thought, a few caveats are in order. First, Marcel quickly rejected the notion of “an illusory synthesis.” Towards the end of his life he commented that he “never wanted, not only to create a system, but even to write a treatise in the philosophical sense of the word.” For this reason, it would be inappropriate to expect these reflections on Marcel’s life to somehow recapitulate, or bring to final closure, the definitive essence of his thought. Second, Marcel’s personal recollection of his life’s journey should not be taken in a naïve, quasi-Platonic sense as simply an ascending journey from darkness to light. Marcel is quick to report: “[M]y

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1 Gabriel Marcel, Awakenings, trans. Peter S. Rogers (Marquette University Press: 2002): 211. Marcel indicates that through a type of “radioscopic analysis,” one can trace these lines of connection. See also “Author’s Preface,” to Tragic Wisdom and Beyond, trans. S. Jolin and P. McCormick (Northwestern University Press, 1973): xxxi, where Marcel refers to “a magnetic field that opens on to the infinite. The opening, in fact, is the essential thing. But the field is crossed by currents.”


4 Awakenings: 169.
life has been perpetually harrowed by a searching, often and for long stretches undertaken in
darkness and anguish. Nothing could be more false than to envisage it as a progression towards
the light.”\(^5\) Lastly, Marcel strongly believes that his consistent interweaving of the experiential
with the philosophical serves as “an irrepressible protestation surfacing from the depths of [his]
being … that life can be put on a file card.”\(^6\) At this juncture of our being resides a *surplus* that
cannot be dissolved or explained away by mathematical-physical explanation – “a tension which
could only … be resolved in an illumination that comes from some point much higher than
man”.\(^7\) As one commentator has insightfully stated: “the vitality of [Marcel’s] work … has to
do, I think, with the intuition that the infinite is reflected in one’s private life.”\(^8\)

In surveying some of the most significant moments in Marcel’s life, two observations
should be kept in mind. First, one must be extremely careful not to evoke Marcel’s “irrepressible
protestation” and attempt to analyze the totality of his life into a series of decisive chronological
events. Instead, the purpose must be to identify those experiential constellations where the
developmental trajectory of Marcel’s thought intersects his life. These events are referred to as
“experiential constellations” because they possess a complex multi-dimensionality—exhibiting
both a personal concreteness and a universality that exceeds the reach of Marcel’s thought by
connecting to a shared fund of human experience. As Marcel puts the matter: [My life]
completely transcends the categories of biology … [and] infinitely transcends my possible
conscious grasp … at any given moment.”\(^9\)

However, the sense of time that will be traversed here is not always linear; experiential

\(^5\) *An Autobiographical Essay*: 3.
\(^6\) *Awakenings*: 34. See also *MB I*, p. 189, where Marcel stresses the fact that life cannot be reduced to a cinematically
as “merely a succession of images.”
\(^7\) *Ibid.*: 109. Marcel will refer to this tension as “the exigience of Being.”
\(^8\) Jacques de Bourbon Bussett, “Preface,” in *Awakenings*: 30.
\(^9\) *MB I*: 167.
time is not the time of the clock or the calendar. Marcel’s life is punctuated by events which cannot be registered in strictly causal terms – events exhibiting both a synchronic and a
diachronic dimension. Marcel will characterize this continuous juncture of his life and thought as a “sinuous road.” Using a geological comparison, he states:

[W]hat really matters is to point out the successive sedimentations, or layers, as a result of which my mental soil has become what it is today…. [This] phase of my research should be considered rather as having become a horizon, a beyond in which past and future meet to enter into a dimension which is no longer that of life perceived merely as sequence or as the fall of leaves.”

These constellations are formulated around the following clusters of events: 1) the death of Marcel’s mother when he was 4 years old; 2) his adverse reaction to the barren abstractness of the French public school curriculum; 3) an initial flirtation with, and rejection of, idealism; 4) the experience working for the Red Cross in WWI; 5) his brief participation in séances as a psychic medium; 6) a direct experience of the vast destruction and devastation of WWII; 7) his life-long interest in music; and 8) his remarkable conversion to Catholicism in 1948.

Death of Mother

The death of Marcel’s mother in November of 1893 in a sense marks the very beginning of Marcel’s conscious memories:

It would surely be better to speak of a certain affective tonality of my first years, those years preceding the death of my mother, after two days of illness on the 15th of November 1893…. Strange as it may seem I recall absolutely nothing of those two desolate days…. Yet I retain a rather definite memory…. I still seem to hear the murmurs of Granny and other members of the

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11 *EBHD*: 14-15.
12 Since it is contrary to the spirit of Marcel’s thought to encapsulate life within a series of events and constellations, the above list is destined to incompleteness. It could have included, for example, the effect of the travels that Marcel experienced as a child due to his father’s job as Ministre Plénipotentiaire and the impact that this had upon his “passionate interest” in the natural world, the concrete importance of people and places, and emphasis placed upon the value of the activity of journeying.
family who had come to extend their condolences.\textsuperscript{13}

This tragic event early in Marcel’s life created a “lasting shock.” As one would expect, in an effort to shield young Gabriel from any additional suffering, his grandmother and aunt “bathed him in gentleness … envelop[ing him] in a balm-like tenderness.”\textsuperscript{14} The protection of this “baln-like” condition from the harsh realities of life would later predispose the young Marcel to idealism. However, despite the traumatic loss of his mother, her presence was still deeply felt by the boy. Marcel’s appreciation of this spiritually enduring aspect of presence is retained throughout his life through his appreciation of intersubjective experience and paranormal experience. Marcel expresses the importance of his deep appreciation of presence in the following:

I clearly recall a certain walk with my aunt when I must have been about seven or eight, during which my aunt, having told me that no one could know if the dead were completely annihilated or lived on in some way, I exclaimed: “When I’m older I’m going to try to find out!” And I think it would be a mistake to take those childish words lightly: in some ways they determined the course I was to take.\textsuperscript{15}

A somewhat unique turn of events transpired about two years later when his father and aunt announced their plan to marry. This event elicited a response by the young Marcel that would pre-figure the characteristic type of Marcellian effort to recuperate seemingly disparate aspects of things in terms of their participation in relations of greater unity: “[T]he unity of a broken household was reconstituted.”\textsuperscript{16} But the event also sounded a more somber, much less optimistic chord that would also resonate throughout the Marcellian corpus and is captured by the phrase a “broken world” (\textit{monde cassé}) – a world divisively severed from its unity. In a “broken world,” a condition of discrete atomization and bare collectivization replaces a nostalgic

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{An Autobiographical Essay}: 5.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}: 6.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{EBHD}: 25.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Awakenings}: 43.
memory of feeling whole, complete, and at home. Within their family “unit,” Marcel quickly became aware “of the profound differences … [and] their antagonism…, that they had married because of me and, quite unwillingly…. I thus held myself responsible for a marriage that was, in the end, unhappy.”

Experience of the Lycée

As the young Marcel began to witness the competitive regimen of the French public school system, he experienced a visceral reaction. His initial attending of the lycée was interrupted in 1898 when his father was appointed as a diplomatic minister to Sweden. During this time spent in the city of Stockholm, which he refers to as “the happiest of my childhood,” Marcel was educated by his aunt in lieu of attending a private school. However, Marcel’s happiness was short lived. After 15 months his father was transferred back to Paris for health reasons. Marcel’s vivid recollections speak for themselves:

My consternation was total…. To return to Paris would be to return to banality … for I could begin to discern the menacing shadow of the lycée…. This somber premonition was later confirmed. My lycée years left, on the whole, the most disagreeable memories; and I can say in retrospect that I think they contributed to the retardation of my intellectual development and, in the last analysis, seriously affected my health.

The lycée’s exclusive preoccupation with a fiercely competitive quantitative ranking system provoked a feeling of anxiety for the young Marcel because his parents placed a “disproportionate importance” upon his class rank. This precipitated two unhealthy responses. Marcel would compete anxiously and feverishly, trying to ensure he would always achieve the highest ranking. This emphasis on grades essentially destroyed any joy of learning that young Gabriel may have felt. At the same time, lurking in the background was an acute sense of failure:

17 Ibid.: 43. See infra: “[T]his premature awareness of being at once responsible and not responsible for an event was at the origin of a tragic vision which was eventually to take shape….”
19 Ibid.: 11.
“[T]he thought that I might fail in my studies became intolerable to me … since it was because of me that these two beings, so different from one another, had decided to come together…. I had to be able at any cost to justify by my achievements the sacrifices that had been made for me.”

The study of philosophy offered Marcel a way out of the sterilization and tedium of the lycée, taking him from a smothered existence to “an enchanted land.” In this land of enchantment, wide-open vistas appeared: “what had seemed to be a given, das Selbstverständlich, was in reality becoming the place for impassioned questioning.” A cluster of Marcellian themes arise from this confrontation between the suffocating lycée curricula and the liberating effect of philosophical reflection. The drudgery experienced at the lycée precipitated Marcel’s initial aversion to what is abstract, universal, and measurable. Marcel once commented that his “aversion to the lycée must have been at the root of his growing horror of the spirit of abstraction.” His exposure to philosophy, on the other hand, nourished his initial inclination towards what is concrete, personal, and tacit. This confrontation also ignited Marcel’s adamant refusal to be reduced to a set of competencies and would sustain his ardent belief that a human being ultimately exceeds his strict, functional identity.

Marcel’s pursuit of philosophy would continue in 1906 when he entered the Sorbonne. There he would attend the lectures of Henri Bergson who made a lasting impression upon him. From Bergson, Marcel learned to appreciate the rich spiritual interior of the self, the inability of static concepts to depict a dynamic reality, and the belief in an “open,” transcendent, as opposed to a “closed,” universe. Marcel deferentially refers his encounter with Bergson in the following way:

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20 *An Autobiographical Essay*: 12.
21 *Awakenings*: 68. After his first philosophy class, Marcel immediately informed his parents that he was going to become a philosopher!
Among all those whose courses I took, Henri Bergson was the only one whose thought had a sure and lasting hold on me…. During each lecture, he conveyed a sense of proceeding in a sort of interior jubilation in a labor of discovery in which his listeners were to participate…. In every instance I can testify that by a driving light he cut through the gray and indistinct background of notions that were being inculcated at the Sorbonne by academicians whose knowledge and good will were beyond question but who lacked the spark, the genius.  

Rejection of Idealism

Marcel’s initial involvement with idealism is best understood in the context of the sense of domestic security that he experienced in his early years:

When I recall my childhood, so carefully watched over and in some ways so confined … I can see why abstraction was the keynote of my early philosophical thoughts and why I was almost contemptuously hostile to empiricism. [O]n the plane of ideas alone I was able to create a shelter from the wounding contacts of everyday life. Thus to philosophize meant at first for me to transcend.

Marcel’s foray into idealism is reflected in his earliest writings and effectively ends with Part I of the *Metaphysical Journal*. The idealistic writings offer a stark contrast in content and style when compared to his other works. Whereas the later writings seem to offer clear, detailed descriptions of concrete situations, the idealistic writings offer abstract analyses of conceptual problems often with an uneven clarity. As Marcel will retrospectively comment:

Today I would be incapable of reading what was later to become the first part of the *Journal métaphysique*, and if I forced myself to do so, it would not be without experiencing at almost every page a feeling of irritation that I would not be able to master successfully…. But what strikes me is how this research that is so abstract and so awkward depended in the end on the safe and comfortable conditions in which I first found myself.

Marcel’s “initial refusal” of idealism stems from his sensitivity to the problem of the transparency of the *cogito* and the awareness that reality cannot be “summed up,” or synthesized,
within an intelligible whole. The *cogito* is an unsuitable point of departure for metaphysics because “a philosophy that begins with the *cogito* … runs the risk of never getting back to being.”26 Descartes assumed that through a rigorous attention to the ideational content of the *cogito* and its *cogitations*, a transparent connection to the outer world could occur—an assumption many now believe is problematic. Reality, for Marcel, truly reveals itself precisely at the moment it surpasses the forms of our representation— a thought which is not the thought of something “would be lost in a sort of dream of itself….“27 Furthermore, the pervasiveness of complex, variegated “*insolubilia*” within our basic experience foreshadows a domain beyond speech and objectifying knowledge: “[Reality] cannot be identified with any conceptual point of view…. I cannot without self-contradiction conceive the absolute as a central observatory from which the universe can be contemplated in its totality, instead of being apprehended in the partial and oblique way that it is by all of us.”28

The unification that the young Marcel was groping for through an idealistic synthesis would ultimately prove to be unsuccessful. Marcel likened his idealistic writings to “a drilling operation performed by unskilled hands and primitive instruments.”29 A process of excavation that began as an attempt to dialectically transcend what appeared to be the factical disunity of experience became a “steep and torturous path” that quickly led to an impasse. Marcel realized that the logic of abstraction that led him to idealism was part and parcel of the same logic that led to his feeling of depersonalization at the lycée. Marcel abruptly learned that it is dangerous to pursue a particular direction in metaphysics before undergoing any type of genuine lived

28 *CF*: 4.
29 *EBHB*: 22
experience – the results of concrete, personal encounter supersede formal ratiocination or dialectical argumentation. The abstract can be reached only via the concrete; the converse is not the case. No abstraction can do justice to life in its irreducible originality and, as he would later clarify in his famous distinction between “existence” and “objectivity,” “existence precisely cannot be reduced to objectivity.”\textsuperscript{30} The unity that Marcel had attempted to overcome through an idealistic dialectic is later achieved through a type of “secondary reflection,” re-conquering the unity that Marcel’s idealistic drilling was unable to reach—“a \textit{hold} on the real at the root of intelligence.”\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{Red Cross and WWI}

Marcel’s work for the Red Cross during WWI proved to be of the utmost significance for him: “[T]he date August 2, 1914, truly marks the transition from one world to another.”\textsuperscript{32} For health reasons, Marcel was deemed unable to perform military duty. Unable to accept being an “outsider,” he joined the Red Cross. This event was anything but serendipitous: “Far from clashing with my genuinely philosophical activity, this Red Cross work involved a task of reflection the results of which were to have considerable importance.”\textsuperscript{33} Marcel’s role was that of a liaison whose purpose was to help families obtain information about soldiers who were missing in action. Marcel made it a point to deal with each case “personally,” treating each interested party with the “greatest possible sympathy.” As Marcel would reflect several years later: “Interrogating, making inquiries, and responding—these were my activities, and as a philosopher, I tried to throw some light on them.”\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{BH}: p. 47. See also \textit{TWB}, p. 221, where Marcel refers to “[T]he indubitable character of existence … the condition of any thinking whatsoever.” Marcel realizes that this discovery places him on the “margin” of idealism.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{EBHD}: 36.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid.}: 36. See \textit{Awakenings}, p 93: “[T]his was very important because, in the end, it was like the first apprenticeship of intersubjectivity as I was to define it later on.”
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{EBHD}: 37.
The light that Marcel directs towards these inquiries is reported on July 23, 1918 in his *Metaphysical Journal*.

What does understanding a question mean? First, putting it to oneself, placing oneself in the mental situation of the questioner. I can only give a full and proper answer to my own question. The consciousness of the answerer is the meeting place of the question and the answer. . . . [T]his interpretation depends upon the idea of the *dynamism of the situation*, which transcends individual destinies though in one sense it is only the material for them. This living contradictory dualism lies at the very core of the real; all spiritual life is essentially a dialogue.\(^{35}\)

This insight led Marcel to “concentrate attention on the second person…. [I]t was my concern to go to the root of the *thou* . . . .”\(^{36}\) When seeing the other as a “second person thou,” as opposed to a “third person he, she or it,” an experience of a bond of fellowship—a “supra-relational” kind of unity that serves as a kind of inter-human connective tissue— is made possible. In Marcel’s words, “the relationship is thus transformed [and] becomes one of subject to subject.”\(^{37}\) Similar to the cases in which Marcel explains that his dramatic works were able to express philosophical themes long before they are able to be thematically articulated in a philosophical register, Marcel’s experience in the Red Cross provided deep, pre-reflective confirmation to the phenomenon represented by “the indispensable term *intersubjectivity* . . . [which] it is difficult for me today to understand how I ever did without it.”\(^{38}\)

**Engagement with Parapsychology**

Around 1916 or 1917, about the same time his awareness of the intersubjective dimension of experience began to crystallize, Marcel began to explore his interest in parapsychology and telepathy. This is not a mere coincidence; the direct experience of

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\(^{35}\) *Metaphysical Journal*, trans. B. Wall (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952): 139, 137. Hereafter referred to as *MJ*. The entire entry runs from pp. 135-145. Dense, “disconcerting,” and not initially planned for publication, Marcel is keenly aware of its difficulty: “[T]he backbone of the *Metaphysical Journal* [is that] being cannot be indicated, it cannot be *shown*; it can only be alluded to . . . .” (Author’s Preface to the English Edition,” in *MJ*: vii.)

\(^{36}\) *EBHD*: 39.

\(^{37}\) *Ibid.*: 40. See *MJ*: p 146, where Marcel encapsulates this intersubjective experience as “We become simply ‘us.’”

\(^{38}\) *EBHD*: 40. See *Ibid.*: 50, where Marcel comments about the ability of “dramatic vision [to be] anticipatory . . . revealing in lightening flashes a terrain [only] later to be explored in discursive thought.” Cf. *TWB*, p. 236: “[D]rama for me is like living tissue; it is more capable of internal regeneration than is properly philosophical thinking.”
intersubjectivity helped to lay bare that fertile network of relationships inaccessible to the static concepts of traditional logic. As Marcel says:

[T]o reflect on a relationship of the kind that the word with suggests is to recognize how poor and inadequate our logic is. Apart from juxtapositions pure and simple it is in fact incapable of expressing relationships of increasing intimacy…. I might add that the English noun togetherness … has no possible equivalent in French. It is as if the French language refused to make a substantive of – that is, to conceptualize – a certain quality of being which is concerned with the ‘entre-nous,’ the ‘between you and me.’

From Marcel’s perspective, when approaching the issue of telepathy, it is important to avoid “a materializing representation of thought.” Marcel’s formal reflections on parapsychology were not presented publicly until 1955 when he gave the twelfth Frederic W. H. Meyers Memorial Lecture to the Society for Psychical Research entitled “The Influence of Psychic Phenomena on My Philosophy.” However, as early as 1916 he revealed the fundamental importance of occult knowledge: “the ideas of so-called occult knowledge against which reason attempts to rebel are in reality at the root of our most ordinary most incontrovertible experiences.”

During the time in which Marcel was working with the Red Cross, he was persuaded by a couple to explore his “mediumistic gifts.” This led to an experiment with a planchette. Marcel was approached by Mrs. Adolphe Reinach who was trying to obtain news as to the disposition of her husband, a reserve officer in the 46th Infantry Regiment who had been missing for some time. During a session when Mrs. Reinach was absent, “the planchette seemed to be imbued with what

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39 EBHD: 41.
40 EBHD: 41.
41 MJ: 130. Marcel will use much stronger language later: “It is even likely that we must start from the paranormal in order to elucidate the normal—because the very idea of the normal is false, in that it derives exclusively from an entrenched habit of thinking which simply obliterates the fundamental strangeness of the datum” (EBHD: 43). See “The Influence of Psychic Phenomena on My Philosophy,” where he cites a conversation “in Switzerland during the winter of 1910-1911 … [which] made a profound impression upon me…. (The Twelfth Frederic W. H. Meyers Memorial Lecture, 1955, The Society for Psychical Research (The University Press, Glasgow: 1956): 5-6.
42 A planchette is a small, triangular heart-shaped board supported by castors that moves to spell out messages. A pencil is typically attached to the planchette resulting in letters or designs that are interpreted by a medium.
I can only call ardent and affectionate energy, the entity addressed the absent woman by the name of Clio.”43 Later it was discovered that Adolphe had given his wife the nickname “Clio” because he felt that she resembled a statue of Clio during a visit to the museum at Caracalla’s Baths in Rome. This event had a profound impact on Marcel: “This little incident has always seemed to me very important; since any idea of a fortuitous coincidence was excluded, it seemed as though we there had proof of a communication inexplicable within the bounds of normal experience.”44

Over the course of time, these telepathic encounters had to be interrupted because of poor health. Marcel admits that “at best [these experiences] contain an adulterated mixture of truth and error…. [But] it is as though I had been given the ability to look from within at the facts which a great number of people can only envision from outside, because they have no experience of them.”45

Marcel’s involvement with paranormal psychology revealed the importance of “incarnation … the condition of a human being feeling connected to something.”46 This “non-objective aspect of the body,” completely different from the Cartesian notion of a Res Extensa, will make “possible [the ability] to throw some light on telepathy….“47 Such a notion of incarnation will help to overcome the barrier erected by a Cartesian dualism and will serve as a wedge, or point of entry, enabling the subject to participate in a “supra-personal unity.” In Marcel’s words: “Telepathy is surely in regard to space what memory is in regard to time.”48

43 The Influence of Psychic Phenomena on My Philosophy: 9. Hereafter, referred to as IPPMP.
44 Ibid.: 9-10.
45 Ibid.: 13
48 BH: 97, note 1.
Destruction and Devastation of WWII

The experience of WWII had an immense impact upon Marcel and provided a direct stimulus to his thought. Whereas WWI presented Marcel with ample evidence of the harsh reality of war through “nameless sorrows, individualized to infinity,”49 WWII now presented an unprecedented moment of historical significance – the human race now possessed the technological means that could lead its suicide. Marcel began to question the ontological condition of the human being that it could come so close to being capable of such a heinous act. He concluded that the human being is capable of such in-human behavior in direct proportion to the degree that it becomes closed-in upon itself. This condition of being “closed” as opposed to “open,” – a distinction he appropriated from Bergson – locks the subject within a domain driven by functional, individualistic, and impersonal imperatives and prevents the self from participating in a wider conception of humanity. In this latter domain of “intersubjectivity,” separation disappears. As Marcel explains: “[T]he threats that today weigh upon our species … can only appear to be the materialized expression of an infinitely more essential degradation. This has to do with the way in which man … has cut himself more and more from what should be called his ontological roots.”50

This functional atomization, or “pulverization,” of the human being has contributed to this uprootedness. Experiences of fraternal and transcendental relationships are replaced by “the transmission of quite different currents, which are inhuman and magnetized by the ends purely of domination.”51 Once the process of functional atomization is completed, the individual atoms, or “monads,” are assembled into an impersonal collectivity. However, to use Leibnizian terms, these monads are completely “windowless,” self-contained within their functional identity, with

49 Awakenings: 131.
50 Ibid.: 171.
no ability to see further. In this dehumanized state, a being conceived purely functionally atrophies due to the fact that it is replicating what are essentially subhuman capabilities—an inbreeding of sorts occurs. The self, turned upon itself, becomes encircled by an insular covering—closed within its own skin. The human being, once it becomes severed from any transcendent relationship, becomes malnourished and slowly withers away. For Marcel, there are two errors to monadism—a self is neither alone nor one: “If I do not breathe the spiritual element for want of which our existence denies itself, I die….”

Acute self-consciousness, in the rationalistic sense, is synonymous with death. According to Marcel: “[O]nce we release ourselves from [our] schematizations, … we must become aware that we are literally arched over by a living reality.”

**Interest in Music**

Taken as a whole my work can be compared, I think, to a country like Greece, which comprises at the same time a continental part and islands. The continental part is my philosophical writing…. The islands are my plays. [J]ust as it is necessary to make a crossing to get to an island, so to get to my dramatic work … it is necessary to leave the shore behind…. And it might be added—I don’t think this is superfluous—that the element that unites the continent and the islands in my work is music. Music is truly the deepest level. In a certain way, the priority belongs to music.

Marcel’s interest in music is central to his thinking. As a child, Marcel was exposed to the importance of music at home by his father, his aunt, and later his wife, Jacqueline. He took piano lessons at an early age—music offered a respite from the rigor of academic competition and enabled him to “breathe freely.” He was a gifted sight reader and good musician but he did not display the characteristics of a prodigy or virtuoso. Marcel wrote several thematic essays concerning the relationship between music and philosophy— the most noteworthy, written in

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54 *TWB*: 231.
1959, is entitled *Music in My Life and Work*. Marcel consistently emphasized the ability of music to capture insights that were recalcitrant to philosophical inquiry. His interest in music and his appreciation of concepts relating to musical composition helped to articulate philosophical insights that could not be expressed by strictly linear thinking: “[My thinking] tended to become less and less optical. It is most likely that my passion for music helped to prevent me from imagining this world, if to imagine, is at least in some sense, to project a form into space….”

Music provided a means by which Marcel could experience the deep sense of continuity and plenitude that pervades experience: “a superior awareness in which our being finds itself presented in its integrity.” Using his wife’s presence as a source of inspiration, Marcel would sit at the piano for sustained periods and improvise, substituting his role as a psychic medium for a musical medium: “enter[ing] fully into the melodious and harmonic world that was mine.” Marcel would later remark that these improvisations represent his best musical accomplishments – delineating the direction of his thought more clearly than his philosophical works. Perhaps in a way similar to Nietzsche but without the tragic, Dionysian emphasis, “Marcel felt the mysterious thread between the most elevated music and the most deeply lived experience.”

Through improvisation, Marcel was able to overcome the dualism of subject and object. Improvisation is not tied to any Kantian *Ding-an-sich* that would serve as a standard of representational adequacy. This lead Marcel to comment: “[Musical improvisation] is a sphere where the thing stated cannot be distinguished from the manner of stating it. In this sense …

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58 *Awakenings*: 177. In 1946-47, Marcel and his wife transcribed thirty of his improvisations into musical notation. These improvisations are based upon poems by Baudelaire, Valery, Rilke, Hölderlin and others. For an in-depth treatment of the impact of music on Marcel’s thought, see *Gabriel Marcel: Music and Philosophy*. Robert Wood’s “Introduction” is especially informative.
59 *Awakenings*: 57.
music has no meaning, but perhaps just because it is meaning.⁶⁰ Within this space of improvisation, a form of participation occurs in which one is already “on the inside.” This interior transcends “cinematographic representation [because] succession seems less and less given…. [To improvise] is rather to participate more and more actively in the creative intention that quickens the whole.”⁶¹

Marcel believed that the fundamental nature of existence was best revealed through forms of musical expression as opposed to forms of conceptual representation. Through music, one is able to become encapsulated within the experience of continuity and cohesion that is essential to being human. Music also enables one to discern a sense of plenitude, or the whole, of which we are a vital part. The act of musical creation is not an act solus ispe – an act generated exclusively within a solipsistic moment of subjectivity. The composer creates out of a primordial, universal type of subjectivity of which we all partake. The musical modulations that result from the composer’s creative activity raise the listener to this universal level – rejoining the listener with a comprehensive awareness that had been lost. Marcel will refer to a “musical mysticism” that is both sensuous and supra-sensuous:

I am not a spectator who is looking for a world of structures susceptible of being viewed clearly and distinctly, but rather I listen to voices and appeals compromising that symphony of Being—which is for me, in the final analysis, a supra-rational unity beyond images, words, and concepts.⁶²

Marcel culminates his ontological vision using a powerful musical metaphor that is rich and symbolic:

[I]n so far as we allow ourselves to give ear to the solicitations—countless in number even if slight in substance—which come to us from the invisible world, then the whole outlook undergoes a change …[a] transformation takes place here below…. Let me make use again of one of the musical comparisons for which you know I have a taste, and say that from the moment

⁶⁰ BH: 57.
⁶¹ Ibid.: 18.
⁶² EBHD: 82-83.
when we open ourselves to these infiltrations of the visible, we cease to be the unskilled yet pretentious soloist we perhaps were at the start, and gradually become members, wide-eyed and brotherly, of an orchestra in which those who we so inaptly call the dead are certainly much closer to Him of whom we should not perhaps say that He conducts the symphony, but that He is the symphony in its profound and intelligible unity; a unity within which we can hope to be included only by degrees, through individual trials, the sum total of which, though it cannot be foreseen by each of us, is inseparable from his own vocation.  

Conversion to Catholicism

Gabriel Marcel converted to Catholicism on March 23, 1929 at the age of 41. He had recently published a note concerning François Mauriac’s *Souffrance du Chrétien*. Mauriac sent a personal letter to Marcel urging him to strongly consider joining the Catholic Church. Marcel describes this period as one in which he was experiencing a deep sense of “calm and equilibrium”—a period unlike any other. Regarding the letter:

It seemed to me that he was but a spokesman and that the call came from much higher up. It was as though a more than human voice was questioning me and putting me into my own presence. “Can you really persevere indefinitely in that equivocal position of yours?” this voice asked me. “Is it even honest to continue to think and speak like someone who believes in the faith of others and who is convinced that this faith is everything but an illusion, but nevertheless does not resolve to take it unto himself? Is there not a sort of equivocation here that must be definitely dispelled; is it not like a leap before which you are obliged to decide?” It seemed to me that I could only apply to this last interrogative with an assent.

The question remained as to which “confessional form” Marcel would adhere to. His religious upbringing, though Protestant, was largely agnostic. He chose the Catholic Church for characteristically Marcellian reasons. For Marcel, Catholicism was synonymous with the universal – multiple, divisive sects within Protestantism undermined the deep sense of unity Marcel was seeking: “It then seemed to me that I could not give my adherence save to the Church that presented itself as corresponding to the richest and most global vision.”

In a journal entry dated March 23, 1929, Marcel discloses the following: “I was baptized this

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63 *MB II*: 187.
64 *An Autobiographical Essay*: 29.
morning. My inward state was more than I had dared to hope for: no transports, but peaceful, balanced, and full of hope and faith.”\textsuperscript{66} Marcel’s reference to “no transports,” implies that his experience was not characterized by any super-natural or other-worldly transmutation. However, one should not construe Marcel’s characterization of this experience as implying any lack of ontological impact. As he was quick to add: “Return to the \textit{here} and \textit{now}, which recover an unparalleled dignity and worth.”\textsuperscript{67}

Marcel was not so naïve as to not recognize those aspects of Catholicism contrary to his sensibility, i.e. a rigid adherence to ritual, excessive legalism, and ideological encroachment. When asked about these divisions Marcel responded: “When we say: we other Catholics, we are outside Catholicism. \textit{[C]atholicity}, ... in my view, that is what matters.”\textsuperscript{68} However, concerning fundamental matters of faith Marcel was devout: “[T]he Roman Catholic Church remains my own, to the extent that … I still see in it … an unfailing faith in Christ and the fundamental truths, the Incarnation being very much the point of ‘enracinement’ or being rooted for me.”\textsuperscript{69} At the same time, Marcel had a deep sense of religious tolerance. According to James Collins: “Marcel h\textsuperscript{e}ld] that a realistic appraisal of our language, modes of thinking and prevailing imagery reveals the depth and persistence of Christian faith and its institutions…. He addresses himself to every man of good will and attentive mind, not just the Christian believer.”\textsuperscript{70} Marcel viewed everyone, regardless of their religion, as part of “a great Christian family” – God is glorified \textit{through} each and every act of creation.

For Marcel, there existed an “essential agreement” between the fundamental truths of

\textsuperscript{66} BH: 24.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.: 24.
\textsuperscript{68} Awakenings: 181
\textsuperscript{69} Awakenings: 181. It is interesting to note that Marcel’s wife began “to adhere” to Catholicism a few years prior to her death from a debilitating illness, giving her a sense of spiritual strength.
Christianity and the integral structure of the human being: “Hence the more one penetrates into human nature, the more one find oneself situated on the axes of the great truths of Christianity.” But despite Marcel’s deep sense of being “irresistibly drawn” into the domain of Christian beliefs, he clearly felt: “the need to reach a level universal enough to make what [he] was saying acceptable or understandable by non-Catholics and even perhaps by non-Christians, so long as they had a certain apprehension of what seemed … essential.” Marcel referred to this universal level of experience as the “peri-Christian” zone of existence. This notion of a peri-Christian zone of existence is captured in the following comment by William J. Richardson, S.J.:

Instead of “Christian philosophy,” let us speak rather of the unity of Christian philosophizing: the unity comes from the truth that is sought, whether through the light of revelation or of reason or, in fact, of both — truth that every Christian believes can never be untrue to itself. Its diversity would come from the kaleidoscopic, kergymatic, not to say kairotic, gifts of those who pursue it.

A Broken World and Its Consequences

Whence something like a breach which seems indeed to open in the middle of what one could call the field of human experience. Everything takes place in reality as on an earth shaken by a seismic shock. Since the coming of Christ we live in a split world.

A “broken world” is a world wrought with fissures, ruptures, and dualisms — a world lacking in continuity. At the pre-phenomenological level, a broken world reveals itself as consisting of discrete and disconnected units — a world predisposed to the quantitative matrix of modern science. At the “hyper-phenomenological” level, these discontinuities are dissolved in

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71 CF: 79.
72 TWB: 239.
74 PM: 107.
favor of a continuity that is experienced first-hand at a level both personal and spiritual.\textsuperscript{75} This is a primordial, unified world – a \textit{Lebenswelt} indicated by Husserl’s famous phrase \textit{die Sache selbst}. Merleau-Ponty captures this unified awareness nicely in the following: “To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always \textit{speaks}, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learned beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.”\textsuperscript{76}

Marcel illuminates how our world is broken on three levels: the dramatic, the philosophical, and the ontological. However, one should not be misled into thinking that these are, in fact, distinct levels – they are segmented expressions of a reality that is continuous – distinguishable but not separable. For Marcel, a broken world is a world that has “lost its inner unity, its living center—a … world where each person is concerned only with himself. Yet, this world is not the only world.”\textsuperscript{77}

Marcel captures the brokenness of our world dramatically in his play \textit{le Monde cassé}. In this play, the heroine, Christiane, marries Lawrence – a man who was not her first love. Her first love, Jacques, declared his intention to take monastic vows just prior to the time that Christiane was about to proclaim her love for him. Jacques’ announcement crushes Christiane. In desperation, she married Lawrence – a man for whom she did not feel love, only pity. Christiane quickly realizes that she cannot follow through with this charade and commences a relationship with a younger man. At this point a revelation occurs. Through his sister, Genevieve, Christiane

\textsuperscript{75} See \textit{BH}, p. 142: “But there is room for another mode of reflection … which is hyper-phenomenological … [and directed towards] the possibility of participation in the being upon which my reality as subject rests.”


\textsuperscript{77} \textit{EBHD}: 90-91. John Dewey referred to this phenomenon as “inward lacerations of spirit.” I am indebted to Joseph Grange for this reference.
learns that Jacques has died. Genevieve poignantly discloses that during the last moments of his life in which Jacques had come to realize that his decision to choose the monastic order had deeply hurt Christiane – that he felt a deep connection to her. This news has a tremendous impact on Christiane. The binding power of a love that subsists after death releases her from her isolation. She now feels as if she is participating more and more in an unbroken, continuous “spiritual” world – a world that Jacques now also inhabits. This realization obliged her to reveal her infidelity to Lawrence – a confession that he finds extremely difficult to hear. At the very moment he is about to recoil from the shock of her disclosure, Lawrence also feels himself drawn into the same “unbroken,” spiritual field as Christiane. They are finally able to recover a sense of togetherness within the continuity of a spiritually unbroken world. The drama ends with Lawrence uttering in a semi trance-like state the following words to Christiane: “It is as if you are coming back to me from the dead.”

**The Spirit of Abstraction**

Marcel develops the notion of a broken world in a philosophical register through his treatment of abstraction. For Marcel, a world becomes broken when its continuity is disrupted – broken down into discrete units that no longer exhibit any trace of a prior unity. Marcel refers to this disintegrating, analytic process as “the spirit of abstraction.” Abstraction – derived from the Latin verb *abstraho*, meaning “to drag away from” – is a process through which a wealth of detail is subtracted from a thing in order to simplify it, endowing it with a limited identity. For example, to speak of “triangularity,” one does not have to address the multiple, contingent features of particular triangular-shaped things. Through the process of abstraction, one can

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79 *Ibid.*:152.
successfully perform many intellectual operations. For example, one could not develop Euclidian geometry solely within the concrete realm of particular triangles. In order to determine that the sum of the angles of a triangle equal 180 degrees, one necessarily has to participate in the level of abstraction – it is necessary to move from triangles to triangularity. However, when one moves from the level of particular triangles to abstract triangularity, one sacrifices not only the wealth of detail that actual triangles exhibit, one also eliminates the concrete context within which particular triangular objects exists. This “sacrifice,” or truncation, is not only limited to geometry. It occurs any time a wider conception of a thing is let go for a narrower, functional conception. This process of vicious abstraction is most destructive when it is applied to a human being – a being who exhibits a vast multiplicity of characteristics and dimensions. Alfred North Whitehead – a thinker equally at home in the mathematical as well as the speculative – understood the debilitating effects of abstraction: “There is a development of particular abstractions, and a contraction of concrete appreciation. The whole is lost in one of its aspects…. But there is no groove of abstraction which is adequate for the contemplation human life.”

Marcel is no luddite. He realizes that abstraction is an intellectual process that is necessary to rise above the sheer facticity of the concrete in order to achieve a condition of epistemic universality. He distinguishes this latter type of necessary abstraction – a type of abstraction that is cognizant of what it is sacrificing in order to achieve a condition of universality – with a thoughtless practice that immediately disavows any awareness of the level of detail that is being sacrificed. In this latter case, a strict, myopic focus occludes the wider field of vision. Marcel refers to this non-reflective, delimiting process as “the spirit of abstraction.” He offers this comparison of these two modes of abstraction:

Abstraction, as such, is a mental operation to which we must have recourse if we are seeking to

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achieve a determinate purpose of any sort…. This means that the human mind must retain a precise and distinct awareness of those methodological omissions which are necessary if an envisaged result is to be obtained. But it can happen that a mind, yielding to a sort of fascination, ceases to be aware of these prior conditions that justify abstraction and deceives itself about the nature of what is, in itself, nothing more than a method, one might say nothing more than an expedient. The spirit of abstraction is not separable from this contempt for the concrete conditions of abstract thinking.  

The mechanism driving this process of reductive, abstract thinking is referred to as “technique.” William Barrett, in his famous study *The Illusion of Technique*, adopted a phrase of William Blake, “mind-forged manacles,” to refer to the unilateral and thoughtless application of technique. Manacles, like the chains Plato described in “the allegory of the cave,” limit human development in a fundamental way – degradation occurs at a spiritual level. According to Marcel: “In our contemporary world … the more a man becomes dependent on the smooth functioning of gadgets at the material level, the more estranged he becomes from an awareness of his inner reality…. What we have to fear … is *submen* – beings who tend more and more to be reduced to their own strict function….” This constitutes a crime of man against man – the more sheer technique is embraced for itself, the more subjects become depicted in that very image. But, perhaps more importantly, the subject who embraces *pantechnicism* to the exclusion of all else, becomes reflexively determined through this series of epistemic acts. When abstract thinking becomes embodied in technique, a type of *decision* procedure is automatically instituted wherein what is deemed functionally essential is culled out -- the remaining carcass is left to die.

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82 William Barrett, *The Illusion of Technique: A Search for Meaning in a Technological Civilization* (Anchor Books, 1979): xv. Barrett referred to technique as “the mind of man working against itself.” For another powerful critique of this phenomenon of unbridled technique, see E.M. Adams, “Reinstating Humanistic Categories,” in *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. LV, No. 1, September 2001, p. 21: “We have what I have called a saber-toothed tiger civilization … [T]he saber-tooth tiger developed great tusks as effective weapons in combat, but perished because they obstructed its eating. We have developed a culture that is highly successful in advancing science and technology …, but in doing so we have undermined and subjectivised the sectors of the culture that underwrite our identity….”
A “decision procedure” is an apt phrase in this context insofar as *de-cision* etymologically implies “to cut from” – an etymological derivation of which Marcel is well aware. Once subsumed within the determining rubric of technique, the human being becomes closed in, cut off from a reality that transcends them. This leads to a stage of quasi *rigor mortis* – the term “rigor” here is quite ironic simply because abstract, technical thinking proudly identifies itself with *rigor*. One now becomes, as Nietzsche indicated: “a librarian and corrector of proofs, and wretchedly goes blind from the dust of books and printers’ errors.”[^84] Such a myopic state is indicative of what Marcel calls a “fanaticized consciousness.” A fanaticized consciousness is a consciousness trapped within itself, unaware of a wider perspective within which it is encircled – requiring only itself in order to exist. According to Gustave Thibon, a contemporary of Marcel and source of great inspiration, “Man does not stand alone: he is immersed in a totality of real entities by which he is at once transcended and fed.”[^85]

**The Grip of Having**

Marcel refers to the “devitalized” condition arising from the spirit of abstraction as “having.” “To have,” from the Latin verb *hābēo*, meaning “to have or to hold, in the sense of to have power over” is, for Marcel, an act of epistemological possession in which knowledge “becomes the center of a sort of mental space, arranged in concentric zones of decreasing interest and decreasing adherence…. This is something so natural that we forget to give it any thought or any representation at all.”[^86] This mental space is set up, or represented – as indicated by the German verb ‘*vorstellen*,’ “to place before one,” – exclusively within the domain of Cartesian subjectivity. A *Res Cogitans*, according to the Cartesian definition of substance, requires nothing

[^86]: *BH*: 70-71.
but itself in order to exist. This delimitation of “having” within the realm of subjectivity will cause Marcel to characterize it using such terms as “hominisation” and “aseity.” When any being is considered solely within the epistemological context of “having,” it is grasped solely in a way that is conducive to being functionally manipulated. Grasping in such a way that is ontologically constitutive is conveyed by the German word *Begriff* meaning “conception” or “apprehension.”

To conceive is to develop a concept regarding something – to frame it within the purview of a dominant albeit limiting characteristic. Simply stated, to conceive something in the mode of having is to obtain a controlling grip upon it – “Get a grip!” as one so often hears today. This profusion of partial knowledge is blinding – it leads to “a spiritual opaqueness or blockage.” For Marcel, the discreet multiplicity that is the result of “having” stands in sharp contrast to “Being [which] is above all inventories.”

To the extent that we dwell in the realm of “having,” an “auto-anesthesia” occurs which means “a loss [at] the level of Being.” This occurs in the following manner: “If you posit the primacy of subject-object … or of the act by which the subject sets up objects somehow or other within itself, the existence of others … [and] any existence whatever … becomes unthinkable.”

This insularity, or cloistering, imposed by the *Cogito* is dualistically opposed to the plenitude of Being. To the extent that Being is fragmented and particularized, any sense of an ontological trace or continuity is lost. Similar to that desperate condition Heidegger characterized as *Seinvergessenheit*, one forgets that Being has

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87 *Begriff*, from the verb “greifen” meaning to seize, to grasp or to catch hold of. Consider the phrase “To have and to hold.”

88 *PM*: 49, 55.

89 *BH*: 102.

90 *Ibid*: 91. Although Marcel would stand in sharp contrast to Sartre on several issues, Marcel is very much aligned with the position Sartre takes in his early essay “Intentionality: A fundamental Idea of Husserl’s Phenomenology,” trans. J.P. Fell, in *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1970: pp. 4-5: “[W]e have all believed that the spidery mind trapped things in its web, covered them with a white spit and slowly swallowed them, reducing them to its own substance…. Husserl persistently confirmed that one cannot dissolve things in consciousness …. Consciousness and the world are given at one stroke…. (p. 4).”

91 *BH*: 105
been forgotten – a total eclipse occurs. It is within this isolated space that Marcel establishes the connection between “non-disponibility” and “having.”

Marcel’s famous contrast between the phenomenon of “having” and “Being” is indicative of a shift from a strictly epistemic perspective to the realm of the ontological and the reality of the invisible world. According to Merleau-Ponty: “With Being and Having, Marcel’s philosophy has been enlarged so to speak. To an increasing degree the center of the perspective shifts from the body to the soul…. This movement between being and having, this border zone, defines the human condition.”

The Realm of the Problematic

Marcel’s development of the question of what constitutes a “problem,” – the region of the problematic – is continuous with his treatment of the spirit of abstraction and “having.” The problematic is that which is susceptible to a solution. It is present in two ways. The most common manner in which the problematic appears is through that which has been solved, e.g. that \( \pi r^2 \) is equal to the area of a circle. But the problematic can also appear as that which is yet to be solved – that which will be solved once the appropriate problem solving methodology has been brought to bear upon it. The efficacy exhibited within the region of the problematic is due, using a Leibnizian phrase, to a “pre-established harmony” between the problem solving techniques of a mathematical-scientific methodology and the manner in which the world is refracted through the enframing processes of the spirit of abstraction and “having.” As Nietzsche remarked: “[Once] human beings projected … ‘things’ as existing in their own

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92 Ibid: 84. disponibilité for Marcel means being available to the wider, transcendent relationships that are within the ontological reach of a human being. His use of the terms Adhérance (adherence) and Adhésion (adhesion) connote a similar meaning. These relationships are closed off within the condition created by abstraction and “having.” In this latter case, one becomes indisponible.

image…. No wonder that they later rediscovered in things only what they had put into them!"94

As Marcel notes, problems are always viewed “in abstraction from the manner in which their appearance is woven into the very texture of life…. Any problem whatsoever implies the breaking-off of a continuity which the mind has to re-establish.”95 Combining the modes of abstraction, having, and the problematic results in a reductive, truncating episteme. Anything which resists articulation through this limiting mode of presentation effectively disappears. This latter region – of presence, adhesion, and intimacy – however, continues to beckon us from afar despite the hegemonic grip of the *problematique*. Similar to the case of “having and being,” the problematic will also graft itself onto a larger context that surpasses it – what Marcel refers to as mystery:

The word ‘problem’ should be understood here with its Greek root in mind: *problema*. There is a problem when anything is placed *before me*…. At all events, it will remain necessary to hold that the subject cannot pose or solve objective problems except on condition of itself remaining in a non-problematic sphere…. And it is at this point therefore that I am lead to introduce or reinstate into our vocabulary the notion of mystery, in opposition to the notion of problem.96

**Dehumanization, Destruction, and Devastation**

At the height of his success, Marcel was asked by his former student, Paul Ricoeur:

“Could it be that your philosophy is a philosophy of the interior life, and therefore ultimately a thought which is out of contact with reality … so that strictly social relations are ignored?”97

Marcel was clearly taken back by this question. His autobiographical accounts make consistent

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95 BH: 102.

96 MAMS: 89, 90. Marcel’s treatment of mystery will be developed in Section V. As Zaner indicates, the “union” that Marcel is trying to attain through his key distinctions – objectivity and existence, primary and secondary reflection, having and being, and problem and mystery – “is approachable only through the first term of the pair[s].” (Richard M. Zaner, “The Mystery of the Body Qua Mine,” in The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel: The Library of Living Philosophers Volume XVII, ed. P. Schilpp and L. Hahn (Open Court Publishing Company, 1984): 328.

97 TWB: 244.
references to the impact that the Dreyfus Affair had on Marcel growing up as a boy in Paris. He
had written pieces over the past twenty years on such topics as justice, responsibility, and the
dehumanizing effects of industrialization. Marcel takes Ricoeur’s question seriously, responding
in the following way: “I think I can say that it would be a profound error, an extremely serious
error, to claim that my thought is concerned exclusively with the interior life.”98

Marcel was hardly a stranger to misinterpretations of his thought – his mis-
characterization as a “Christian Existentialist” is a perfect example of such misconstrual. But the
question, or tacit criticism, raised by Ricoeur, stems from a superficial reading. Marcel was
deeply concerned with what he referred to as the threat felt by “a humanity betrayed by its own
creations.”99 He viewed the present as a time of monumental historical and philosophical
significance – a time “without precedence” – because “it involves the possibility that [mankind]
could destroy his earthly habitat by means of the techniques he has perfected—in short, commit
suicide on a species-wide scale.”100 The fact that we have not witnessed a nuclear Armageddon is
no refutation of Marcel’s concern. To destroy oneself does not necessary mean the end of life
physically speaking. Dehumanization, the process through which a human being is no longer
able to exhibit her spiritually endowed richness and integrity, is a mortifying process as well.

Despite the veiled criticism in Ricoeur’s question, Marcel’s writings offer a legion of
examples that attest to his sensitivity to dehumanization and destruction. As Marcel traveled
throughout the world, he had the privilege to observe many examples of beautiful, panoramic
landscapes and vistas. But Marcel’s travels also took him to major cities – impoverished, third
city cities as well as and major metropolitan centers of commerce and industry. For Marcel,
there was little difference between the two. The modern city is an “agglomeration” – a massive

98 Ibid.: 245.
99 “Author’s Preface, TWB: xxxiv.
100 TWB: 26-27.
composite of human resources – as well as “collectivization” – a discrete, disjointed assemblage of atomic units gathered together for no other purpose than mere functioning. Note how these terms, “agglomeration, atomization, and collectivization” bespeak a sense of brokenness. If someone is unable to serve a particular function, they are considered “functionally defective.”¹⁰¹

We are all familiar with these inhumane conditions, either first hand or while watching CNN. What makes Marcel vulnerable to the kind of criticisms expressed by Ricoeur is that Marcel is trying to bring to our awareness the epistemic and ontological basis that makes these dehumanizing conditions possible: “There is the danger of the technical environment becoming for us the pattern of the universe, that is to say, the categories of its particular structure being claimed to be valid for an objective conception of the world…. Mankind becomes a target for those techniques which, in principle, are legitimately applicable only to the outward world.”¹⁰²

Marcel’s travels also took him to regions of Europe ravaged during WWII: “I think that I can never forget the more than physical horror and anxiety I experienced walking among the ruins of inner Vienna in 1946, or more recently in Caen, Rouen, or Würzburg.”¹⁰³ The horror that Marcel experienced was “more than physical” because it was not only the visible damage that caused this emotion. The “more than” or surplus dimension of his emotional reaction, stemmed from the realization that a type of technological development – perhaps “devolution” is a more apt term – is what laid the ground work for this type of destruction. Marcel refers to this process as “the pragmatization of human beings and relations.”¹⁰⁴ Through this process of pragmatization, the human being is shaped into an atomized, collectivized, and agglomatized

¹⁰¹ Cf. The music of the Brazilian musician, Tom Zé, in his CD Fabrication Defect (Warner Brothers, 1998). In the liner notes Zé explains the notion of fabrication defect: “The Third World has a huge and rapidly increasing population. These people have been converted into a kind of ‘android’…. But these ‘androids’ reveal some inborn ‘defects.’ They think, dance, and dream – things that are very dangerous to the First World bosses.”
¹⁰² DW: 13, 15 (emphasis added).
¹⁰³ Ibid.: 21.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid: 16.
“thing,” or unit. Once the human being is shaped into such a depersonalized unit, she is transformed into an object of use – even if one of those uses entails being destroyed. Perhaps Heidegger’s controversial statement best captures the danger of this type of vicious, reductive type of thinking: “Agriculture is now a motorized food industry—in essence, the same as the manufacturing of corpses in gas chambers and the extermination camps, the same as the blockading and starving of nations, the same as the manufacture of atom bombs.”

This pragmatization of the human being also leads to a condition of “uprootedness.” To be uprooted means to be torn from one’s natural surroundings. For Marcel, being uprooted plays a major role in the process of dehumanization. Here “uprootedness” means much more than to be physically displaced. For Marcel, there is a deep appreciation of what it means to be ontologically uprooted. Once a person loses their ontological mooring, a condition necessarily arises in which one is de-sensitized to the presence of the supra-personal: “[I]t is only where there exists a concrete and organic unity – and not a piling up or an accumulation – that we find ourselves in the presence of the supra-personal, and only there does it become possible to speak of a spiritual heritage.”

**The Flight From God**

Marcel borrowed a phrase from the theologian, Max Picard, to capture this process of becoming de-sensitized to our spiritual heritage. Picard coined the phrase “the fight from God” to emphasize the reverse direction in which humankind is moving. The word “religion” – from the Latin *religio* – connotes a bond or relation. According to Marcel, “Flight has taken to itself a

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105 The translation used here is by Thomas J. Sheehan in “Heidegger and the Nazis,” in *The New York Times Review of Books*, 16 June, 1988, 41-43. Sheehan is translating the German as it appears in Wolfgang Shirmacher, *Technik und Gelassenheit: Zeit Kritik nach Heidegger* (Frieburg: Alber, 1983), 25. This passage was initially part of Heidegger’s lecture “The Question Concerning Technology.” Only the first part of the sentence has been retained in the published version. Heidegger’s use of the phrase “in essence, the same” is indicative as to how, for both him and Marcel, abstract, functional thinking stands in a reductive relation to mystery. See Marcel’s comment in *MB II*, p. 165: “Their lies a road which runs straight to the forced labor camp and the cremation oven.”

106 *DW*: 27.
kind of independent existence; it has become an entity… [But] no one remembers that he flees from God.”  

For Picard, “Flight” is represented by the constellation of quantitative practices that project the world as “technicalized” – a world conforming to the light of the technical image. To use a phrase of Heidegger, this image of technicity “holds sway,” becomes hegemonic, and determines the standard of objectivity. To use the language of Descartes, to engage in “Flight” means to live exclusively in the realm of “primary qualities,” i.e. extension. From such a singular perspective, to dwell in the realm of faith would be to bathe in the sheer subjectiveness of “secondary qualities.” Picard offers this characterization:

What distinguishes the Flight today ... is this: once Faith was the universal, and prior to the individual; there was an objective world of Faith, while the Flight was accomplished subjectively, within the individual man. It came into being through the individual man’s separating himself off from the world of Faith by an act of decision. A man who wanted to flee had first to make his own flight. The opposite is true to-day. The objective and external world of Faith is no more; it is Faith which has to be remade moment by moment through the individual’s act of decision, that is to say, through the individual’s cutting himself off from the world of the Flight. For to-day it is no longer Faith which exists as an objective world, but rather the Flight…  

Marcel viewed the 20th century as a time when the scientific world view prepared in the 17th century had clearly taken hold, becoming entrenched, resulting in a world in which “ideas are objectified, reduced to formulas, and made into propaganda. [In this world,] thought is perverted and becomes demonic.” The responsibility of the philosopher is to serve as an “exemplary witness.” This unique type of witness attests, or gives testimonial, in order to bring forth an awareness of what man is essentially, regardless of his current, existential condition. Marcel wants to articulate the “extremely complex knot of relations [reflecting] different levels
Exemplary witnesses converge towards the universal in the sense of achieving a comprehensive vision resulting in a progressive overcoming of anything resembling self-centeredness. This need to recuperatively overcome the fissures of a broken world in the interest of a higher unity, will eventually cause Marcel to institute a radical return to experience – but not until an appeal to idealism first.

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Escape to Idealism

Marcel’s published writings frequently reference his overcoming of idealism. Less attention, however, is focused on his early idealistic writings. Marcel offers several disparate dates as the time he abandoned idealism – as early as 1915, about the time he commenced Part II of the Metaphysical Journal and, according to Being and Having, perhaps as late as June 26, 1929. Idealism insulates the object within a conceptual matrix resulting in a condition where the object has no meaning other than that which is conferred upon it by the mind. Simply stated, for Marcel, idealism’s concern with states of consciousness negated its ability to get “a hold of the real.” Any genuine ontological investigation qua interrogation of being assumes a pre-ontological understanding of being. As Aquinas knew well, being is either there first or not at all. A classic example of Marcel’s early foray into idealism is Les conditions dialectiques de la

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\[\text{\textsuperscript{112} BH: 27}
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\[\text{\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.: 47. See also MJ: 179: “[B]eing … must not be taken to mean a synthesis of intellectual determinations…. To ask if there is being is … to get to the bottom of things … to see through the tissue of phenomena (the veil of happening).”}
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\[\text{\textsuperscript{114} Thomas Aquinas, On Truth, 3 Volumes, trans. Mulligan McGlynn and Schmidt (Regenery: 1952-1954): Volume I, Question I, Article C: “That which the intellect first conceives as that which is most known and into which it involves all conceptions is being.” I am grateful to Oliva Blanchette for this reference.}
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By tracing the argument of this essay, we can observe the process of an idealist-driven, dialectical method undermining itself during the course of its development. Most of Marcel’s later, isolated remarks concerning idealism are visible here in full bloom. So despite what Marcel says about formally abandoning idealism as late as 1929, there is evidence that the seeds of this abandonment were sowed as early as 1912! However, in typically Marcellian fashion, these seeds of discontent will generate fresher, more vibrant roots. Les conditions dialectiques de la philosophie de l’intuition ends with an appeal to “an act of faith … ma[de] explicit only in a practical dialectic of participation.”

The Dialectical Conditions of Intuition

Marcel’s argument in this essay is dense and complex, a style typical of his idealist writings. The dialectical argument proceeds on two fronts. It begins negatively following a path that leads to “apparently paradoxical results [because] the philosophy of intuition must recognize the essential role of dialectic to affirm intuition. [But] to affirm intuition as independent of all dialectic would destroy thought – all thought – and thus intuition itself…. “ The argument then proceeds positively, by “establish[ing] that the philosophy of intuition can only be [re]constituted through a rational critique of the idea of absolute knowledge and that the [subsequent direction taken by the] philosophy of intuition is bound up with this rational critique.” For Marcel, if the possibility of absolute knowledge is discredited, then the “horizon” within which intuition can be considered must be “enlarged.” As Marcel frames the issue: “It is no longer a question of finding the conditions that make such a philosophy possible, but more profoundly if it exists.”

115 “Les conditions dialectiques de la philosophie de l’intuition,” in Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale 20/5 (Sept 1912): 638-652. I am grateful to Dwayne A. Tunstall for allowing me to consult his unpublished translation. Hereafter referred to as LCD.
116 LCD: 652.
117 Ibid.: 639.
118 Ibid.: 639.
119 Ibid.: 639.
those readers who already know the direction of Marcel’s later thought, the positive path is much more rewarding.

The general drift of this via negativa is as follows: Intuition, contrary to discursive knowledge, is supposed to provide direct access to being. To provide such access, a notion of “immanence” is required – being must be somehow present in the mind of the intuitor. But, how being would be present in the mind via intuition can only be determined by “exclusion” – by means of a contrast with the negative example of discursive thought. However, this determination that discursive thought is ontologically impotent is based upon a prior conception of being. According to Marcel, “pure thought is posited in a transcendent relation to being in order to “clear the path for intuition.” This is where a negative dialectic begins to wreak havoc. The intuitive affirmation of being is established as contrary to the negative ontological value of discursive thought. But, intuition cannot establish itself as a legitimate agent of knowledge: “In asserting that intuition attains being, and if this assertion is put forward as an objective judgment, pure thought would indeed be itself defined implicitly as transcendent in relation to being … [and] denies being as absolute.” In other words, if thought is to be endowed with a certain absolute perspicacity, the ability to validate that perspicacity now implies more than can be proffered by thought: “That which enables us to recognize the insufficiency of all concepts cannot itself be a concept. [B]eing can only be divined as an uncharacterizable plenitude.” Absolute knowledge, as well as the intuition it was intended to validate, are effectively disempowered in the course of their dialectical presentation. In short, “thought is powerless to convert the idea of being into being.”

120 Ibid.: 641
121 Ibid.: 642.
123 LCD: 644.
The *via positiva* proceeds like this: Intuition presupposes that being is given and a potential object of apprehension. Intuition also presupposes a distinction between being and the idea of being. Can the distinction between being and an idea of being be reconciled? The reconciliation of “being” and the “idea of being” requires the development of a “criterion of being considered as such, being in so far as it is distinct from its idea and opposed to its idea.”

According to Marcel, there is no “criteriology of being” – a criterion falls under the category of an idea. If there is no criteriology of being, the question loses its significance – being cannot be identified with an idea: “Perhaps, when taken to its conclusion, this doctrine leads to a contradiction, i.e. to a thought that is not a thought.”

The constructive assimilation of being and the idea of being is another vestige of absolute knowledge. The question remains, however, as to whether such a comprehensive system could be realized through empirical thought. Usually one is never in the position to refute absolute knowledge because such knowledge has a tendency to synthetically assimilate anything which stands in opposition to it. Yet Marcel finds a way: If one is going to make the claim for absolute knowledge, then one has to be able to claim that it is free of subjectivity. But in order to make that determination, absolute knowledge must be replaced by “some expedient such [as] intuition.” However, such a transcendent condition of being is necessarily lacking. Either it occurs within the system of validation, i.e. as an idea, and is powerless to provide the validation, or it is established externally and is no longer within “the total system of ideas.”

This is where Marcel’s turns towards an ontological realism – “a moment of capital importance [occurs] when it is doubtlessly possible to see the transition to a theory of being.”

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124 Ibid.: 646.
125 Ibid.: 647.
126 Ibid.: 649.
127 Ibid.: 650.
In order to conceive knowledge as absolute, one would be forced to reconcile “formal perfection” with “extensive particularity” – the collection of all finite points of view, i.e. truth and error. But this requirement in the end undermines the possibility of absolute knowledge, leaving only “a chaotic collection deprived of all order and the truth of which can no longer be defined.” Therefore, whatever regulative value absolute knowledge may possess as a heuristic notion, it “is powerless to constitute itself … [and] could not in any way express the nature of being.” Marcel is quick to emphasize the positive implications of this critique of absolute knowledge: “To postulate an object impenetrable to knowledge is to postulate a knowing beyond knowledge.” This surplus to discursive thought is what Marcel refers to as “being.”

Given this radical critique of absolute knowledge, what becomes of intuition? No longer simply a vehicle of representation, intuition becomes an act of creative transcendence in which “thought – conveying an awareness of the distorted character of every objectivization – asserts itself as irreducible to every conversion of that sort.” No longer posing as the ideal synthesis of being, intuition assumes a more circumspect role as “identical to being, at least when it is participating in it.” Any attempt at an absolute synthesis is abandoned. Existence is now viewed as a “zone of adhesion” that is incapable of being reduced to thought. Marcel is operating on the leading edge of a realm that exceeds the grip of knowledge – “[participating] through some successive steps of creation, to a center where it is compelled to renounce itself freely, in

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128 *Ibid.*: 650.
129 *Ibid.*: 651.
130 *Ibid.*: 651.
131 *Ibid.*: 652.
132 *Ibid.*: 652. See James Collins, “Gabriel Marcel and the Mystery of Being,” in *Thought*, XVIII, No. 71, December 1943, p. 675: “Still strongly influenced by the “Les conditions dialectiques de la philosophie de l’intuition,” … [Marcel] singled out for investigation that factor in thought which is not an idea, namely, the function of positing. In so far as it posits, thought is a creative intuition or act of transcendence that is irreducible to an objectified idea. Although it is not identified with being, thought does effectively participate in being.”
order to make room for – the one who is (Celui qui est).133

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The Return to Experience

What we call “the jump to existence” is really a kind of intra-existential transformation. That is the only way we can avoid idealism. We must say, then, that thought is inside existence…. I take this to mean the return to being.134

Marcel’s encounter with idealism confirmed the inability of thought to reach being solely through the vehicle of thought – Being is not a demonstrandum: it exists as a global, “indissoluble unity of existence and of the existent.”135 If thought is inside existence, then a return to experience is required. According to one commentator:

An identification of experience and reality is possible only when the term experience is given the full range of its significance, only when it is defined as the total life of the self…. The “return” must somehow be a “reconstruction.” It will no really be an effort to [simply] find something already there, buried under the debris of fancy, but rather to elaborate something new. It will really be an effort to reshape experience, to give it a new mold, a new direction.136

However, this return to experience entails an appreciation of experience in depth and is nothing resembling the reductive characterization offered by logical empiricism. Although our experience does provides access to non-sensible dimensions of reality, what we typically take to be “real” makes little or no accommodation for what is not materially perceivable. According to Theodore Roszak:

[P]hilosophy often trails off into much bookish discussion about something called “sense data,” conceived abstractly as a uniform species of evidence that politely registers its arrival and then waits to be accounted for by clever epistemological schemes…. The model for the unsensuous sense data so dear to the empiricist seems to be a scientist reading a thermometer as part of a not

133 LCD: 652.
134 BH: 27.
135 MJ: 322. See also p. 32: “Thought is unable to lay the foundation of the immediate relation – it can only surpass them – the idea of demonstration … involves a contradiction and collapses.” See Collins, “Gabriel Marcel and the Mystery of Being,” p. 676: “[Following] his attack on idealism, Marcel … shift[ed] the center of gravity of his philosophy from the problem of the one and the many to that of the full and the void…. From the latter standpoint—that of the ontological exigency of man before the mystery of being—it is impossible to sustain the notion of absolute knowledge.
so very eventful experiment – surely the most minimal exercise of our sensory abilities.137

This equivocation of experience and sensation is problematic. Sartre provides a powerful critique of this equivocation:

Such is the notion of sensation. We can see its absurdity. First of all, it is a pure fiction. It does not correspond to anything which I experience in myself or with regard to the Other. We have apprehended only the objective universe; all our personal determinations suppose the world and arise as relations to the world. Sensation supposes that man is already in the world…. Sensation is a pure daydream. It must be deliberately rejected by any serious theory concerning the relations between consciousness and the world.138

According to Alphonse de Waelhens, classical arguments for the priority of the objective world – a world mirrored by sensation – move in a “vicious circle.”139 First, a conception of the objective world is founded upon sensation. Then, this objective conception is used to invalidate sensations as objective, thus relegating sensation to the purely subjective. A serious confusion between noetic and ontological simplicity leads to the absurd conclusion that the more fragmented and impoverished something is, then the more it exemplifies the real. But, as Bernard Lonergan pointed out, “[K]nowing is an organically integrated act…. [E]mpiricism amounts to the assumption that what is obvious in knowing is what knowing obviously is. That assumption is false.”140 The early Wittgenstein also criticized this notion of pure representation, or “picturing” – by uncovering its dependence upon the notion of a pristine mirror-image: “How can the all embracing logic which mirrors the world use such special catches and manipulations? Only because all of these are connected to an infinitely fine network, to the great mirror.”141 For

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the early Marcel, the “great mirror,” allowing for a synoptic representation of the world, is the conceptual equivalent of absolute knowledge – the identity of the idea of being and being.

The Existential Orbit: The Human Body as Wedge and Probe

But the awakened and knowing say: body am I entirely, and nothing else; and the soul is only a word for something about the body.142

This notion of experience that Marcel develops is prior to the functional distinctions of subjective and objective. His goal is to “dig into” experience in order to re-establish vital connections that have been severed. Marcel’s outlook is in keeping with the conception of experience developed by John Dewey – a treatment of experience that extends vertically as well as horizontally: “Experience … reaches down into nature; it has depth. It also has breadth and to an indefinitely elastic extent. It stretches. That stretch constitutes inference.”143

For Marcel, the dimensions of depth and elasticity that one encounters in the world are made possible by the human body. In Marcellian terms, the body acts as a *wedge* by which the self becomes inserted into the thickness of the world. From this perspective, the self is incarnate, literally *embodying* the world. The expression commonly used to characterize this phenomenon is “body-subject.” The body also acts as a *probe* enabling the self to experientially traverse, in varying degrees of adhesion and intimacy, the entire spectrum of the world.144 This incarnated condition is ontologically prior to any form of Cartesian dualism. According to one commentator, “It is from human being and in relation to human being that we come to understand all of being. But this selfsame human being is not a being closed in upon itself. It is a

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144 See “Incarnate Being as the Central Datum of Metaphysical Reflection,” in *CF*, p. 15: “[W]e must distinguish not only degrees of clarification but degrees of intimacy with oneself and one’s surroundings – with the universe itself.”
being open to all of being.”¹⁴⁵ It is the embodied self that provides the necessary condition of this opening that serves as the basis of any contact with things whatsoever. Marcel characterizes the sum total of this relational field as an “existential orbit.” As early as the *Metaphysical Journal*, Marcel was aware of the pivotal role assumed by the body as a conduit, or sluice, to the world: “[I]t is clear that the datum common to my consciousness and to other possible consciousnesses is my body.”¹⁴⁶ The immense reach of this orbit is reflected through the dimensions of depth and breadth that are attainable through the body – from the earliest traces of memory, up to and including the highest form of metaphysical speculation. In fact, Marcel will extend the reach of this orbit ultimately into the realm of the eternal. Aristotle’s profound claim that the soul is *potentially* all existing things is possible only on the basis of this prior condition of embodiment.¹⁴⁷

It is through this “extensive” reach of the body that the self is embedded in the world. As *ex-tended*, the body is literally “out-stretched” or plugged into the world – “the human body *marks* a person’s insertion into space and time.”¹⁴⁸ The body and the world are then interpenetratively linked in a coordinated sense that forms an ambient nexus separated by no entitative barrier. This connection is fundamental – there is no need to bridge a gap through some type of epistemological device. As Richard M. Zaner indicated in his excellent study *The Problem of Embodiment*, this connection is “neither posterior to experience (empiricism) nor

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¹⁴⁶ *MJ*: 18.

¹⁴⁷ See Aristotle, *De Anima*: 431b, 26-27. See also *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book 10, Chapters 7-8, where Aristotle argues that this intellectual dimension is a divine (*ônios*) characteristic.

¹⁴⁸ Erwin W. Strauss and Michael A. Machado, “Gabriel Marcel’s Notion of Incarnate Being,” in *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel: Library of Living Philosophers* XVII. “Ex-tend” from the Latin preposition *ex* “out of” and *tendo*, *tendère*, téendi*, tentum*, meaning “to stretch, to extend, or to spread.” Marcel likes to use the phrase “to graft upon,” in the sense used in horticulture, in order to convey the natural bond that is achieved.
antior (idealism) but ‘identical and coextensive with it’.\textsuperscript{149} Using terms reminiscent \textit{Les conditions dialectiques de la philosophie de l’intuition}, one could say that a true “path” has finally been “cleared” between the self and the world. As a human-being enmeshed within the world, sensation is ‘immediate’ – things are given with a “fundamental internality,” – a characteristic connoted by the German word \textit{Gegebensein}.\textsuperscript{150} This sense of incarnation is the primordial basis of all experience and cognition. In Marcellian terms, “experience [is] transmuted into thought.”\textsuperscript{151}

\textbf{The Primacy Feeling}

The type of pre-reflective experience being developed by Marcel is not based upon the classic, sense-data model. Marcel is quick to contrast the problem of sensation with the mystery of feeling. Like Whitehead, Marcel was aware of the disclosive capacity of feeling and its ability to reveal contours of the world otherwise inaccessible to thought. Thought, on the other hand, has a tendency to deform both the continuities and the vicissitudes within experience. This occurs through a process of objectivization in which wholes are isolated, analyzed, and ultimately solidified into forms of relations – integral unities congealing into facts. But as Robert Frost indicated in the poem, \textit{Mowing}: “The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.”\textsuperscript{152} What if the discrete results of analysis are, in fact, derivative from a prior unity? Marcel’s answer is affirmative: “In the beginning … is a certain felt unity which becomes progressively articulated so as to make room for an ensemble of interrelated terms…. This transformation, indeed, will not take place without incurring an impoverishment, a kind of drying up of the realm of


\textsuperscript{150} \textit{CF}: 25. \textit{Gegebensein} connotes a strong sense of being given – literally “to have been given.”

\textsuperscript{151} \textit{CF}: 26.

\textsuperscript{152} Robert Frost, “Mowing,” in \textit{The Poetry of Robert Frost}, ed. E.C. Lathem (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969): 17. The word “fact” is derived from the past particle (\textit{factum}) of the Latin verb \textit{facio}, meaning “to make.” Perhaps this conveys the sense in which facts involve labor, i.e. facts have a constructive aspect.
In short, thought comes at a price and has its basis in feeling.

Marcel uses the French *sentir*, as opposed to *toucher* or *tâter* – verbs connoting the sense of touch – to describe the fundamental apprehension achievable through the body. The notion of *sentir* is opposed to any “message theory … like that between two telephone poles.” The message theory is problematic for the following reason. A transmission of sorts is assumed to occur between an emitting pole and a receiving pole. But in order for the act of transmission to occur – in order for the language sent to be transformed into the language received – the key to the transmission must somehow already exist for the recipient. However, what was sent cannot be pre-given to the recipient – if it were there would be no need for any transmission to occur. The “message theory,” for Marcel, operates at the level of “primary reflection” – a level of thematic reflection in which objects are discretely organized and fragmented into inter-objective relationships. At the level of primary reflection, relations “are fundamentally mediatized, conditioned by a series of mediations at the level of objects.”

In order to overcome the instrumental space of mediation, Marcel will attempt to treat the act of *sentir* recuperatively, in the French sense of the verb *recueillir*, through a gathering process he refers to as “secondary reflection.” By viewing the body as my act of feeling, *je sens*, we arrive at the fundamental basis of experience: “the affirmation of a pure immediate, that is to say an immediate which by essence is incapable of mediation.” This feeling of the “body qua mine” provides the foundational, existential *substratum*, or touchstone, of all transmissive engagement whatsoever. For Marcel, this “non-mediatizable immediate” provides the baseline of

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154 *MJ*: 327.
156 *MJ*: 329.
all feeling – an *Urgfühl*.\(^{157}\)

**Participation**

The act of *sentir* articulated here is contrary to the blank slate or wax tablet described in empiricism *à la* John Locke. Marcel will develop a notion of experience as “participation” – a theme that goes back as far as his earliest idealistic writings. For Marcel, authentic participation is a type of intimate intercourse *between* a self and the world, consisting of a bond between human beings, or a covenant between a human being and God – it is a *coesse*. Through participation, a fusing together or essential ordination occurs: “[P]articipation is not a fact, not a dictum of the mind; it is a demand of free thought; a demand which is fulfilled by the very act of positing it, since its fulfillment relies on no condition external to itself.”\(^{158}\) Participation is bi-directional – possessing both a centripetal and centrifugal dimension. Centripetally, participation moves towards a center. This is not the passive reception of classical empiricism. Instead, the subject engages in the act of reception: “[H]ere, to receive, means to open myself and give myself to an external action.”\(^{159}\) Marcel characterizes this movement as “an inward relaxation in which I abolish the sort of constriction which makes me shrink into myself.”\(^{160}\) The subject *receives* through a process of absorptive fusion – a process made possible only on the basis of a prior sense of embeddedness stemming from the body qua mine. To borrow a phrase from the Heideggerian lexicon, *Dasein ist In-der-Welt-sein* – or, in Marcellian terms, *être-au-monde*.\(^{161}\)

However, if simply left to itself, this centripetal motion would result in a process of

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\(^{157}\) See *The Mystery of Being*: 109. See also *MJ*: 247. Cf. Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (Macmillan Company, 1938), p. 165: “The body is ours…. This fact of observation, vague but imperative, is the foundation of the connexity of the world, and of the transmission of its types of order.”


\(^{159}\) *CF*: 91.

\(^{160}\) *Ibid.*: 34.

\(^{161}\) See *Sein und Zeit*: 52-62 See also *CF*: 21. The French express the act of being born as *venire au monde*, “coming into the world” as in “I came into the world on August 9, 1955.” I am grateful to Professor Oliva Blanchette for this insight.
deformation – becoming a self-divinizing act of anthropocentrism. A centrifugal movement is required away from self-centeredness in which “[one] moves more and more into the circle with reference to which and outside of which there exist third persons who are the others.” Marcel is fully aware of his dependence upon “insufficient metaphors.” Partly as a consequence of his failed encounter with idealism, Marcel was convinced of a “fructifying dimension” beyond thought and convinced of the superiority of an “open world” à la Bergson versus any closed system of thought. To do justice to the dynamism of this open world, metaphors become indispensable: “The problem for philosophers is to give us access to a dimension which can only be conceived dynamically, but which we perpetually tend to lose sight of, as we succumb to the vertigo of the object.”

Qua ex-tended, the body exists in a symbiotic, centrifugal relationship to the world: “My body is in sympathy with things … I am really attached to and really adhere to all that exists – to the universe which is my universe and whose center is my body.” This tacit, albeit thick, corporeal awareness is anterior to reflection – an immediate which is absolute, “making all mediation possible.”

**Dimensions of Intersubjective Being**

This reciprocating movement of centripetal and centrifugal forces, originating out of the autochthonous body-subject, is illuminative of the basic structure of intersubjective being. Through a process of recollection, an interior, centripetal movement occurs resulting in an awareness of being contained in “something shaping me like a womb.” At the same time, the

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162 *CF*: 33-34. In the language of John Dewey, participation, like experience, consists of both “doing” and “undergoing.”
163 *I and Thou*: 47.
164 *M.J.*: 274.
166 *CF*: 29.
self moves ecstatically outward, centrifugally: “We are no longer on the level of assertion but on that of engagement or adhesion.” For Marcel, as for Martin Buber, the fundamental datum of human existence is “man with man.” This sense of sursum is possible only on the basis of Marcel’s vision of the world as a “prolong[ation] of my body.” Without this reach, or prolongation, the result would be, in Whiteheadian terms, a “static morphological universe” of man contra man – a world described by Hobbes as a war of “all against all” in which “the life of man [is] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

It is helpful to trace these respective contours of intersubjectivity. For modern philosophy, beginning with Cartesian dualism, intersubjectivity posed an almost insurmountable problem. Husserlian phenomenology, with its primary emphasis upon the intentionality of consciousness, was initially seen as offering a solution. Initially, Husserl conceived cognitive intentions as primary – being was identified with the object qua known within the transcendental ego. Intersubjective being becomes, at best, a second level, derivate type of intention. Marcel views intentionality at a more primordial level – that of inter-dialogical encounter. As Marcel makes clear in *Metaphysical Journal*, within the realm of dialogical exchange “between the question and the answer there must be a meeting ground which, if not selected, is at least accepted … by the question.” For Husserl, intersubjectivity is a thematic problem to be phenomenologically overcome whereas, for Marcel, it is the basic presupposition of philosophy or any human activity whatsoever. Marcel’s position is reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty’s remark that phenomenology was a “movement” long before becoming a “doctrine.” In other words,

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167 CF: 95.
168 MJ: 245.
intersubjectivity is a condition that exists ontologically prior to any attempt to solve it as a problem. The conception of intersubjectivity as a given, or Gegebensein, to be embraced, as opposed to a problem to be overcome, is captured in the work of Alfred Schutz, whose insights will lend direct support to Marcel’s view of the primacy of intersubjectivity.

For Schutz, the lines of intersubjective being run very deep and “serves as the fundamental category of human existence in the world.” Intersubjectivity, for Schutz, is grounded in our condition of natality – the fact that we are “born of woman.” Due to the fact that our autochthonic, shared past stems from the womb of our mother, any type of subsequent intellectual activity – regardless of type or level – is “founded on the primal experience of the we-relationship.” In fact, Schutz will go further – perhaps anticipating what would come to be known as cloning: “We are simply born into a world of others…. As long as human beings are not concocted like homunculi in retorts but are born and brought up by mothers, the sphere of the “We” will be naively presupposed.”

There is little doubt that Marcel would agree with Schutz on the non-problematic nature of intersubjectivity and that it serves as a fundamental category of any genuine philosophical anthropology. Marcel would also fully validate the importance of natality – being “born of woman.” However, Marcel would want to trace the origins of intersubjectivity further, and at the risk of abusing spatial metaphors, by looking both outward and upward.

The centrifugal dimension of Marcel’s conception of intersubjectivity is instructive here. Marcel indicated that, centripetally speaking, something was “shaping [him] like a womb.”

172 Ibid. : 82.
parallel to Schutz’s remarks here are uncanny. But Marcel’s notion of intersubjectivity also reflects a transcendent arc that seems to be lacking in Schutz’s discussion. For Marcel, the centrifugal, transcendent dimension of intersubjectivity serves as a line of connection to an Other that includes human being but, at the same time, also surpasses it. By plumbing the depths of the self *de profundis* “the whole world becomes one unified system of internal relations … an ‘intersubjective nexus’ linking one being to another…. [This] is a continuous process of participation in the range of existence from the pre-reflexive (submerged) to the reflective (emergent).”174 This continuous process, qua embodiment, will provide the basis of three levels of participation: the “we” relationship, the “I-Thou” relationship, as well as a transcendent relationship to Being.

§

**Communion and Fellowship: A Higher Empiricism**

It is the private life which holds out the mirror to infinity; personal intercourse, and that alone, that ever hints at a personality beyond our daily vision.175

Marcel referred to his post-idealistic thought as a “higher empiricism.” Residing within the tissue of experience is an interstitial link to a universal sense of meaning *de jure*: “the unconditional which is the requirement and the very mark of the Absolute in us.”176 This is not the type of universality exhibited by “2+2=4.” Instead, “the task or vocation proper to the philosopher consists in preserving within himself the paradoxical equilibrium between the spirit of universality … and his personal experience.”177 David Abram, in *The Spell of the Sensuous*, refers to this phenomenon as a process of “turning inside out,” consisting of “a loosening of the

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174 E. Straus and M. Machado, *Marcel’s Theory of Incarnate Being*: 126, 128. See CF: 17, where Marcel references “a centrifugal movement toward the external world.”
175 E.M. Forster, *Howard’s End* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1910,): 78. Cited in CF: 147. Marcel also used this quotation as an epigraph to Part II of the *Metaphysical Journal*. These remarks “expressed one of the basic convictions inspiring my entire philosophical development” (CF: 147).
176 *HV*: 134.
177 *TWB*: 31.
psyche from its confinement within a strictly human sphere, freeing sentience to return to the sensible world that contains us…. [Quoting Hölderlin] “The inner—what is it, if not intensified sky?” According to Whitehead, “We can phrase this shortly by saying that in one sense the world is in the soul.”

The domain that Marcel wants to uncover here is spiritual as opposed to material – it can be shown and shared but not proven as in QED. For Marcel, the spiritual is reflected through our awareness of increasing degrees of comprehensive experience. Using an analogy of concentric circles, this experience can range from an intimate encounter with the natural environment, another human being, culminating in a participative comprehension of God, the supreme Other. Marcel believes adamantly that this culmination constitutes the most fundamental datum of human experience – “the truth of life.” Marcel draws upon the work of Georg Simmel in this context: “At the spiritual level life gives birth to something more than life…. [T]he way life has of raising itself to more than itself is not something given from without; it is rather its own being grasped in its immediacy.”

The “We” Relationship

In its own intrinsic structure, subjectivity is already, in the most profound sense, intersubjective…. Marcel’s emphasis on the primordiality of inter-personal relations places him in opposition to any form of dualism. The ego is not an “isolated reality” – it is the result of a process of emphasis placed upon a select segment of experience and is in no way reflective of experience as a whole. Contra Leibniz, the ego is not a self-enclosed monad – it is “a highly

179 Whitehead, Modes of Thought: 163.
sensitive enclosure.” Marcel’s ego is permeable, containing “windows,” enabling it to be “awakened” and to radiate rays of connectedness to the beyond: “It participates in the inexhaustible fullness of being from which it emanates.” As Paul stated in I Corinthians 6:19, “You are not your own.” Within this plenitude, the ego participates as a “trustee,” a shareholder or stakeholder within the whole. The analytic divisions and classifications commonly relied upon, i.e. self, world, other, etc. are, in fact, second-order, derivative distinctions that arrive on the scene after the original act of participation – an act founded upon the primary event of incarnation. These distinctions are, in the language of Dewey, taken as opposed to given. As long as these derivative distinctions are substituted for our initial condition as unified, the relation between the self and an other can only be conceived in an exterior way, denuding their essence as a moment in “the ontological bond which unites each particular being to Being.” This characteristic of being ontologically “bound” is vital to the human being, constituting its “vocation” – what one is “called” to do. Simply stated, the path that leads to the self must in some sense traverse the domain of the other. The connection between “self-realization” and “intersubjectivity” is essential here. From Marcel’s perspective, the primary vocation of the human being is to realize this ontological bond synoptically by incorporating “the most concrete forms of human experience … recognizing that the most humble of them … can go immeasurably deep.”

Marcel will offer a variety of concrete examples to emphasize this point. When one travels using public transportation, one simply comes into contact with others. The exchange

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182 HV: 16.
183 HV: 26.
185 See Dominic Anton Joseph, Self Realization and Intersubjectivity in Gabriel Marcel (Rome: Urbaniania University Press, 1988), p. 118: “Just as existence is understood as the openness of the subject onto the universe, so to the existence of the self is openness to others and thereby its realization to personhood.”
186 HV: 27-28. See ibid.: p. 101 where Marcel refers to “the hallowing of the real.”
between a traveler and a ticketing agent, despite any pleasantries exchanged, is a relationship of pure functionality. Each sees the other as merely an object. In Marcellian terms, the relationship is reflective of the mode of “having” as opposed to “being.” But once aboard and underway, a conversation may be initiated. This conversation could simply consist of a benign question like “What is your destination?” Or, the conversation could shift to a discussion of shared experiences and acquaintances. The emphasis is upon sharing: “On this sort of magic voyage …, [t]hey are together in an elsewhere … which has a mysteriously intimate character. They are linked to each other by a shared secret…. [T]he notion of the secret is the mainspring of intersubjectivity.”

**The “I-Thou” Relationship**

It can happen, however, that a bond of feeling is created between me and the other person, for example I discover an experience we both have shared…. [H]ence a unity is established in which the other person and myself become we, and this means that he ceases to be him and becomes thou; the words “you too” in this process take on primary value.

> I’m going out to clean the pasture spring;  
> I’ll only stop to rake the leaves away  
> (And wait to watch the water clear, I may):  
> I shant be gone long.—*you come too!* 

This mainspring of intersubjectivity provides access to the wide sweep of spiritual reality, enabling the self to “open onto” the infinite. To do so, a process of “secondary,” recuperative reflection must be undertaken in which the self undertakes “the indispensable task … of remaking, thread by thread, the spiritual fabric heedlessly torn….“ The aim of secondary reflection is to uncover the spiritual relationships, invisible yet substantial, enveloping the self – relations that were severed by primary reflection. As Marcel says, the purpose is “to recapture a

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187 **MB I**: 178. See *infra*, p. 179: “This is nothing more than a spark of spirituality….”
188 **CF**: 33.
190 **HV**: 100. See *MB I*, p. 203, where Marcel refers to a” grafting of the flesh onto the spirit.”
reality and to awaken the soul to its presence.” The human being exists as an *imago Dei* – not in the sense of a material representation but as a reflection (*εἰκόν*), a glimmer of the totality. As Plato recognized, the capacity for *sight* is “like an eye” already contained in the soul, but is not turned in the right direction. Through a process of *συνείδεσις* – in the Greek sense of consciousness with – Marcel will attempt to steer a course to the infinite by modulating back and forth between the personal and the ontological. The realm of the infinite, as profoundly grasped by Nicholas de Cusa, is “a sphere of which the center is everywhere and the circumference is nowhere.”

The “I-Thou” relationship occupies a higher position on the ascending plane of spiritual being than the “we-relationship.” Within the I-Thou relationship, two beings interact in a way that transcends the purely functional. As was apparent in the case of the two travelers, the “space” that existed at first between the “self” and the “other” was one of simple location – the two were “next to” or “beside” each other. These terms bespeak a sense of exteriority or distance from one to the other. As the sense of shared intimacy associated with intersubjective being takes hold, the barriers associated with the prepositions “next to,” “at,” and “beside,” become dissolved in favor of a feeling of “being with.” According to one commentator, “spatial proximity begins to be complimented by the awakening psychical proximity; position begins to

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191 *HV*: 72.
192 See *Republic*, Book VII, 518c-d.
193 See *EBHD*, p. 79 where Marcel refers to *syneideses* as a “flash of insight.” The notion of the human being as an *imago Dei* who, “like an eye,” is capable of receiving a “flash of insight” is interesting when considered in the light of Corinthians I, Chapter 15, verses 51-52: “Listen! I will unfold a mystery: we shall not all die, but we shall all be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye….”
194 See Alexander Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1954): 18. See also Giorgio de Santillana (ed), *The Age of Adventure: The Renaissance Philosophers* (The New American Library, 1954), p. 51: “Infinity is present (‘contracted’) into each finite thing, in fact, it is the foundation, the reason, and the measure of its being. Caught between minimal and maximum infinities, but reaching neither, the finite thing is a participant of being…..”
be transformed into presence.”\textsuperscript{195} This type of presence is characterized by a deep and intimate form of recognition, or reciprocity, as indicated by the French preposition \textit{avec} or “with.” Taking advantage of the capacity of Romance languages to express the second person pronoun “you” both informally and formally, Marcel refers to the other as a “thou” (\textit{tu}) as opposed to \textit{vous} – the formal, polite version of “you.” In order for the other to be perceived as a “thou,” the perceiver must loosen the tight grip of self-interest that encircles him. Once loosened, a shared network of relationships gradually becomes discernable \textit{entre nous} – an intertwining, expanse of relations invisible to the naked eye. This is why Marcel refers to \textit{presence} as a “communion” wherein “the co-articulation of the vital and the spiritual is really palpable.”\textsuperscript{196} Within the space of this co-articulation, a reciprocal moment occurs involving a mutual embrace between self and other: “We are here at the exact point where honest thought changes into a \textit{De profundis} and by the very fact of doing so opens to transcendence.”\textsuperscript{197}

\textbf{The Bond of Fraternity}

The person who gives up his life for a cause is aware of giving all, of making a total sacrifice; but even if he is going to a certain death, his act is not a suicide…. Why? Because he puts his life at the disposal of a higher reality…. There cannot be any sacrifice without hope, and hope is suspended in the ontological realm.\textsuperscript{198}

For Marcel, the notion of self-sacrifice is vital, offering a powerful key to the transcendent. There is no rational explanation that can be given for self-sacrifice because the act of self-sacrifice is not an act simply of \textit{quid pro quo}. Marcel’s analysis is very insightful:

We have to distinguish carefully between the physical effect of the act of self-sacrifice and the act’s inner significance…. Self-fulfillment takes place at another, an invisible level…. They

\textsuperscript{196} \textit{MB I}: 210.
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{HV}: 146. \textit{Infra}: “a mysterious inversion takes place … between giving and receiving … discover[ing] all around … the inexhaustible current flowing through our universe.” For an in-depth, insightful comparison of the notions of intersubjectivity in the fiction of Walker Percy and Marcel, see Mary Deems Howland \textit{The Gift of the Other: Gabriel Marcel’s Concept of Intersubjectivity in Walker Percy’s Novel’s} (Duquesne University Press, 1990).
\textsuperscript{198} \textit{CF}: 77.
answer a call that comes from their very depths…. At this point it seems a strange overflow is taking place … as if death might be really, in a supreme sense, life. 199

The Marcellian notion of sacrifice in the interest of a higher reality is perhaps nowhere better exemplified than in Ernest Hemmingway’s novel For Whom the Bell Tolls. In this classic story, Robert Jordan, an American fighting on the side of the Republic of Spain during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939, is wounded in the process of attempting to blow up a strategic target – a bridge that serves as a major avenue of approach for the enemy. While fighting along side of guerilla insurgents, Robert falls in love with a young woman, Maria. Their love is consummated the night before Robert is wounded. Robert is now transcendentally linked to two higher causes. One cause is the Republic, for which he will remain behind in order to delay the enemy – realizing that he will be killed in the process – and the other is Maria, with and through whom he has entered into the realm of the truly intersubjective. It is hardly coincidental that Hemmingway, although writing in English, capitalizes on the opportunity to utilize the formal / informal structure of the Spanish language – represented by the words “you” (usted) and “thou” (tu) – a distinction characteristic of Romance languages. 200 The following poignant exchange between Robert and Maria, just prior to be separated, exhibits the powerful dynamic that exists between the transpersonal act of sacrifice, the informal mode of address, and the intersubjective:

“Guapa,” he said to Maria and took hold of her two hands. “Listen. We will not be going to Madrid—….. We will not go to Madrid now but I go always with thee wherever thou goest. Understand? As long as there is one of us there is both of us. Does thou understand? What I do now I do alone. I could not do it well with thee. If thou goest, then I go, too. Do you not see how it is? Whichever one there is, is both.”
Now you will go for us both … you must not be selfish. You must do your duty now. You are me now. Surely thou must feel it….“ 201

199 MB I: 166-167.
200 See Milton M. Azevedo, “Shadows of a Literary Dialect: For Whom the Bell Tolls in Five Romance Languages,” in The Hemmingway Review, Vol. 20, No. 1, Fall 2000: 30-48. Although Azevedo raises the issue of the way Hemmingway is able to “manipulate English morphology, syntax, and vocabulary to create a unique Spanish-in-English diction (p. 32),” he fails to examine this important exchange between Robert and Maria.
201 Ernest Hemmingway, For Whom the Bell Tolls (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1940): 463. The poem by
This passage gives concrete expression to the presence of a spiritual dimension in experience – an awareness of the other through intersubjective feeling. That this intersubjective experience is arrived at through dialogic encounter is hardly coincidental: “The dialogue is the most primeval phenomenon, generally and necessarily experienced everywhere; this is its title to priority.”202 This experience is, for Marcel, religious:

One thing that is not deceptive, one thing that cannot deceive – and this is my most profound conviction – is discovery. We might say that in a certain sense the road that leads to self passes by another. But we must add immediately that this self so mediated has hardly anything in common with the initial self. In this sense, discovery, as I understand it, can only belong to the religious dimension.203

For Marcel, intersubjectivity holds the key to the experience of being. If being is a condition of “plenitude,” then a self-contained ego – incapable of experiencing anything that exists outside of the domain of its restricted subjectivity – is incapable of accessing being. The self, when exhibited in the full scope of its radiance, ex-ists “as being a presence, or as a modification of presence.”204 The very acts which disclose the subject as a being-in-communion are at the same time the acts which provide access to being. For Marcel, the paradigmatic examples of these spiritual acts are those moments of communal fellowship – hope, fidelity, and

John Donne, that Hemmingway chose as an epigram to his novel, implies the close relationship between intersubjectivity and the transcendent:

No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe; every man
is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if
Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse,
as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor
of thy friends or thine owne were; any mans death
diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde; And
therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
It tolls for thee.


204 MB I: 210. To “ex-ist” literally means to “extend from being.”
love – in which the *coesse* of I and Thou is mutually recognized and embraced. In Marcellian terms, this reflexive, spiraling path to the self is possible only via the presence of the other.

### The Transcendent Orientation of Love

Love … appears to me to be what one might call the essential ontological datum.\(^\text{205}\)

Love, as Marcel conceives it, bespeaks the fundamental ontological unity that is exhibited between the self and the other engaged in intersubjective being – a process of spiritual re-connection in which the beloved is lifted out of its quotidian position in space and time and re-established within its rightfully endowed place in the eternal. Access to the eternal is not determined by the laws of nature. As Marcel was well aware from the death of his mother, the *presence* of a loved one does not cease with the end of their physical existence. In the spiritual realm, telepathic feeling often supersedes traditional methods of physical communication. According to Marcel, “Telepathy is surely in regard to space what memory is in regard to time.”\(^\text{206}\)

Through the act of love, the beloved is re-instantiated into the eternal and “immobili[zed] … above the world of genesis and vicissitude.”\(^\text{207}\) This transmutation is not an act of wishful thinking but a re-instatement of the self in its aboriginal claim to being. Marcel was very influenced by the work of Louis Lavelle, a contemporary French metaphysician who advocated the primacy of the relation between the self and being. For Lavelle, the self is inscribed within being – human existence arises out of a region which is anterior to the critical distinction between subject and object: “*la présence actuelle et inévitable de la totalité de l’être en chaque*...
When the beloved is transmuted into the realm of the eternal, their being qua spirit enables them to transcend the cycle of decay that is characteristic of existence physically conceived. No longer seen as completely tethered to a simply biological cycle, the beloved now exists in perpetuity by virtue of her re-affirmation in the eternal – thus the famous Marcellian dictum: “Thou at least shall not die.” Similar to the manner in which Marcel will speak of hope, love is “a sort of ontological counterweight to death.”

Marcel refers to love as a “real interiority.” As the lover continuously attests her love for the beloved, each is spiritually lifted. In a quasi-Platonic sense, the lover’s soul is stirred by the sensuous beauty of the beloved, causing the former to recollect, albeit faintly, the pure, genuine beauty of the eternal. The beloved is lifted out of her empirical conditions of space and time and reinserted into the extensive field of being. At the same time, the lover, through the spiritual act of loving, attests to her faith in the plenitude of being – a realm in which lover and beloved are joined together. Victor Hugo describes this experience with poetic beauty: “Sentir l’être sacré frémir dans l’être cher…” The lover becomes acquainted with divinity through the beloved. For Marcel, love “is perfect knowledge … in which it is no longer permissible to disassociate being from appearance.” As perfect knowledge, love is no longer subject to the dualisms that pertain to the finite order, i.e. the dualism of flesh and spirit. Love, qua infinite, surpasses all dualism and reflects a sort of “divine mediation.” In order to recognize the possibility of love, it is necessary to envision a level of divine being “that does not meet any truth that it is powerless

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209 MB II: 203.
211 “To feel sacred being throb within the beloved…” See Chapter XIII, “Love,” in *The History of the Centuries.*
212 MJ: 63.
to recognize.”\textsuperscript{213} For Marcel, unconditional love and faith in a divine plenitude go hand in hand: “love is only conceivable, only possible for a being who is capable of such faith...; such a love is perhaps like a prenatal palpitation of faith”\textsuperscript{214} God is the absolute Thou – invoked through the acts of faith and prayer. This recognition of faith as integral to the self and its transcendent orientation was operative in Marcel’s thought from the beginning. In the \textit{Metaphysical Journal}, Marcel wrote: “Faith is the act by which the mind is made, the \textit{mind} … as living and active reality…. Through faith I affirm the transcendent foundation for the union of the world and my thought.”\textsuperscript{215} Marcel uses the terms “creative fidelity” to refer to the act through which being is concretely enacted.

\textbf{Creative Fidelity as the Place of Being}

[Fidelity occupies] the truly central position … in the general economy of my thought.\textsuperscript{216}

“Being as the place of fidelity” is the \textit{pons aeternitatis} in Marcel’s philosophy. Through engaging in fidelity, one ascends to the level of transcendence. One example Marcel develops involves paying a visit to a terminally ill friend in the hospital.\textsuperscript{217} Before leaving, you promise in good faith to return – knowing that the friend’s days are numbered. Soon after, you regret that you made this promise and begin to rationalize why you are not necessarily obligated to return. This rationalization occurs in the following way: Although I sincerely meant what I said at the time, my mind has since changed. Why should I be bound by an emotion I no longer feel?

The act of fidelity is indicative of a “primal bond” that is reflective of the unity and continuity of the human soul. Fidelity reveals the “supra-temporal identity” of the self: “the

\textsuperscript{213} \textit{Ibid.}: 63.
\textsuperscript{214} \textit{CF}: 137.
\textsuperscript{215} \textit{MJ}: 44, 45.
\textsuperscript{216} \textit{CF}: 149.
\textsuperscript{217} \textit{BH}: 47.
evidence of fixed stars in the heaven of the soul.”\textsuperscript{218} This identity is not simply given \textit{apriori} – it is achieved through creative appropriation. The self that is identified through the act of fidelity is one that is freely earned through a decisive act of choice. It is easier in many instances to be unfaithful – to accept the world as broken. Unlike Sartre, Marcel did not believe that man is condemned to freedom because of the non-existence of God. For Marcel, our freedom is achieved during those significant acts in which we re-create, or attest to, our being qua spirit. It is this freedom which can reveal the inconceivable richness of the universe: “[C]onditional pledges are only possible in a world where God is absent. Unconditionality is the true sign of God’s presence.”\textsuperscript{219} Our failure to execute our freedom, to be faithful to our choice, is the ontological source of the current state of malaise that surrounds us. According to Kenneth Gallagher:

“Through fidelity I transcend my becoming and reach my being. But the being I reach is not a being which was already there: It is only there in as much as I reach it. [T]he self that fidelity reveals is a self which fidelity \textit{creates}.... Fidelity creates the self, the self as non-object.”\textsuperscript{220}

Through creative fidelity, one recalls a connection to spirit, thus re-establishing one’s place in the eternal whole. Like Bergson, Marcel believed that “[s]omething appears to overflow every part of the body … passing beyond it in space as in time…. [T]he soul … being precisely a force which can draw from itself more than it contains, yield more than it receives, give more than it has.”\textsuperscript{221} Recollection enables the self to recapture its ontological lineage by escaping the

\textsuperscript{220} \textit{The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel}: 69. Perhaps Sartre’s description of being \textit{pour soi} as “a being which is not what it is and which is what it is not” is applicable here. See \textit{Being and Nothingness}, Part II, Chapter I, “The Immediate Structure of the For-Itself: 73-105.
\textsuperscript{221} Henri Bergson, \textit{Mind-Energy: Lectures and Essays}, trans. H.W. Carr (Henry Holt and Company, 1920): 38, 39. See also, p. 56: “Put aside, then, artificial reconstructions of thinking; consider thinking itself, you will find directions rather than states…. [T]hinking is essentially a continual and continuous change of inward direction, incessantly tending to translate itself by changes of outward direction…. For an insightful discussion of the demise
confines of abstract, quantifying thought, entering again into a spiritual dimension that exceeds conceptualization. Recollection implies a repetition, not in a strictly mechanical sense, but in the active sense of a retrieve. To recollect, as in recueillement, is to engage in the revivification of spiritual possibilities. As Mircea Eliade indicated, at all levels of religious experience there exists a “close connection between cosmicization and consecration.”

This sense of consecration is captured by the German verb wiederholen – to repeat is to “hold again.” But a Marcellian type of recollection should in no way be equated with a nostalgic romanticism that simply wishes to hearken back to the past. Recollection, properly conceived, resembles the Augustinian attempt to turn towards the interior reaches of the self through confession in order to become closer to God. This process of spiritual interiorization creates a dual condition of material poverty and spiritual fecundity: having nothing yet participating in being. To be spiritually revivified is to engage in “the active perpetuation of presence.”

To truly exist, for Marcel, is to attempt to become actualized in perpetuity by extensively re-absorbing oneself into the expanse of the eternal. No longer simply a return to the past, an appeal is made to the future as well: “[T]his region where the now and then tend to merge … could be nothing other than Eternity.”

**The Ontological Efficacy of Hope**

Hope is directed towards eternity…

Hope is the act through which the self transforms its condition from material captivity to spiritual freedom. In order to best understand hope, it is necessary to contrast it with desire. For

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of the soul as conceived by those such as Marcel and Bergson, see William Barrett, *The Death of the Soul: From Descartes to the Computer* (Anchor Books, 1986).


223 PE: 36.

224 *MB I*: 194. I am reminded of the line from the Lennon-McCartney composition *Two of Us*: “You and I have memories longer than the road that stretches out ahead.”

Marcel, desire is a condition of the self-absorbed ego. If a person says “I hope I win the lottery” what they really mean is that “I desire to win the lottery.” The difference, for Marcel, is crucial. To desire is to experience a “tension” that must be eased – a tension caused by a perceived lack of egoistic fulfillment, like hunger. Marcel notes our tendency to speak of desire in terms of having a fever, emphasizing the obsessive capability of desire to assume complete domination over one’s condition. Desire is necessarily connected to the condition of “having” and is doomed to non-fulfillment because the cycle of need is endless. Any lack of fulfillment is deemed to be a frustrating postponement. Due to its need to eliminate any type of resistance, desire sees time as a form of imprisonment. The desiring subject thus seeks to eliminate time – to close the gap between satisfaction and desire in order to avoid a Sisyphean condition of despair. Marcel chooses the example of a prisoner – a choice that is hardly coincidental – to illustrate his point: “Impatience manifested itself sometimes by attempts to escape…. These attempts corresponded to a rejection of waiting…. Trying to escape is escaping from the temptation to despair.”

As a result of this sense of desperation, desire becomes “wishful thinking.”

To hope, on the other hand, is to “rejoin an immemorial experience … in a dimension which is that of perpetual novelty.” Unlike imprisonment, this experience of perpetual novelty is not undertaken within the unending cycle of desire. In the realm of hope, time is “relaxed or stretched” as opposed to cut short – “a range which goes from inert waiting to active waiting.” A contrast with desire is helpful in this context. A person who wants to win the lottery, or escape a lifetime of confinement, desires to do so simply for him or herself – desire is an egoistic act executed in the mode of having. Hope, on the other hand, reflects an intersubjective possibility that is able to surpass the tension created through desire. When one truly engages in hope, one

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226 Mystery and Hope: 281.
227 Ibid.: 278.
228 Ibid.: 280.
reaches a dimension of intersubjective being insufficiently characterized by the pronoun “we.”

The act of hope is a generative process whereby the subject interiorizes itself within the total spiritual economy: “I hope in thee for us.” Marcel expresses this phenomenon powerfully: “Hope is perhaps the very stuff by which our soul is made.”

Unlike the condition of desire, in which the subject conceives itself as an object requiring satiation, hope “re-establishe[s] the subject in the condition of subject, and at the same time, [the subject] is re-integrated into a living relation with the world of men, from which he had cut himself off.” This living relation transcends the strictly material realm. One usually prays for that which is outside of one’s power to produce. But it is also the case that one prays for something that one does not have the power to specify – a movement from the realm of problem to the realm of mystery. Here mechanistic causality is left behind – life moves forward with an adventurous quality reflected in the Whiteheadian phrase of a creative zest towards novelty – existence conceived as “in the making” (faciens) as opposed to ready-made (factum). Hope, stemming from the “vital centers” of the human being, possesses “the power of making things fluid.” Once fluid, possibilities are set free with the potential to be transformed as part of the workings of a larger process. As such, hope creates a condition of binding elasticity: “the very

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229 HV: 60.
230 BH: 80.
233 HV: 41. For an analysis of hope from a pragmatic perspective, see Patrick Shade, Habits of Hope: A Pragmatic Theory (Vanderbilt University Press, 2001): 200-201. Although Shade’s pragmatic perspective causes him to emphasize the important role played by habits, the latter still “provide the conditioned basis of hope’s special transcendence … by transform[ing] our basic abilities … widening our horizons [and] … recogniz[ing] the threads of hope that weave through our very being [and] … make hope an integral part of our legacy.”
cement which binds the whole into one.” No longer a condition in which a being is disaffected from Being, “hope culminates in the notion of the mystical body, of the all in all.”

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The Ontological Mystery: Circulating Being

Infinity, or this absolute unrest of pure self-movement, in which whatever is determined in one way or another, e.g. as being, is rather the opposite of this determinateness, this no doubt has been from the start the soul of all that has gone before.…

Marcel’s focus upon being (l’être) provides the foundation and the unity of his thought. Contrary to many thinkers in the western tradition, Marcel’s conception of being is not univocal – it consists of several polyvalent notions that are irreducible to any sort of primeval Urgrund. Having closely examined Marcel’s critique of idealism, it is apparent that being cannot be conceptualized in any totalistic way – man is immersed in being in the mode of homo participans versus homo spectans. Being is best conceived in terms of a surplus that exceeds categorical inventory – any attempt to define a being as “x” simultaneously implies that this same being is not “y” or any number of other possible variables. But this is no admission that being is meaningless or, as Nietzsche is famous for stating, “the final wisp of evaporating reality.” In fact, one of Marcel’s fundamental ontological claims is that being serves as the immanent ground of any kind of intelligibility whatsoever.

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234 HV: 60-61.
235 Desire and Mystery: 285. See BH, p. 76, where Marcel refers to a “close bond of union between hope and a certain affirmation of eternity.”
236 G.W.F. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977): 101. See H.S. Harris, Hegel’s Ladder, Volume I: The Pilgrimage of Reason (Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), p. 303: “The real infinite has been present with us from the beginning … as the drive of finite experience to comprehend its own infinite significance…. The human desire to know – to understand the situation we are in – is the most primitive way in which the Absolute is in us from the start.” For Marcel, unlike Hegel, this comprehension cannot be speculatively demonstrated.
237 Marcel’s most sustained reflections on “being” are contained in Chapter Three of Tragic Wisdom and Beyond, entitled “The Question of Being,” and The Mystery of Being Part II: Faith and Reality, Chapters I-IV. Although there are several books and essays concerning Marcel’s ontology, one of the best is Thomas Anderson’s “Gabriel Marcel’s Notions of Being,” in Philosophy Today, Spring 1975: 29-49. See also Kenneth T. Gallagher, The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel, Chapter IV.
238 See Twilight of the Idols: 19.
Being is conceived foundationally in the following ways: as the foundation of beings; as the foundation of existence; as the foundation of intersubjectivity; as the origin of value; and as the eternal. Marcel embraced a nuanced conception of being, reflecting a wide dimensionality – dimensions that are crucial to our very character as human beings. Before Marcel’s understanding of being can be satisfactorily investigated, it is first necessary to examine what Marcel refers to as “ontological exigence” or “the exigence of being” – a trace, or “blind intuition,” wherein human beings experience the alluring pull of a pre-reflective awareness of being.

Contemporary society suffers from a disease that is, at the same time, a dis-ease. The disease is nihilism – the belief that man is the measure of all things. Our narrowly conceived world of functions, technology, and bare abstractions leads to physical, spiritual, and psychological maladies. This dis-ease originates from an experience that “something” is lacking – a deep sense of striving, or nisus, towards that which transcends the abstract inventories of a broken world. Using a Kantian analogy, our barren functional world is the world of Verstand – the world of categories that define the world of Newtonian nature. Kant’s genius was that he recognized that the world of nature alone could not satisfy the demands of spirit – hence, his appeal to Vernunft. The latter manifests itself in a drive, or search, for transcendent completeness – the quest of pure reason towards that which it can’t comprehend but which, at the same time, it can’t ignore. As Marcel says: “[E]xistence comes to us as something which contains and also goes beyond everything to which we might seek to reduce it.”239 That which cannot be contained and “goes beyond,” is the plenitude of being. Qua plenitude, being cannot be reduced to a datum

239 MB II: 33. Cf. PL, p. 17: “The role of philosophical reflection [is] to bring to light the spurious character of every particular truth if it is reduced to an element that can be isolated from knowledge…. This is what I shall express by saying that the particular truths depend upon thought in general (in the Kantian sense). See also EBHD, p. 129: “[T]here is hardly anything left of the aura that accompanied the word Vernunft … for Kant and his followers.”
– Kant’s conclusion that being is not a real predicate is true in a quite limited sense. But that which is not reducible to a datum, due to its universality and plenitude, somehow redirects itself towards us ecstatically in the form of an appeal that takes the form of “a deep-rooted interior urge.”

In an effort to combat the tyrannical reign of functional categorization, Marcel will characterize being as an “ontological mystery.” For Marcel, a mystery – as opposed to a problem – cannot be approached in the external manner of a detached subject unleashing a technique upon an object. Through his failed venture with idealism, Marcel realized that ontological reflection precludes the ability of the questioner to remain outside of the scope of inquiry – knowledge is enveloped by being: “To pose the ontological problem is to inquire about the totality of being and about myself as a totality.”

Technique, synonymous with abstract thinking, is unable to capture that aspect of presence which is most essential – it’s “uncircumscribed” nature. As a subject rooted in being, we occasionally experience the “rupture” or the inability of categorical analysis to provide an exhaustive account of the course of human existence. Once the categories of an “egocentric topography” are broken down, the human being becomes capable of transparency, exhibiting a degree of permeability vis à vis the plenitude of being. For Marcel, the distinction between the “full” and the “empty” is more fundamental than that of the “one” and the “many.” When the insular barriers of abstract thought are removed, and the self recognizes its fundamental being qua participans in esse, one leaves the cloistered region of the problem and enters into the realm of mystery: “mystery is a problem that encroaches upon its own data.”

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240 MB II: 37.
In order to convey the primary, active, and foundational character of being, Marcel will stress the verbal, infinitival aspect of being (l’être). Qua primary act, being is ontologically first – in order for a being to be “x,” it must first be. Stated in Marcellian terms, all beings must participate in being in order to be. Stemming from this original ontological participation, being reveals a categorial surplus. Similar to the way in which a verb is conjugated out of its infinitive form, a being is in a sense conjugated, or derived, out of an infinite field of potential as this being and not that, or some other, being. Marcel combines this dimension of a surplus and foundational act to arrive at a conception of being as an “omnipresent unity … that transcends each and every category in as much as it includes (enwraps) them all and is the unity of them all.”

It is important to note in this context that being, as Marcel conceives it, is not an empty abstraction à la Niezsche, but something similar to what Hegel referred to as a concrete universal. The concrete universal encompasses all beings in their uniqueness. Marcel avoids the classic ontological dilemma which consists of having to choose between a conception of being that is too focused upon singular beings, and a conception of being that is unified, abstract and totally removed from any consideration of beings in their particularity. The perspective of singularity places being at risk by conceiving it strictly as an abstract notion that cannot do justice to the uniqueness of beings. The perspective of abstract unification places beings at risk by robbing them of their haecceity. Marcel avoids this Scylla and Charybdis by conceiving l’être both extensively and intensively. This allows Marcel to claim “[t]he more we are able to know the individual being, the more we shall be oriented, and as it were directed towards, a grasp of


244 See *CF*, p. 100: Where Marcel references God as the only concrete universal we are able to attain…. [Transcendent yet] more internal to me than myself.”
being as such.”245

Marcel also considers being as the foundation of existence – the specifically human context within which the drama of life unfolds. An embroiled controversy exists within the community of Marcel scholars over the relationship between being and existence within the Marcellian corpus. It would take us too far off course to effectively mediate this issue. Suffice it to say that some Marcel scholars have confused the relationship between being and existence – a move that has met with some consternation within the wider community of Marcel scholarship.246

For Marcel to ex-ist is to be manifest – to assert oneself as a sensible presence and, at the same time, be inserted into the world. Marcel’s focus when speaking of existence is strictly upon incarnate being – a kind of being associated solely with the physical world – and does not include the wider connotation of being as the foundation of all types of beings. For this reason, according to Thomas Anderson, “Marcel chooses to never refer to [existence] as the act … because … he limits existence to the realm of the physical.” 247 Although being qua existence offers a narrower conception of being than that of being as being, the concreteness that is associated with being is still operative – existence is incarnate being être-au-monde.

For Marcel, embodied subjects do not exhibit the discrete atomism of windowless monads or the self-sufficiency of the Cartesian cogito. Prior to emerging as the singular, empirical ego, the subject is pre-reflectively enmeshed in an intersubjective Lebenswelt, consisting of a “fluid medium [with] a spiritual quality … in which everything is bound together

245 CF: 148.
… beyond the plane of pure relations … [in] living communication.\(^{248}\) This is the realm of intersubjective being. Whereas being qua being founds a \textit{being}, and being qua existence gives rise to a circumscribed region of being, i.e. \textit{living} being, being qua intersubjectivity founds the person as a \textit{human} being. As Marcel was fond of saying “the road that leads to self passes by another.”\(^{249}\) Personhood is not given at one stroke. In order to be achieved, the subject must escape from the prison of egoism and become re-integrated within the multi-textured fabric of intersubjective, social being. The transition from existence to personhood consists of a transmutation from living to being – from “I exist” to “I am.”\(^{250}\) The transition from the mode of being qua existence to the mode of being qua intersubjectivity, reestablishes the being of the \textit{sum} in its inseparable wholeness.

It is by now apparent that abstract, functional thinking will never breach the insurmountable gulf it has erected through its legion of dualisms. However, the faint appeal that continues to speak from behind the wall of abstraction, provides a clue to Marcel’s conception of being as value. The realm of pure functionality, wherein the function a person performs somehow becomes equated with what they are, is dehumanizing. Human being is more than mere functionality: To be is always to be a value.\(^{251}\) However, the essence of a human being is not to be a functional \textit{quid} or \textit{what}. Contrary to Quine, “To be is [not] to be the value of a variable.” The human being is a unique, un-replicable occurrence of being – a primary unity of

\(^{248}\) \textit{MB II}: 15.
\(^{250}\) See \textit{MB I}, p. 134: “[A] man’s given circumstances, when he becomes inwardly aware of them, can become, in the strict sense of the term, \textit{constitutive} of his new self.” See also, \textit{CF}, p. 66: “Each of us gains access to this inexhaustible reality only through the purist and most unblemished part of himself.”
“this” and “what” in the Greek sense of tode ti.\(^{252}\)

Marcel conceives of being qua value as a gift. Prior to our age of vulgar commercialism, in which most forms of human interaction have become depersonalized, to give a gift was to present something unique to the recipient – unique in the sense of symbolizing how unique that person is. Likewise for Marcel, a human being is a gift – a hierophany uniquely created out of the vast potential of being, i.e. of all that is and could be. Value is “a seal of the existent … incarnated first in order to radiate later.”\(^{253}\) According to Louis De Raeymaeker: “Since particular being is not the whole of reality, it exists only partially…. [I]t is an imperfect being. [But] the perfection of every particular being belongs itself wholly to being, and by that token it is to be distinguished in a clear-cut way from every other thing…. [T]he perfection which is proper to that being is necessarily distinct from that of the others.”\(^{254}\) Similarly, for Marcel, the course of a human life is also a unified, value-laden phenomenon. Within the living being “[a]xiology and ontology … are probably inseparable.”\(^{255}\)

For Marcel, values are actual dimensions of reality – real and objective structures residing within the tissue of experience. Values may not be perceptible physically in a crude materialistic sense, but our capacity for feeling liberates us from any need to rigidly adhere to an atomistic, sensationalist epistemology. The act of love serves as a true testimonial to this value dimension of experience. Through love, both the lover and the beloved, through the mutual recognition of their unique ontological value, become joined together in the realm of the eternal. Through a “unitive intention,” the lover surpasses the limits of her physical being by perceiving


\(^{253}\) *Pi*: 200.


\(^{255}\) *TWB*: 117. Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Routlege and Kegan Paul, 1974): 6.44: “It is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists.”
the beloved in his radiance as a transcendent dimension of value. This ambient field of value is reflected through the beloved as an incarnate embodiment of the sphere of value. This notion of value as a bonding medium “seems to lure us forward in a movement which can be consummated only in the perfect κοιηωή.”\footnote{Ibid.: 55.} This “community” of the whole consists of both the quantitative totality of uniquely created beings and the qualitative totality – the aesthetic outcome resulting from the integration of uniqueness with coherence. Marcel characterizes this as “an immense skyscape, invisible but somehow felt.”\footnote{Ibid.: 130.}

This notion of “consummation within a perfect community” holds the key to understanding being as “pleroma” or “absolute super-being.”\footnote{See TWB: 52.} Here Marcel will focus on a key distinction made by both Bergson and Blondel between pensée pensée and pensée pensante – closed and open thought. Philosophical thought must exhibit the open character of pensée pensante “which can be developed only if it is constantly replenished in such a way that its uninterrupted communication with being is guaranteed.”\footnote{CF: 13.} To use a Spinozistic analogy, philosophical thinking must exhibit the sense of dynamic continuity captured by phrase natura naturans as opposed to the closed sense of natura naturata. This continuity is disclosed through an experience of parts fusing into greater wholes towards which the parts are teleologically guided and fulfilled – an act of recueillement or recuperation seeking the higher unities associated with over-all structures, organic wholes and intelligible syntheses without which physical being would not be recognizable. In order to capture this meta-problematic, hyper-phenomenological reality, Marcel will turn to the role of secondary reflection in order illuminate
a “reflexive intuition” that hints of “a reality which overflows and envelops me, without my being able to view it in any way as external to what I am.”

If traced properly, this intuition of secondary reflection can lead the subject “toward the real and pleromatic unity where we will be all in all.” This complex skein of relations consists of a synthetic unity in which everything is bound together in homogeneous solidarity – a mystical “city of souls.” For Marcel, being par excellence, consisting of the supra-personal unity of all beings, is God: “the inside … to which … we are entirely unable … to imagine … a corresponding outside.” For Marcel there is no precise boundary between ontology and mystification: “Conversion is first of all the movement by which consciousness … transcends the obsession with numbers through the numberless.” No longer bound by the limitations of abstract thought, ontology converts to mysticism through an encounter with that which surpasses conceptualization – the eternal.

Eternity reflects a dimension of time much different from that of clock or calendar. The eternal qua infinite time – time considered in its totality – transcends simple duration. To say that duration admits of no succession is to say that it has no terminus – beginning or end. Eternity is a timeless present or totum simul: It neither was, nor shall be, but is. The living present serves as the nexus of time and eternity because “in eternity, everything in all its modal temporal forms is together with everything else.” Diametrically opposed to what is referred to as a Newtonian “absolute present” – a theoretically constructed, yet vanishing, point between the “no longer” and the “not yet” – this eternal present is a nunc stans. As Aquinas said “Eternity is existing all at

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261 EBHD: 141.


263 Searchings: 52-53.

once (*totum simul existens*)."265

It is important to consider eternity dynamically as opposed to statically.266 At the phenomenological level, temporal experience is not discreet. Each of the modes of time – past, present, and future – are contained within the others. The present and the future inform the past. The past and the future affect the present. The past and the present constrain the future. William James characterized this stretch of temporal duration as “the echo of the objects just past [and] the foretaste of those just to arrive.”267 In order for our experience to be temporally integrated in this fashion, the discrete, evaporating now-points of Newtonian time must be supplanted by a thicker conception of the present. James refers to this more robust conception as the *specious present*:

[The specious present] is no knife edge, but a saddleback, with a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched, and from which we look in two directions into time. The unit of composition of our perception of time is a *duration*, with a bow and a stern, as it were—a rearward and a forward-looking end. It is only as parts of this *duration-block* that the relation of *succession* of one end to the other is perceived…. The experience is from the outset a synthetic datum, not a simple one.268

The modes of time, prior to their physical realization, must somehow exist in a prior state of inter-relation. Eternity consists of the ontological reality in which the modes of time are together *eternally*. Eternity, so conceived, is synonymous with the “divine life” because “God [is] … a Life embracing all determinate things in all their shifting temporal modes.”269 This is not a static realm that somehow exists simply *totum simul*, but an ontological dimension with an

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266 This “dynamic” conception of eternity is indebted to the work of Robert C. Neville. See *Symbols of Jesus: A Christology of Symbolic Engagement*: 44-55. See also *Eternity and Time’s Flow* (SUNY Press, 1993).
268 *Ibid.*: 609-610.
269 Neville, *Symbols of Jesus*: 49. See James F. Harris, “An Empirical Understanding of Eternality,” in *Philosophy of Religion*, Volume 22, 1987: 165-183. Harris develops a notion of eternality using the Jamesian conception of a specious present as well as the notion of “stimulus thresholds” from cognitive psychology: “We can thus understand God’s eternity in terms of an infinite specious present and an absolute zero stimulus threshold, both of which seem to make sense in terms of contemporary epistemology and cognitive psychology (p. 179).”
“integrated” temporal structure. In Jamesian terms, this eternal variation of the specious present is “the original paragon and prototype of all conceived times….” 270

Hence, eternity should not be taken simply as an example of an other-worldly transcendens – eternity is realized within time. For Marcel, each being, qua created, “modulates between the intimate and the metaphysical … [providing] the magical fomentation around which personal existence is centered.” 271 Marcel viewed the individual as a concrete instance of spiritual being; a value disclosed in time throughout the course of a life – a personal drama fulfilling itself as a unique being, within a community of beings, linked to the eternal. The presencing of being encountered through the perdurance of each entity, constitutes a temporal realization of the sacred. This infinite expanse of eternal time allows for the unfolding of “the continuous eruption into being of those myriad forms, the active thating or ising of everything which emerges into consciousness” 272 Independent of the ordering systems of thought and language, lies the eternal sense of being – is-ness, Istigkeit, or, as the German mystics of the high Middle Ages expressed this phenomenon, itzt. Our lives consist of an immediate, albeit finite, realization of the eternal. Human existence, then, is both temporal – consisting of an integrated temporal sequence in which a past evolves into a future – and eternal – the integration of this temporal sequence within the larger context of divine, temporal unity. As one observer duly noted: “Being is value born of the intersection of time and eternity.” 273

270 Principles of Psychology: 631. See Gabriel Marcel, Royce’s Metaphysics, trans. V. and G. Ringer (Henry Regnery Company: 1956), p. 78: “[T]ime gives us the form within which can be expressed all intention finality and meaning…. The world’s drama is played out in time.”
271 EBHD: 85. HV: 71.
Part II

From Idealism to Communitarian Fulfillment:
Marcel’s Royce Interpretation

I surrender in no whit my assurance of the unity of God and the World.¹

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The Context of Marcel’s Royce Interpretation

Marcel’s La Métaphysique de Royce remains such a gold standard in Roycean scholarship that a reviewer once remarked “It is somewhat paradoxical that Josiah Royce should find his most eloquent interpreter in France’s Gabriel Marcel.”² The essays contained within this work were originally published as a series of four articles in La Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale in 1918 and 1919. After being released in monograph form in 1945, they would later appear in English translation in 1956 as Royce’s Metaphysics.³

The circumstances surrounding the creation of these essays remain somewhat vague. Marcel could not “remember precisely” what led him to write these essays, although he believed they were prompted by a request from La Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale to review the work of Royce. Despite the retrospective comments Marcel makes downplaying the influence of Royce’s thought upon his own – characterizing

² Quentin Lauer, “Royce’s Metaphysics,” in Thought, Vol. XXXII, 1957: 450. This statement, of course, was made well before the superb commentaries on Royce written by Frank M. Oppenheim, S.J.
several aspects of Royce’s philosophy as “outdated”\textsuperscript{4} – there seem to be obvious reasons why a thinker of Royce’s character would have appealed to Marcel. Both Marcel and Royce, deeply opposed to any type of reductionism, appealed to a much wider conception of experience than that proffered by contemporary empiricism. As Marcel indicated:

“Royce, with an eclecticism which by no means implies feebleness of thought, searched for his solutions wheresoever he found authentic and profound intellectual experience, wheresoever he felt a direct contact with that reality in which we bathe and outside of which we are nothing.”\textsuperscript{5} Additionally, both Marcel and Royce – in an effort to provide a synoptic link between the Absolute and the individual – were co-opted early in their careers by a serious infatuation with Absolute Idealism. And while it is certainly the case that Royce’s encounter with idealism lasted much longer than Marcel’s, both thinkers ultimately abandoned the systematic architectonic of Absolute idealism for a more concrete, historical approach.\textsuperscript{6} If Marcel truly believed that Royce’s thought was an anachronism, deserving to be relegated to the status of a relic, it is very difficult to explain how Marcel could have provided such a brilliant account as to how Royce’s ethical and logical writings grew organically out of his earlier metaphysical writings. Perhaps a decision as to the value of Royce’s Metaphysics is best left to such an astute reader as William E. Hocking, who characterized Marcel’s Royce interpretation as “the

\textsuperscript{4} Such comments (\textit{RM}, p. x) typically emphasize the importance of Hocking over Royce and that Marcel read Hocking before Royce. See also the third appendix to Gabriel Marcel, \textit{La Métaphysique de Royce, avec un appendice de texts, publiée et préfacée par Miklos Vetö} (Paris: L’Hartmann, 2005), p. 239, where Marcel discloses in an interview with Karl-Theodor Humbach that he regards several aspects of Royce’s thought as representing “an outdated stage of philosophy” while recognizing that Royce’s mature ethics and philosophy of loyalty “are of permanent value.”

\textsuperscript{5} \textit{RM}: xvi.

\textsuperscript{6} For a discussion of Marcel’s encounter with idealism, see pp. 7-9 & 34-39. For a discussion of how Royce engaged in re-thinking his commitment to Absolute idealism, see pp. 132-142. A concise summary of the transitional shifts Royce’s thought underwent on this issue can be found in John E. Smith, \textit{Royce’s Social Infinite: The Community of Interpretation} (The Liberal Arts Press, 1950), pp. 13-19.
first, and still in my judgment, the most substantial and prescient, discussion of Royce’s entire metaphysical outlook.”

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Unraveling the World Knot

Marcel begins his study of Royce by examining the latter’s attempt to “attack the world knot in a way that promises most for the untying of its meshes.”8 The world knot, for Royce, consists of the questions “What is an Idea?” and “How do Ideas stand in a true relation to Reality?” Royce knows quite well that as naïve realists, we take for granted a world of fact. But taking for granted a world of discrete fact leads quickly to a series of debilitating antinomies: “Begin by accepting, upon faith and tradition, the mere brute reality of the World as Fact, and there you are sunk deep in an ocean of mysteries.”9 In the “First Series” of *The World and the Individual*, Royce will examine, in a Hegelian-like fashion, three examples of being “sunk” in an ocean of dialectical difficulty by examining three traditional conceptions of the “ontological predicate” – Realism, Mysticism, and Critical Rationalism.

At this juncture, an awareness of Royce’s methodological orientation is necessary. The world of fact is experienced through such a welter of qualitative contrast that it becomes “persistently baffling, unless we somewhere else find the key to it.”10 The key, for Royce, lies in consciousness. Royce sees the entire history of philosophy as a series of attempts to arrive at an understanding of “the problem of the whole relation between Idea

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7 *RM*: vi.
8 *W&I (FS)*: 16-17.
9 *Ibid.*: 17.
and Being.”¹¹ Each of the major philosophers Royce cites in this context – Plato, Plotinus, the Scholastics, Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel – all assert the primacy of the “World as Idea” over the “World as Fact.” For Royce, idealism is implied in the most disparate philosophical positions. In fact, all roads lead to idealism – the truth of philosophical thought: “[by] dealing with the problem of Reality from the side … we are supposed to be able to attain reality, that is, from the side of ideas.”¹² Royce’s neo-Kantian roots are evident here – roots which took hold from his earliest readings of Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer while engaged in graduate studies at Johns Hopkins. As Marcel astutely recognized, Royce was a “resolute idealist [for whom] idealism is co-extensive with metaphysics.”¹³

Royce’s idealism is not subjective idealism. As thinkers like James and Dewey indicated, ideas possess not only a representational capacity – ideas also have an active volitional and teleological dimension. According to Royce: “[I]ntelligent ideas of things never consist of mere images of the things, but always involve a consciousness of how you propose to act towards things of which you have ideas.”¹⁴ It is the “inner purpose” of an idea which Royce will focus upon by using the example of singing a melody. When a vocalist sings a melody, the primary experience is not that of approximating an externally independent musical value conceived as being performed by some ideal singer. Instead, “your melody, at the moment when you sing it … constitutes a musical idea. You may even suppose the melody original with yourself, unique, and sung now for the first time.

¹¹ See RM: 3, where Marcel characterizes this problematic as one of how “thought accosts reality.”
¹³ RM: 4. It is interesting to speculate just how much, at this point in his career, the idealistically inclined Marcel agreed with Royce.
Royce will develop this important distinction between the representative capacity of an idea and its conscious purpose powerfully. The ability of an idea to refer to something beyond itself constitutes an idea’s *external meaning*. The *internal meaning*, on the other hand, consists of the *partially* fulfilled purpose embodied in the idea. Royce accounts for the internal meaning of a completed idea as “the purpose viewed as so far embodied in the idea, the soul as it were, which gives the idea body.”

Returning to the example of the melody, the internal meaning of this musical idea consists of fulfilling the purpose of singing the melody. Whereas the external meaning of the melody might be to correspond to a particular work of Beethoven, the internal meaning speaks to the fulfillment of an affective disposition of the self. Needless to say, the internal and the external meanings of an idea may, at first glance, appear to be quite different from one another.

Marcel, through his own criticisms of objectivity, is sensitive to the bias displayed in favor of the external meaning of an idea. Additionally, as an advocate of recuperative, secondary reflection, Marcel is supportive of Royce’s attempt “to show that for speculative thought this dualism [between internal and external meaning] is resolved in unity, and that, in the final analysis, all meaning is immanent….” Royce addresses the realistic bias of inquiry head-on. Recognizing, to some degree, that a collection of ships is what it is before you count them:

“*[N]o idea is true or is false except with reference to the object that this very idea first

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16 *W&I (FS)*: 25.
17 *RM*: 4.
means to select as its own object…. [U]nless ideas first voluntarily bind themselves to a given task, and so, by their internal purpose, already commit themselves to a certain selection of its object, they are neither true nor false, — in this consideration, I say, there may be hidden consequences that we shall later find momentous for the whole theory of Being and of truth.”

Royce’s intent is to problematize the realist’s preference for external meanings: “[W]e shall find either that the external meaning is genuinely continuous with the internal meaning, and is inwardly involved with the latter, or else the idea has no external meaning at all.” The human tendency to separate the internal and external meaning of an idea is due to a failure to reach “behind the appearances” and unravel the world knot. The strands of the world knot are tied together by a telic connection – comprehensive unity is ontologically prior to discrete instances. Royce maintains “that, at bottom, the external meaning is only apparently external, and, in very truth, is but an aspect of the completely developed internal meaning.” It remains to be seen as to what a “completely developed” internal meaning might consist. This answer will bring us to Royce’s Fourth Conception of Being or Absolute Idealism – an “absolute system of ideas … which is genuinely applied in the true internal meaning or purpose of every finite idea, however fragmentary.” This finite, fragmentary realization of meaning within the totality of an infinite system echoes Marcel’s notion of an exigence of being – a condition in which finite being strives to transcend its finite, fragmentary perspective and regain participation within a larger whole. In Marcellian terms: “[F]inite thought is perpetually attracted by a beyond, by Another, which eternally escapes it.”

18 W&I (FS): 31-32. See Fashionable Nihilism (SUNY Press, 2002), p. 4, where Bruce Wilshire refers to this realistic bias as scientism: “[Scientism is] required to rule apriori and arbitrarily that the other ways couldn’t possibly be effective in [determining] their subject matter areas.”
19 Ibid.: 33.
20 Ibid.: 36.
21 Ibid.: 36.
22 RM: 5.
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The First and Second Conception of Being: Realism and Mysticism

The first conception of being, realism, identifies the real with the given as brute fact. The real is “independent of an idea or experience through which the real being is, from without, felt, or thought, or known.”23 Given the prima facie evidence before us, it should come as no surprise that realism is a belief that is philosophically widespread. However, the evidence in favor of the “knot” of realism quickly begins to unravel under the slightest scrutiny. If thought is independent of being, how can thought possibly know being? An ontological gap precludes any possibility of an epistemological bridge. Employing his typically understated sense of humor, Royce compares the realist project to the relationship between a horse and a hitching post “only that even here the horse can strain at the post while he pulls, while realistic knowing is absolutely naught to its object.”24

Royce offers a pragmatic explanation of realism – a necessary abridgement requisite for social progress. Realism ultimately consists of an attempt “to think narrowly in order to act vigorously.”25 Despite realism’s pragmatic efficacy, as a philosophical doctrine it collapses under its own weight by asserting the relationship of knowing and being while, at the same time, asserting that knowing and being are ultimately irreconcilable. Marcel captures these tensions beautifully in the following: “But here, as in many other instances, thought extrapolates, goes to its limit, and erects into an absolute

24 Ibid.: 70.
25 Ibid.: 75.
principle what is really only a useful convention, which is valid only under certain conditions.”\textsuperscript{26} Even when operating under the guise of an orthodox realism, one acts in a manner of executing “internal meanings.” Although one may naively assume that the number of ships in the harbor is completely independent of the act by which they are counted: “[T]he counting of ships is valid or invalid not alone because of the supposed independent being of the ships, but also because of the conscious act whereby just this collection of ships was first consciously selected for counting. [N]o idea is true or is false except with reference to the object that this very idea first means to select as its own object.”\textsuperscript{27}

Marcel, demonstrating his extensive grasp of the Roycean corpus, cites an important section of Royce’s \textit{The Religious Aspect of Philosophy} in an effort to reinforce the Roycean position that “realism … is unable to satisfy the demands of spiritual life.”\textsuperscript{28} The existence of values is a necessary prerequisite of spiritual life. Realism, presenting only a world of “powers producing effects upon any one thing or group of things [externally related],”\textsuperscript{29} offers no possibility of conceiving “the spiritual” – a relational dimension transcending the mechanistic order. For Royce, despite the hegemonic efficacy of a realistic conception of powers, a “still small voice is not heard in them.”\textsuperscript{30} In order to awaken from “the realistic dream,” a deeper view of nature is required. Marcel compares Royce’s critique of idealism to Hegel’s notion of an “unhappy consciousness” – a consciousness divorced from itself due to its tendency to seek truth not in terms of its

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{RM}: 6. See Royce’s comment “[R]ealism never opens its mouth without expounding an antinomy [\textit{W&I (FS)}]: 76.”
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{W&I (FS)}: 31.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{RAP}: 236.
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}: 237.
internal, changing nature but as an alien reality.

The Second Conception of Being that Royce critically investigates is mysticism. Royce possessed a catholic intellect. Poetry, especially that of Browning, mathematics, logic, economics, history, science – no subject truly escaped his voracious curiosity and extensive erudition. Mysticism, both Eastern and Western, is another subject in which Royce demonstrated a prolific understanding that was well ahead of his time.  

Mysticism, for Royce, is synonymous with the doctrine that “to be means, simply and wholly, to be immediate…. ”32 The mystic is concerned with pure experience. Royce, clearly familiar with the more reductive forms of British empiricism, emphasizes that mystics are perhaps the only “thorough going empiricists” in the history of philosophy. Marcel, recognizing the important role feeling exhibits in cognition, characterizes mysticism as:

“[A] certain process of purification [seeking to] free itself from mediation [in order to] obtain pure experience, the immediate absolute…. This is because this fact alone is beyond the desire of discursive thought, beyond all quality and separation…. Being is wholly in immediate feeling…. [T]here is now but silence and God alone.”33

In Hegelian-like fashion, Royce will reveal the contradictions inherent in mysticism. Mysticism “expresses a fragment of the whole truth about being.”34 In its desire to seek the truly immediate, mysticism ultimately arrives at nothing. Royce cites the words of the Hindu mystic Yājnavalkya, “Neti, Neti, Neti …” – in Sanskrit “not this, not that, not this, etc.” Since all finite thinking assumes the form of mediation, the Absolute must be ineffable but, adds Royce, “yet not outside of the circle within which

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32 W&I (FS): 80.
33 RM: 14, 12. Marcel’s later characterization of the body as “the non-mediatizable immediate,” and its pivotal role in secondary reflection should not be overlooked.
34 W&I (FS): 84.
We at present are conscious.35

Mysticism is able to attain the Absolute only through a kind of sophistry — “a fascinating contrast-effect that, far from being itself anything absolute, or actually unknown or ineffable, is a constantly present character of our human type of finite consciousness.”36 Our finite consciousness gives us access to the Absolute only through a type of via negativa: Neti, neti, neti…. Though a kind of “homing instinct,” the mystic may, like a migrating bird, intimate true Being but, adds Royce quite perceptively, “this goal [true Being] is first conceived by contrast with the process of the pursuit.”37 In other words, the mystic’s “Absolute Being” is relegated to a “Mere Nothing” due to the absence in finite being of a basis of comparison. If the finite self is a mere illusion, then it cannot be utilized as the comparative basis of the Absolute. Mysticism, like realism, ends in a reductio ad absurdum.”

According to Marcel, mysticism has a “speculative value” which is greater than that of realism because it discloses “the teleological leitmotiv of Royce’s metaphysics.”38 By recognizing a “homing instinct,” mysticism affirms that human being is oriented to Being – this “still small voice” of the spirit indicates something very similar to Marcel’s exigence of being.” Nevertheless, the failure haunting both mysticism and realism leads Royce to conclude: “[our] account of Being must be so amended as to involve the assertion that our finite life is not mere illusion, that are ideas are not merely false, and

36 Ibid.: 180.
37 Ibid.: 180.
38 RM: 13, 14. As will become clearer in our later discussion of the Forth Conception of Being, this voluntaristic, teleological leitmotiv consists of “the preponderant part played by the will, by personal activity, in religious certitude, and the role of courage, even of risk, in the building of that certitude (RM: 19).”
that we are already, even as finite, in touch with Reality.”

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The Third Conception of Being: Critical Rationalism

In the Third Conception of Being, critical realism, Royce will attempt to build upon the strengths and weakness of the prior two conceptions. From mysticism, Royce wants to retain the mystic’s “homing instinct” for the whole while avoiding “the mystic’s mere series of gradually vanishing terms.” From realism, Royce wants to build upon the realist sense of “the essential preparedness of Reality for knowledge,” while abandoning the “extreme statement … of the absolute mutual independence of the Real and of the Idea.”

Emphasizing the “relative” independence of knowing and being, Royce defines “the Real as essentially [that] which, under conditions, would become knowable and known.” The reality of an object is correlative with the object being known. In Roycean terms: “[K]nowledge comes to pass when things that possess reality apart from knowledge come to influence … the conscious states of knowing beings.”

Royce recognizes that multiple problems occur when the world is seen as somehow dependent upon one’s knowledge of it. Royce avoids the Scylla of a bare, autonomous externality and the Charybdis of mystical phantasm by developing a

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40 Although Royce will speak of critical rationalism and critical realism, Marcel will frequently use the term “critical idealism” to refer to the Third Conception of Being. As will become increasingly clear, the operative word is *critical* – pertaining to the role of thought in determining validity. Whatever one chooses to call that ontological condition which follows from the critical orientation – realism, rationalism or idealism – is less important.
41 *Ibid.*: 194.
43 *Ibid.*: 196.
44 *Ibid.*: 196.
conception of the real as outside of any particular knowledge yet having to correspond to a set of universal epistemic conditions. A symbiotic relationship occurs between knowing and being so that it is impossible to determine exactly what either pole of the relation is. As in the case of Mill’s depiction of objects as “permanent possibilities of sensation,” reality can no longer be considered in abstraction from knowledge. Experience becomes an interactive, reflexive process in which subject and object are co-constituted and mutually impact the development of each. Royce characterizes his modified realism in this way: “[T]hat which, if known, is found giving to their ideas their validity, as that to which ideas ought to correspond…. To be real now means, primarily, to be valid, to be true, to be in essence the standard for ideas.”

The real now becomes determined phenomenalistically in the Kantian sense of Mögliche Erfahrung, i.e. the necessary and sufficient epistemic conditions required in order for cognitive experience to be possible: “What is, is … what, under certain definable conditions, I should experience. To be is precisely to fulfill or to give warrant to ideas by making possible the experience that ideas define…. What is Being then but the Validity of Ideas?”

To summarize, being is external to any particular act of knowing, but being is not independent of knowing per se. Echoing James’ use of phrases derived from the marketplace such as “cash value,” Royce points out that such “facts” as price, credit, debt, etc. – although hardly arbitrary – have no reality independently of the ideas that refer to them. However, Bishop Berkeley’s problem quickly arises: How is the real sustained over time independently of finite episodes of knowledge?

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46 Ibid.: 203, 204.
Royce tackles this problem from a Kantian perspective. Kant established two levels of being: phenomenal and noumenal. Kant’s Ding-an-sich, although unknowable, is still considered to be real – a point overlooked by many critics. Phenomenal reality, on the other hand, is defined qua knowable through the transcendental conditions of experience. It is important to note that Kant never considered phenomenal knowledge to be the property of one person, solus ipse. Phenomenal knowledge entails a universal validity due to the fact that it is grounded in concepts of pure reason. Rational knowledge is both independent – qua universal laws of nature, and dependent – qua conditioned by the pure forms of intuition and the pure categories of the understanding. As Royce says, the Third Conception of Being “is objective, but not isolated from the realm of Ideas.”

Royce raises a series of questions concerning the adequacy the Third Conception of Being and whether a “further supplement” is required. Such questions are pivotal because they “begin the final stage of our journey towards an adequate view of the meaning of the ontological predicate … [by asking] does our experience, as such, ever compass eternity?”

At this point Royce will tap into his expertise in modern algebra and logic because “the modern mathematician rightly doubts every attempt to prove any proposition in his science unless … you can first empirically show him … the actual process of construction belonging to, or creative of, the ideal object of which your proposition undertakes to give an account. Construction actually shown is, then, the test.” Royce describes this process of constructive intuition in terms of the inner

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48 Ibid.: 251, 252. Cf. Marcel’s remarks on eternality….
49 Ibid.: 253-254. See also page 226: “[C]onstructive imagination has its own rigid and objective constitution.”
experience of the mathematician. In order for mathematical construction to occur, the object “must be capable of adequate presentation in the inner experience of the mathematician, if any exact result is to be attained.”

How is it that a mathematician can reason about ideal objects that can never be present to him or to any other observer? Royce’s response to this question is powerful:

The mathematician, in his own exact way, is like Browning’s lover. His instant is an eternity. He sees in a transient moment. Every one of his glimpses of fact is like a flash of moonlight on the water. Yet what he sees outlasts the ages of ages. But nothing in all this eternal validity of his outcome makes him less empirical in his actual scrutiny. The validity is to be eternal. But his form of his experience is precisely that of any other human creature of the instants flight….

The valid, then, even the eternally valid, enters our human consciousness through the narrow portals of the instant’s experience. Reasoning is an empirical process, whatever else it also is. One who observes the nature of abstractly possible experience, does so by reading off the structure of a presented experience. Necessity comes home to us men through the medium of a given fact.

For Royce, this process of imaginative construction is not limited to modern mathematical logic. The very same process is operative in the empirical sciences as well. For example, returning to the example of the ship to be counted, “if you watch the ship longer, … you will under given conditions … get the presence of certain empirical facts.” However, the ship, or any given object of knowledge, is more than what can be verified at a particular point in time. This is why the version of phenomenalism associated with sense data theory was forced to posit the totality of possible observation statements – referred to as “subjunctive conditionals” – in order to bridge the epistemological gap between knowledge and reality. As Hume recognized, during the course of our day to day encounters, we recognize the fact that there are possibilities of experience to be tested, but in the interests of faith, custom, and expediency, we simply

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50 Ibid.: 254.
51 Ibid.: 256-257.
52 Ibid.: 257.
fail to test them. However, the fact remains that the majority of claims one makes about the world do not ultimately refer to how things actually do seem to anyone, but how they would seem if the appropriate conditions were fulfilled.53

From “moment to moment,” we may validate each of our occasions of experience but, at the same time, we recognize that “Being … possess[es] far more validity than, in our private capacity, we shall ever test.”54 In our episodic capacity as finite knowers, we are unable to establish the “infinitely more extended” notion of validity required to support the edifice of true knowledge. Critical realism “fails to explain … the difference between the reality that is to be attributed to the valid truths that we do not get completely verified in our experience, and the reality observed by us when we do verify ideas.”55 The crucial question that Royce poses is what is the nature of “Being in general” in which the totality of possible experience is “exhaustively presented”? Royce aims to avoid a condition of pure possibility held in suspension – what Hegel referred to “cognition naïvely reduced to vacuity” – by posing the question: “must not all Being prove to be pulsating with the same life as concrete experience?”56

Finite knowing is less than completely true, and the finite knower consists of “a self or subject not standing fully in himself.”57 Prior to his more direct appropriation of Pauline theology in The Problem of Christianity, Royce is already employing the Pauline notion of a plurality of the self – a higher, spiritual plane is contrasted with an earthly, profane plane of existence. The unity of knowing and being can be understood properly

54 W&I (FS): 259.
55 Ibid.: 260.
56 Ibid.: 261.
only within the context of an Infinite Knower. The universe must be viewed as an endless process of self-reflection through which the universal and particular are intimately related. Royce has now entered into the expansive breach of his Fourth Conception of Being – Absolute Idealism:

“The world of validity is indeed, in its ultimate constitution, the eternal world. It seems to us so far a very impersonal world and a very cold and unemotional realm…. Before we are done with it we shall find it in fact the most personal and living of worlds…. Erelong we shall discover that it is a realm of individuals, whose unity is in One individual, and that theory means, in this eternal world, not mere theory, but Will and Life.”58

Marcel is acutely aware of the pivotal importance of this juncture in Royce’s thought. By articulating the finite conditions of possible experience, critical rationalism can assist the work of primary reflection but “outside the experience which is actually given to me … there is an infinity of other experiences which I take to be merely possible … which have not been actually realized…. [T]his penumbra of possible experiences extends around the narrow circle of my actual experience…. But what is this penumbra?”59

A halo of infinite possibilities provides the fringe of every act of finite knowing – a “fissure” is opened which cannot be bridged by the limited reach of actual experience. The “possible” experience of the critical realist must somehow be aufgehoben in the infinite experience of a more comprehensive type of reflection – otherwise critical realism is powerless to eliminate the dualism of the actual and the possible. If the dualism between the actual and possible is not overcome “consciousness may remain forever a prisoner of its own creations.”60 Critical realism provides the possibility of a degree of plasticity by transforming reality from a dead externality to an expression of cognitively

58 W&I (FS): 222.
60 Ibid.: 19.
based postulates but, as Marcel is quick to point out, what is gained by epistemic plasticity is lost in terms of ontological comprehensiveness. Speaking strictly for Royce, but having once traveled down a similar road, Marcel remarks: “There is no possible resting place on the road leading to absolute idealism.”

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Into the Breach: The Road to Absolute Idealism—A Fourth Conception of Being

“Human thought must first sunder, in order perhaps later to reunite.”

To understand Royce’s approach to the Fourth Conception, it is necessary to briefly consider his doctrine of judgment. Drawing upon lessons learned in the development of the Third Conception, it is clear that ordinary judgments “make some sort of reference to reality … but never without some sort of conscious intention to be in significant relation to the Real.” To properly judge is “to bring the what into relation with the that” – a vital link which is most often kept apart. Royce uses the example of classical Aristotelian logic to prove his point. Using the three classes of syllogism – categorical, hypothetical and disjunctive – Royce argues that they are exclusionary, showing only what the world does not contain: “They tell us, indirectly, what is, in the realm of external meanings, but only by first telling us what is not.” For example, the categorical proposition ‘No A is B’ says that no instances of A are instances of B. If A exists, then A is –B, but, strictly speaking, this proposition does not indicate that A actually exists. For Royce, such judgments “do not directly tell us what the world of valid being actually and concretely contains, but do tell us what the real world does not

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61 RM: 14.
63 Ibid.: 272.
64 Ibid.: 273.
65 Ibid.: 277.
contain" — in this case, the world does not contain an instance of A which is at the same
time an instance of B! Echoing the pragmatic call for lived experience, Royce recognizes
that life requires a plan of action — a plan not derivable from the abstract possibilities of
syllogistic judgments in which Omnis Determinatio est Negatio. Any attempt to move
from the abstract to the concrete is an “endless but hopeless” task due to the sundering of
the internal and external meaning of ideas. In the negative categorical judgment, – ‘No A
is B’ — “a cutting off of false possibilities [is involved], and an assertion of what therefore
seems the more precisely and determinately limited range of valid possibilities [is
believed to occur … a] range beyond which is simply inexhaustible so far as you take
your object as merely external.” In the example cited, A is –B. Could A then possibly
be C or D? But, if A exists, then what is A? In Roycean terms, what are “the positive
contents of Being?”

The act of judgment need not be exclusionary. Through a consideration of their
internal meaning, ideas are capable of becoming “enriched in their inner life.” Internal
meanings reveal a “positive constitution” to be contrasted with the “shadowland” of
external meanings. This “positive constitution” lies within the power of consciousness:
“If you can predetermine, even if but thus negatively, what cannot exist in the object, the
object then cannot be merely foreign to you. It must be somewhat predetermined by your
meaning.”

Simply left to themselves, neither internal meanings nor external meanings are

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66 Ibid.: 274.
68 Ibid.: 280. Royce will later refer to these positive contents as an “F-collections.” F-collections consist of
those relationships which are the obverses of “O-collections” — the set of “exhaustive but, in their entirety,
inconsistent choices…” See Royce, “The Relation of the Principles of Logic to the Foundations of
Geometry, in Royce’s Logical Essays: 388-408.
69 Ibid.: 281.
70 Ibid.: 281, 282.
able to fully articulate concrete individuality. An individual is an instance of value – a unique being which cannot be replicated. Qua externally defined, an individual becomes a *definiendum* – a mere type and no longer a unique being as such. Qua internally defined, the individual does not fare much better – running the risk of becoming completely subjectivized. The real exists as a limit – *Grenz* – which lies beyond our finite attempts, whether serially or conceptually, to reach a complete determination. The question becomes: What constitutes a complete determination? A complete determination must involve a unification of internal and external meaning – a “linkage [which] is the deepest fact about the universe.” Royce exposes an antinomy within the notion of external meaning. Using his acute knowledge of symbolic structures used in logic and mathematics, Royce transcends a dependence upon spatial metaphors: “What is involved in correspondence is the possession, on the part of the corresponding objects, of some system of ideally definable characteristics that is common to both of them … and that is such as to meet the systematic purpose for which the particular correspondence is established.” There is no external criterion of truth *per se*. Truth is determined teleologically as purpose. In the relationship between *idea et res*, greater emphasis must be placed upon the intentionality of the idea than upon the exclusive identity of the thing: “The embodied purpose, the internal meaning, of the instant’s act, is thus a *conditio sine qua non* for all external meaning and for all truth.”

Having successfully debunked the orthodox correspondence theory of truth, Royce recognizes that he can no longer simply presuppose the existence of the physical world: “No doubt there is this world,—but in what sense it is, that is precisely our

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71 Ibid.: 299.
72 Ibid.: 304.
73 Ibid.: 311.
Here again, Royce is forced to navigate between a Scylla of bare externality and a Charybdis of wishful fantasy. To steer a proper course, Royce takes his bearings from Kant and presents the issue in the form of an antinomy. Simply stated, does the internally-based view of knowledge, as selective intention, completely rule out any independent being of the object apart from its relation to the idea? Or, is an idea unable to pre-determine objectively those characteristics in exacto which make an object true? As he works through the horns of this apparent dilemma, Royce shows again and again his capability of dialectical subtlety and rigor. While, on the one hand, “Hamlet is what Shakespeare’s intends him to be,” the possibility of error also demonstrates that some ideas are not able to conform to their object. Sounding contradictory at first, Royce will reconcile the contradiction in terms of the higher unity of Absolute consciousness:

[The object] is at once uniquely determined by the true meaning already imperfectly present at the outset, and it is also not consciously present in the narrow instant’s experience with which we begin. A vaguely indeterminate act of will thus begins a process; the object sought is simply the precise determination of this very will itself to unique and unambiguous extension, … For the object is a true Other, and yet it is object only as the meaning of this idea.”\(^\text{75}\)

Whereas in finite consciousness, ideas exhibit a “kind of fulfillment,” ideas do not reach a complete or “whole fulfillment.” Royce expresses his notion of complete fulfillment in the following:

\[A\text{the desired limit of determination, the idea … would face a present content which would imply, seek, and in fact permit no other than itself to take for this ideal purpose its place…. It follows that the finally determinate form of the object of any finite idea is that form which the idea itself would assume whenever it became individuated, or in other words, became a completely determined idea, an idea or will fulfilled by a completely adequate empirical content, for which no other content need to be substituted or, from the point of view of the satisfied idea, could be substituted.}\(^\text{76}\)

\(^{74}\text{Ibid.: 313.}\)

\(^{75}\text{Ibid.: 331.}\)

\(^{76}\text{Ibid.: 336-337.}\)
Royce is now in the position to unravel the world knot and integrate the realms of the ontological and the epistemic – the universal and the particular. Knowledge is defined in terms of *degrees* of fulfillment. Whereas universality implies a defective incompleteness due to a level of specificity not yet reached, individuality is co-extensive with the complete fulfillment of your internal meaning. Having defined truth and being “at one stroke,” Royce is now in the position to lead us to the “threshold of a new definition of being.”77 Being is attained through a process in which an idea is completely realized. This is an “individual life, present as a whole *totum simul.*”78 An individual life must be realized *totum simul* in order to overcome the fragmentation of finite existence – a fragmentation contrary to the fulfillment of its complete realization. Qua whole, it is a divine life: “The sun of true Being has risen before our eyes … and we shall enter at last the homeland.”79

Being consists of the full expression of an idea’s teleological meaning. If finite consciousness had the ability to unhinge itself from its functional limitations, the entire expanse of existence would “spread before you as a simple and unique life.”80 Within the space of this *totum simul*, a life would exhibit the integrity of meaning and purpose that would cause one to say “It was meant to be.” Anything less than what is included in this total expanse would constitute a variance and entail *being* something other. In the words of the mystic, “*That art thou.*” In the completed life, abstract generality is superceded through individual form, “the *what* turns into the *that* …. [However] our instant is not yet the whole of eternity; but the eternal light, the *lux aeterna*, shineth in our every

77 Ibid.: 337, 339.
78 Ibid.: 341.
79 Ibid.: 342.
80 Ibid.: 348.
Within the context of the Fourth Conception of Being, each episodic moment of experience is a reflection of a higher unity: “[I]f proof is what we want, and if every single power sends us beyond itself for the interpretation of the meaning of the whole, we cannot hope to grasp that meaning so long as we avoid studying the world in its eternal aspect.” Each episode is able to reflect the synthetic fullness of Being by virtue of its finite unity as a life. Royce expresses this sense of ontological unity poetically, powerfully, and prophetically in the following:

No man experiences, for himself, at any moment, this final constitution of our realm of experience. [W]e see through a glass darkly. It is not yet revealed what we shall be. It is not yet known to us what our own whole experience itself in its details contains. But we know that it is…. It is through and through a constitution that answers our questions, embodies our meanings, integrates our purposes…. The now present but passing form of our human consciousness is fragmentary. We wait, wonder, pass from fact to fact, from fragment to fragment. [A] study of the concept of Being reveals to us precisely that the whole has a meaning and is real only as a Meaning Embodied.

§

The Fourth Conception of Being: A Marcellian Excursus

Marcel’s examination of the Fourth Conception of Being is incisive, displaying his knowledge of the entire Roycean corpus and his deep familiarity with idealism. From his extensive reading of Royce’s other works, most notably The Conception of God and The Religious Aspects of Philosophy, Marcel is clearly aware of the direction or “the train of Royce’s thought.” From his early readings of Kant, Royce carefully examined the nature of skeptical doubt. According to Bruce Kuklick, this concern of Royce dates back to his doctoral dissertation of 1878 entitled “On the Principles of the Interdependence of

81 Ibid.: 358, 356.
82 RAP: 289.
83 W&I: 368.
84 RM: 21.
Royce’s objective was to rebut skepticism or the view that anything outside of the immediate episode of experience consisted of an inference or postulate. According to Marcel, Royce’s early skeptical doubt was destined to implode, demonstrating the fragile infrastructure upon which scepticism vainly attempts to build a foundation: “Doubt is possible only when it is based on what we admit. As a matter of fact, any judgment by which we would deny that there are real errors, claims truth, and hence its contradictory would be an error. Thus every judgment would destroy itself, since the pure and simple negation of an error is a contradiction.” Said differently, every denial of truth at the same time implicitly posits a notion of truth. Royce was aware of the implications of this insight at the time of writing his dissertation, recognizing that the overcoming of scepticism is not to be achieved through a more robust realism but through a greater appreciation of the creative, postulative power of thought: “one [of the] greatest of all philosophic results in the history of thought, and the one that will always be recognized as Kant’s greatest among his many great services—the principle namely that all knowledge is creative, that its objects such as they are, must exist in through, and for itself.” It is not an overstatement to say that extreme skepticism provided the path by which Royce journeyed to absolute truth. As one astute observer noted, “[Royce’s] entire undertaking was to discover a new ground of assurance on which men could eternally count.”

Marcel was keenly aware of this aspect of “volitional dynamism” that Royce

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86 RM: 22.
appropriated from Kant. In *The World and the Individual*, “volitional dynamism” is expressed teleologically in terms of purpose. It is “not mere agreement, but *intended agreement* that constitutes truth.”89 Let us recall again the example of counting ships. The act of counting occurs within the context of the prior establishment of the intentional act of determining the number of a group of ships. The realist, beginning in *medias res*, is unaware of this prior act. As Marcel remarks, “It is illusory to believe that we subdue the world.”90 This pre-reflective intentionality constitutes an essential component of experience. As Royce indicated, “Only what is known can be erred about.”91 But how can we err about the unknowable?

Marcel draws upon Royce’s famous discussion of the conversation between John and Thomas. When viewed through a dualistic lens, this conversation becomes impossible. It becomes a conversation between six persons: the real John, the real Thomas, the image of John, the image of Thomas, John’s image of Thomas and Thomas’ image of John. In the language of Abbott and Costello, “Who’s on First?” According to Marcel, “we have locked ourselves inside a dream to which we agree that a reality corresponds, but which nevertheless remains a dream, only coinciding by chance with what happens ‘outside of us.’”92 The manner in which Royce is able to escape from this dizzying labyrinth is significant. Marcel insightfully depicts Royce’s attempt to unify the seemingly discrete, fragmented episodes of finite consciousness in the following: “A road opens before us. Why not let a third thought intervene, a thought that would comprehend both Thomas’ reality and John’s idea of Thomas and compare the one with the other …

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89 See *W&I (FS)*: 306-307.
90 *RM*: 26.
91 *RAP*: 399.
the point of view of [a] third thought which confronts and appreciates.”

This notion of a “third,” for Royce, consists of a complete consciousness in which fragmentation and dualisms are synthesized within a greater unity. Royce’s complete consciousness is not *Erfahrung überhaupt*. A system of possible experience in the end amounts to nothing actual. What is needed is “a totally actualized content …. [An] absolute reality which is present [as] an absolute and organized experience, ideally conceived.”

Marcel’s reading of Royce’s Fourth Conception contains a distinctively Hegelian flavor. Following a method similar to what Hegel used in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Marcel explains that even the most immediate episode of experience is mediated within a larger network of relations. Marcel is quick to recognize as a result of his own phenomenological analyses of experience that the world is revealed through a rich tapestry of relations. Through the process of abstraction, these relations are truncated and ultimately forgotten. The focus is placed upon a pervasive identifying characteristic – a conventionally defined “essence” – much to the exclusion of other modes of being. For Marcel, a complete view of the entity in its “vector character” reveals a thread linking it to a rich and vast range of external associations – a range of associations that cannot be suppressed under the colonization of abstraction. Marcel’s perceptive recognition of the richness of experience brings him to the conclusion that “Empiricism, in making itself explicit, becomes absolute idealism … [and] Royce’s idealism is one with empiricism.”

93 Ibid.: 24. The notion of the “third,” will play in Royce’s later studies in logic and semiotics. See *W&I (SS)*, p. 89: “Between any two there is a third.”
94 *RM*: 29.
95 *RM*: 34, 32. “Vector character” is a term used by Whitehead, not Marcel. However, the similar manner in which both thinkers view concreteness and the prevalence of experiential relations is captured nicely in Jean Wahl, *Vers le concret: études d'histoire de la philosophie contemporaine* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1932). See pp. 223-269 entitled “Le Journal Métaphysique de Gabriel Marcel.”
Marcel provides a series of revealing clues as to how Royce understands “divine life.” Reality and experience are largely synonymous terms. Experience consists of the act of a consciousness which wills and understands at the same time. Here again, it is helpful to refer to Hegel. In his famous “Introduction” to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel recognized the need to destroy the Kantian notion of a *Ding-an-sich* or that which is external to consciousness. For Hegel, “Consciousness provides its own criterion from within itself, so that the investigation becomes a comparison of consciousness with itself…. Thus in what consciousness affirms from within itself as being-in-itself or the True we have the standard which consciousness sets up by which to measure its knowledge.”

Royce, appropriating Hegel’s discovery, concludes that willing and understanding, indissolubly linked within absolute consciousness are “the two faces of the divine life.” Marcel is quick to point out that this is not a mere anthropomorphism – an infinite magnification of human finitude, projected upon the Absolute. Divine life must be viewed as an unrealized ideal consisting of the complete extension of experience, temporally and conceptually, arranged in an integrated unity. It may be helpful to cite Dewey’s remark concerning Whitehead’s philosophy in this context – a philosophy advocating a “complete extension” experience: “The difference [between the physical and the psychical] are differences in historic routes of derivation and hereditary transmission; they do not present fixed and untraversable gulfs.”

In Marcellian terms, experience is the open circuit of being.

Within the Roycean life plan, the individual is “not converted into a mere element

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96 G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977): 53. Translation slightly modified. See also, p. 10. “[E]verything turns on grasping the True, not only as *Substance* but equally as *Subject.*”

97 RM: 33.

devoid of reality.”\textsuperscript{99} Absolute experience, i.e. God, and the individual represent a “concrete unity \textit{par excellence}.” Neither will be sacrificed for the sake of the other. Speaking in religious images in order to do justice to the totality which he seeks, Royce cautions the non-believer: “Flee where we will, then, the net of the larger Self ensnares us. We are lost and imprisoned in the thickets of its tangled labyrinth.”\textsuperscript{100}

§

The Relationship Between Divine and Human Being: The Individual as a Life Plan

We have reached the “central point” of Royce’s metaphysics – “the intimate relationship between absolute experience, i.e. God, and the individual as we know them … a concrete unity \textit{par excellence}.”\textsuperscript{101} This spiritual unity is similar to what Marcel refers to as the “existential orbit” of the self – a spiritual arc wherein the empirical self is encased within a wider totality. The importance of this wider extension of the self is clearly stated in the following: “The private self, however, cannot stand alone…. Royce’s Absolute is the final stage of the attempt to make intelligible the given of the present moment of experience, and that the self is the mediating link from the given in experience to the ultimate in reality.”\textsuperscript{102} Tracing the spiritual arc connecting the individual and the Absolute reveals what Royce refers to as a fulfilled “life plan” – a unique, complete, teleologically defined moment of existence.

Marcel probes Royce’s conception of individuality carefully. His initial foray into

\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Ibid.}: 36.
\textsuperscript{100} Josiah Royce, \textit{The Spirit of Modern Philosophy} (Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1982): 379. Hereafter referred to as \textit{SMP}.
Absolute idealism taught Marcel that “the pseudo-immediate leads us to the mediated.”

Discursive thought is incapable of attaining the concrete individual. Limited to ideal types, the best that discursive thought can offer is a picture of an individual through “a perfectly designed type … a universal form that is more and more determinate.”

But a picture of a man is still not a man. Individuality, for both Royce and Marcel, is established relationally:

Individuality is like a ferment. Introduce the germ of it into your world of knowledge, and the universe soon swarms as with yeast, and individuality bubbles out everywhere. For in relation to any one individual, you can define countless other individuals. But the first individual you can only know by breathing the breadth of a new life into the otherwise dead and stubbornly universal categories of merely abstract theory.

Let’s look more carefully at what “breathing the breadth of a new life” might consist of. It can not be understood causally. Any understanding of God as external to His creation is destined to insurmountable difficulties. From the Absolute point of view, the concept of causality is a “partial” fact which can be understood only within the context of the whole. The continuous whole of experience exists prior to the finite divisions imposed by discursive thought. It is worth quoting Royce in detail here:

In the last analysis, in fact, one cannot say: The world, or reality, or the Absolute, must be; but only: the reality, the Absolute, the world, is. Fact is always superior to necessity, and the highest expression of truth in terms of thought is inevitably the categorical judgment rather than the hypothetical, the assertory judgment rather than the apodictic. For this reason all assertions … must be subordinate to the ultimate assertion “The whole world of given fact is…. [A]ll finite experience must be regarded as a fragment of a whole, whose content is present in the unity of consciousness of one absolute moment.…."

This passage marks a critical moment in Marcel’s Royce interpretation. Marcel

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103 RM: 37.
104 Ibid.: 38.
105 CG: 258-259.
106 CG: 203-204.
understands what is at stake if a “total accord” between the Absolute and the individual is not realized. Marcel finds the “soul of all intelligibility” in Royce’s notion of divine purpose or the “Arrest of fulfillment by free limitation.”

Arrest is a free, Self-limiting decree through which the Absolute undergoes a process of Self-realization, exercising “a choice, [or] an attentive selection of the actual world within an indefinite or infinite series of abstractly possible worlds….” This “original and profound theory of metaphysical attention” supports Marcel’s notion of being as value. The process in which the Absolute “Arrests Itself,” becoming Self-conscious through a primordial act of hierophany, “creates individual beings in which it recognizes itself … not [through] a casual action, but rather a teleological and immanent development like that of a work of art.…”

Considered within the overarching context of this hierophantic act, finite individuals are defined in terms of their unique value. Finite selves, no longer conceived empirically as discrete psycho-physical units, are now viewed as vital parts of a cosmological world-order – a necessary order in which each instance of uniqueness resonates throughout the entire spectrum of Infinite created being. As Royce passionately states: “[T]he true or metaphysically real Ego of a man … is simply the totality of his experience in so far as he consciously views this experience as … the struggling but never completed expression of his coherent plan in life, the changing but never completed partial embodiment of his one ideal [purpose].”

Royce views the ego as a metaphysical category. Using terms reminiscent of his

107 Ibid.: 212.
108 RM: 41. See Infra. Marcel is aware of the temptation to interpret “Arrest” in deterministic terms due to that “we are constrained to consider it as a choice….”
109 RM: 41.
110 CG: 291. See also, p. 290 where the connection between Marcel’s notion of being as value and Royce’s “life plan” is further evidenced: “A plan in life, pervading and comprehending my experience, is, I say, the conditio sine qua non of the very existence of myself as this one, whole, connected, Ego.”
characterization of the human being as an “exigence of being,” Marcel frames Royce’s project in the following way: “[U]nity cannot come to the ego from the outside. Unity is not given to the ego. The ego must confer unity on itself…. But we can (and generally this is what we do) identify our remembered past with th[is enlarged] ego whose individuality is only indicated or suggested to us.”\footnote{RM: 42. See J. Harry Cotton, \textit{Royce on the Human Self} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 46: “We cannot think of the self except in contrast to what is other than the self.”} Without the enlarged sense of meaning and purpose that is provided by the enduring thread of Absolute being, our lives quickly become relegated to a Macbeth-like status – tales told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. Royce depicts life without an absolute basis as: “[A] cauldron of seething and bubbling efforts to be somebody, a cauldron which boils dry when life ends.”\footnote{Royce, \textit{The Philosophy of Loyalty} (The Macmillan Company, 1909): p. 172. Hereafter referred to as \textit{PL}.}

Marcel’s deep interest in music and his belief in the power of musical “concepts” to express non-linear realities enable him to view Royce’s notion of a life plan as similar to the unique, qualitative character of a melody. A melody consists of a series of interacting patterns of change that are synthetically apprehended in terms of a single unity. What might appear to be mere fragments of discord are concordantly joined together within the eternal panoramic of Absolute consciousness. Jacob Loewenberg, a former student of Royce, characterized the latter’s “synoptic vision” in the following: “Like the celebrated flower in the crannied wall, every part of the universe is seen by him as involving a hidden concatenation with every other part. It is the inner nexus of things upon which his eye is ever focused.”\footnote{Jacob Loewenberg, \textit{Royce’s Synoptic Vision} (Published for the Department of Philosophy of The Johns Hopkins University, 1955):15. See also p. 20: “[W]e must note Royce’s penchant for synopsis. Bifurcations are seen by him as distinctions within continuous processes or structures.”} Using Marcel’s famous distinction between being
and having, a life-plan does not consist of the completed act of possession of an external thing; a life plan must be achieved through the process of consecrating oneself to an ideal – thus, falling into the antecedent realm of being rather than having. Any homo sapiens, although exhibiting all the physical characteristics of personhood, does not automatically qualify as an “individual” in the Marcellian or Roycean sense. According to Marcel, “many people who phenomenally appear to us as human beings are not really distinct moral individuals, but are mere fragments of a finite personality….” It does not require careful observation to validate Marcel’s point. Such individuals could be viewed as suffering from a type of schizophrenia or some sense of multiple personality disorder because they have not succeeded in achieving a state of synthetic unity, or stasis, within a higher order or being. According to Royce: “The empirical ego, apart from the unity of life-plan, can be as truly called a thousand selves as one Self.”

Marcel sees no shortage of important implications to be drawn from Royce’s profound insight into the ontological depth of the individual. First, without an ontological foundation connecting it to the whole, the self appears as a mere impoverished shell – in rather stark Rylean terms, a mere “ghost in a machine.” Royce wants “our knowledge to show us [that] the Being of things, is what reality, taken as an individual whole, or again, as this individual, finally is.” For both Marcel and Royce, finite individuals have a stake, or share, in divine experience. The finite self comprises an essential ingredient of divine experience – as an integral aspect of divine experience, a life-plan is simul a

114 RM: 43.
concrete realization of God’s cosmic plan writ small. Nevertheless, the enactment of a life plan is a free act. In Roycean terms, “[T]he individual as I define him, is free,—free with the identical freedom of God, whereof his freedom is a portion.”117 This will enable Royce to utter in the same breadth such notions as divine compulsion, personal uniqueness, and freedom.118 The connection between the infinite and the finite is not one of logical possibility or causal determination, but of reciprocating “intimate solidarity.” To view the relationship in any other terms is to become entrapped in paradoxes of dualism and determinism. According to Royce, “God’s consciousness forms in its wholeness one luminously transparent conscious moment…. On the other hand, … this individual’s experience … when metaphysically viewed—[is] a unique experience, and consequently a unique constituent of the Divine life, nowhere else capable of being represented in God’s universe, and therefore metaphysically necessary to the fulfillment of God’s own life…”119 If I were otherwise, so would God be. Divine will is expressed through the finite individual but, as Royce is quick to point out, “the existence of an individual will [is determined], just in so far as it is this individual will, by nothing except itself.”120 By expressing God’s will, I express no will except my own. In the words of Meister Eckhart, “Were I not, God himself could not be.” For Marcel, Royce has captured “the most profound mystery of philosophy and religion” – the profound union of the one and the many.121

117 CG: 294. See RM, p. 150-151, where Marcel raises the question as to whether Royce is able to reconcile the exclusive “pure immediacy” of the finite consciousness with God’s “consciousness” which “understands in itself all that is positive.”
118 See W&I (SS): 293-294.
119 CG: 293.
120 W&I (SS): 330. See also p. 293: “This your own way of expressing God’s will is not derived. It is yourself. And it is yours because God worketh in you.”
121 See RM: 46-47. See also, p. 151, where Marcel indicates that the Absolute, conceived no longer as consciousness but as a thing becomes “in short, a metaphysical monster.”
§

**The Absolute as Totum Simul: Bradley, Dedekind and the Importance of Self-Representative Systems**

In the chapter entitled “The One and the Many,” Marcel demonstrates his often under-rated technical acumen as he explains “[Royce’s] ingenious and daring interpretation of the relations between time and eternity.”\(^{122}\) How can Royce reconcile the idea of a universal life-plan, existing as a moment within universal consciousness, with an understanding of the free acts of concrete, specific individuals? Such an understanding is reflected in the following excerpt from *The Conception of God*:

[W]e may now without question say that the one act of absolute choice which is embodied in the world that contains the individuals A, B, C, etc., *does as fact actually include many mutually contingent, that is, mutually undetermined acts of choice, each of which is identical with that mode of will which gets expressed in the life in the individual, and which as a fact includes his own personal self conscious will.*\(^{123}\)

Royce is able to reconcile what might appear to be contraries by an ingenious act “which overlaps metaphysics and higher mathematics.”\(^{124}\) The concept Royce utilizes to reconcile the finite and the infinite is known as “a self-representative system” – a notion he appropriated from Richard Dedekind – a 19\(^{th}\) century German mathematician. Royce is coerced somewhat into demonstrating the possibility of reconciliation due to pressure exerted by the vocal opposition of F.H. Bradley, who argued that contraries brought about by relational thought can only be effectively reconciled after being transcended in the abstract monism of the Absolute. The entire argument – Bradley’s position, Royce’s appropriation of Dedekind, and Royce’s conception of “the actually infinite” – is all

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\(^{122}\) *RM*: 58.

\(^{123}\) *CG*: 314.

\(^{124}\) *RM*: 49. See *infra*, where Marcel refers to Royce’s approach as a “kind of metaphysical sociology.”
contained in the famous “Supplementary Essay” to Volume I of the *World and the Individual* entitled “The One, the Many, and the Infinite.” The difficult, abstract issues dealt with in this essay preclude any type of exhaustive treatment. Before turning to a cursory look at the issues involved, let it be sufficient to say that this essay represents Royce at his technical and metaphysical best.

In trying to account for unity of a thing in the context of its relations, Bradley is quickly confronted with a dilemma: “[If] there is a relation C in which A and B stand, then the problem of the unity of the thing becomes the problem as to the genuine tie that binds both A and B to their now relatively independent relation C.” But this way of proceeding quickly leads to an infinite regress because “[t]his tie that unites A and B, in the thing, to C, hereupon appears as a new fact in the relation, D…. The links are united by a link, and this bond of union is a link which has also two ends; and these require a fresh link to connect them with the old.” According to Bradley, “There must be a whole embracing what is related, or there would be no differences, no relation…. This remark applies not merely to things, and to the relations that are to bind into unity their qualities, but to space, and time, and to every case where varieties are in any way related.” In order to escape an *ad infinitum* type of regress, Royce offers the following characterization of the Bradley’s Absolute, cannibalizing key Bradleynan phrases:

[As] “immediate presentation,” [the Absolute] gives us the experience of a “whole” which “contains diversity,” but which is, nevertheless, “not parted by relations.” On the other hand, “relational form,” where known to us, points “everywhere to a unity,”—“a substantial totality beyond relations and above them, a whole endeavoring without success to realize itself in their detail. Such facts and considerations give us “not an

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125 *W&I (FS)*: 473-588. Hereafter referred to as *SE*.
126 *SE*: 478-479. Throughout the “Supplemental Essay,” Royce repeatedly quotes Bradley from the Second Edition of *Appearance and Reality* (Oxford University Press, 1897). This protocol will be maintained.
127 *Ibid.*: 479, 481.
128 *Ibid.*: 479.
experience, but an abstract idea” of a “unity which transcends and yet contains every manifold appearance.” “We can form the general idea of an absolute experience in which phenomenal distinctions are merged, a whole becomes immediate at a higher level without losing any richness.” But meanwhile we have “a complete inability to understand this concrete unity in detail.”

The problems associated with Bradley’s Absolute are similar to those associated with Hegel’s notion of the negative or “bad infinite.” The bad infinite is destined to incompletion through the ongoing addition of the + 1. Likewise, Bradley’s position, according to Marcel, is akin to “quasi-agnosticism” – as thought becomes enmeshed in the “infinite fission” of hierarchical relations, it is destined to incompleteness because “completion would prove destructive … emphatically mak[ing] an end of mere thought. It would bring the ideal content into a form which would be reality itself, and where truth and mere thought would certainly perish.”

Knowledge is somehow completed in the Absolute but the Absolute lies beyond relational thought. Here we arrive at agnosticism.

As Marcel sees it, Royce’s challenge is to demonstrate, contra Bradley, that a concrete, actual infinite can be “retained without contradiction.” Royce accomplishes this by returning to the teleological basis of his thinking, arguing “there really are purposes whose nature is such that their realization involves a multitude of particulars which could not be finite without that realization becoming impossible.” The conceptual analogue wherein the infinite and the finite are fused is called a “self-representative system.”

The famous image that Royce offers is a map of England that represents that which it maps in every detail. In Marcel’s words:

Let us suppose … that someone wants to trace a literally exact map of England, i.e. with

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129 SE: 483.
130 Ibid.: 485. Bradley adds “[T]o reach its goal, [thought] must get beyond relations. Yet in its nature it can find no other working means of progress.”
131 RM: 50.
a point by point correspondence between the map and the territory the map represents. Let us suppose, on the other hand, that the map is traced on the land of England itself. The image, the representation (the map) would therefore, to realize the intended purpose, contain as a part of itself a representation of its own contour and its own content, and so on. If there were a limit to this series of self-representations, the map would be imperfect and, strictly speaking, inaccurate. It is therefore clear to anyone who understands what is to be realized, that an infinite series of maps within maps is necessarily implied in the end which we have set. If we suppose now that this perfect map exists, we will be right in asserting that it contains actually, and not potentially, an infinite series of maps….\textsuperscript{133}

The following definition of a self-representative system is offered by Royce: “A System S is called ‘infinite’ when it is similar to a constituent (or proper) part of itself; in the contrary case S is called a ‘finite’ system.”\textsuperscript{134} Self-representative systems possess three defining characteristics. They are recursive – for each ideal element M, there “corresponds another element of the system, and one alone … which can be regarded as deriving from the first by way of recurrence.”\textsuperscript{135} They are distinct – “different elements have distinct images … [because] in the system which would be the complete and definitive expression, one element only would be derived from another element….\textsuperscript{136} Self-representative systems are also selective – “only a portion of the system is representative.”\textsuperscript{137}

It is important to note that a self-representative system is a “self-ordered” system. A self-representative system is able to confer order upon itself through being defined \textit{in advance} by a single internal purpose, or defining plan, that involves an endless series, or \textit{Kette}, of constituents. The self-ordered nature of the system, when combined with the

\textsuperscript{133} \textit{RM}: 50-51.
\textsuperscript{134} \textit{SE}: 510-511. According to Richard Hocking “It was striking, and for Royce’s purpose most helpful, that when Dedekind went on from his definition … to his proof of this proposition by the method of identifying an actual instance, the instance he chose was that of a system of elements called ‘the possible objects of thought’ for a thinker.” (See Richard E. Hocking, “The Influence of Mathematics on Royce’s Metaphysics,” in \textit{Journal of Philosophy}, Vol. LIII, No. 3: February 2, 1956: p. 87)
\textsuperscript{135} \textit{RM}: 51.
\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Ibid.}: 51-52.
\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Ibid.}: 52. Dedekind argued that the infinite system of numbers constituted a self-representative system when conceived as a whole that is related through a unity of purpose. See \textit{SE}: 501, no. 1.
three defining characteristics of recursion, uniqueness, and selectivity, results in a powerful metaphysical implication. In the words of Bruce Kuklick:

An internally Self-Representative system is one which can be represented by a part or “portion” of itself, produced by leaving out elements of the whole; this kind of system is said to be infinite…. The Universe, as Subject-Object, contains a complete and perfect image or view of itself. Hence it is, in structure, at once One, as a single system, and also and endless Kette [i.e. series]…. An internally Self-Representative system with the structure of the Absolute contains an infinite number of infinite subseries which are capable of representing the whole, and we may conceive human selves as subseries of the Absolute.138

Marcel, through his in-depth familiarity with idealism, is able to understand both the subtlety and the superiority of Royce’s approach over that of Bradley. Bradley was forced to transcend relational thought and to seek refuge in the dark monism of the Absolute due to his inability to recognize that “the intellect itself defines, by its own movement, what could never be given to us in our temporal experience: a self-representative system of objects…. A well-ordered system [that] has the form of a completed self.”139 Temporal experience may present “endless dispersion,” but this “remains subordinate to the perfectly determined unity of the unique plan by which the Absolute defines itself completely at one stroke.”140 As the “initial term of the system, … Absolute Experience can be truly immediate [although] represented by an infinite number of points of view or ordered perspectives.”141 Royce characterizes this whole as “a totum simul, a single, endlessly wealthy experience.”142

Although Royce’s “self-representative” account of the Absolute is a classic

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139 RM: 52.
141 RM: 54.
142 W&I (FS): 536. See also RM, p. 56: “Such completeness can only be simultaneous.”
example of creative metaphysical synthesis, it might be helpful to attempt to clarify by
way of an example what Royce is trying to convey. Royce’s primary objective is to show
the unified relationship that exists between the finite and the infinite that protects the
concreteness and freedom of the former, while allowing for the ontological superiority of
the latter. If one chooses to remain at the level of traditional thinking, one is left with
either inadequate ontological conceptions, i.e. realism, mysticism, and critical-
realism/idealism, or a Bradleyan form of abstract monism in which the illusory particular
is absorbed into an Absolute void. Dissatisfied with all of these “solutions,” Royce
undertakes a brilliant, two-step process to grasp the unique character of Absolute being.
First, for lack of a better term, he imaginatively “freezes” the Absolute in what might be
referred to as an extended cosmic moment through an act of “conspectus” – a wide
“apperceptive span” that allows for the presentation of the universe in its vast scope in
depth and breadth, inclusively as well as exclusively. Royce then extracts a “diagonal
slice” of this infinite expanse in order to illuminate in concreto the deep, subliminal
traces of concatenations and connections crisscrossing throughout the finely interwoven
nexus of the Absolute experience. The heuristic and symbolic power of the self-
representative system lies in the manner in which it is able to reflect the expansive
breadth and depth of the universe at both a micro and macrocosmic level sub specie
aeternitatis or, in Roycean terms, totum simul. Although the empirical ego may seem
confronted with an endless dispersion of a discrete Kette, the metaphysical ego “knows
itself as this and not something else” because it is a teleologically-ordered self that
emerges out of a “recurrent process corresponding to an eternally true aspect of the
structure of reality…”143

143 RM: 57, 55.
Marcel is fascinated by one of the implications of Royce’s application of a self-representative system to the Absolute – the possibility of different apperceptive spans or, in the language of contemporary epistemology, alternative conceptual frameworks. Marcel asks the reader to imagine how human experience might change in the event of different apperceptive spans and foci. While it is clear that communications between like-minded individuals are possible only when experience has a common apperceptive span, it is possible to imagine:

A consciousness having the same content as our consciousness, but which has a different apperceptive span, [and] what seem to us to last a second is stretched out into a series lasting an entire era. And conversely, it could happen that what we understand only in a diluted state, and thus confusedly, is concentrated for an experience other than our own into an intelligible abridgement.¹⁴⁴

When different apperceptive spans are viewed in a relationship of figure-ground or focus and field, Royce’s philosophy of nature can be seen as depicting “a world where everything communicates … [and] exchanges and complex interactions are established between streams of [differing degrees of apperceptive] experience, so that newness would abound in all the regions of the conscious world.”¹⁴⁵ Through a process of adjusting the variables impacting the width of the apperceptive span and the rate of change of the contents considered within a given span, a narrower or wider spectrum of experience is illuminated. Once illuminated, dimensions of experience which were previously invisible are now in statu nascendi – resulting in the emergence of new strata and strains of experience. An organic process, typically considered in terms of the slow rhythm of geological time due to the “infinitely segmented” impact of finite consciousness, is now possible to be experienced in such a way that would be forever capable “of living its

¹⁴⁴ RM: 92.
¹⁴⁵ Ibid.: 93.
original and synthetic intensity.” Conversely, a spontaneous, loving glance, when viewed from the apperceptive vantage point roughly equivalent to that of a century, would become “empt[ied] of meaning.”

Marcel draws two important spiritual consequences from Royce’s insight. When a hierophantic irruption of the sacred occurs, it emerges within a prior context of profane space. According to Marcel, “what is indeed meaningful, what reveals a spiritual life, is always a variation in habits, the breaking of a rhythm which seemed inalterable.” The restructuring of apperceptive spans allows for the possibility of being awakened to dimensions of experience previously relegated to the most invisible part of the experiential continuum. In the words of Stephen Stills: “A new day, a new way, and new eyes to see the dawn.” Similar to that which is revealed through the technique referred to as “time lapse photography,” nature can be seen in its Aristotelian sense as consisting of “much longer series” of telic processes pursuing ideal meanings – a dimension previously precluded from experience conceived as an atomistic succession of efficient causes. Despite his appreciation of secondary reflection, Marcel exercises sufficient restraint vis à vis Royce’s caveat to recognize that “extreme caution” must be exercised when it comes to trying to ascertain – either microscopically or macroscopically – the essential integrity of the Absolute plan: “We are condemned to remain unawares.” That being said, what Marcel finds momentous here is not the application of a hypothesis but the “general direction” where this discovery of possible levels of experience that are integrally linked and teleologically ordered might lead. What appears to the stark realist

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146 RM: 93.
147 RM: 92.
149 RM: 94.
as a world of opaque, “fragmentary givens,” can now, upon reflection, be seen as a universe that is experientially integrated – intelligent, although not always pellucid to the finite gaze.

The notion of the Absolute as teleologically-ordered provides a perfect segue for a consideration of Marcel’s analysis of Royce’s view of time and eternity. Marcel’s deep interest in music enables him to appreciate time in terms of the perception of variation in recurring patterns of order. In order to understand the meter of poetry or the composition of a melody, “the whole succession … [must be] present at once to our consciousness … precisely as the beginning and the end of a rhythm are not the same for our experience, but are yet at once seen as belonging to one and the same whole succession.”

Dimensions of time – past, present and future – are linked teleologically: “what comes after in any succession is related to what comes before as realization is related to desire.” This relation, when defined vectorally as “tending towards” some form of future fulfillment, is a mirror of eternity – an imago aeternitatis. Marcel is able to meld Royce’s conception of teleological development with his own notion of ontological exigence, resulting in a view in which “we discover in time ideas and inner meanings strain[ing] towards that Other in which they can be incorporated and actualized. [T]his other … is totality.”

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150 W&I (SS): 120, 144. Cf. RM, p. 79: “[A] musical composition exists in every bar, not only in its final chord….” The importance of Royce’s notion of reality as a self-representative system must be emphasized here.

151 RM: 78. See infra where Marcel adds a powerful point regarding space and time: “whereas space seems to spread out before us the contents of the world … time gives us the form within which can be expressed all intention, finality and meaning. This is why the temporal word is more exciting than the visible world when considered as immovable. Space only furnished the stage of the universe. The world’s drama is play out in time.”

152 RM: 79.
stanza, apprehend time “both as a successive order and as a totality.”

§

The World of Description and the World of Appreciation

Marcel’s sensitive treatment of the distinction in Royce’s thought between “description” and “appreciation” is of seminal importance. It clearly demonstrates how Royce’s thought provided a fertile field in which the young Marcel could develop a host of themes that would occupy his entire philosophical life: the difference between primary and secondary recollection, the primacy of the concrete, the critique of abstraction and objectivity, the importance of telepathy, and the primordial basis of intersubjectivity. This distinction allows Marcel to crystallize Royce’s “new and profound insight whose importance cannot be exaggerated … [that] our experience is perpetually referred to a spiritual context which gives it true meaning.”

Marcel’s first goal is to show that the “worlds” of description and appreciation are, despite appearances to the contrary, not necessarily incompatible and can penetrate one another through a higher form of reflection. A conception of objectively lurks in the background of the world of description. In order for something to be successfully described, an enduring notion of the discribendum must be capable of being assimilated through time. Categorization and reproduction are both a sine qua non of description. As Marcel knows, “Identity of description is the sole guarantee of objectivity.”

Categorization requires an analytic discrimination in which — in terms of primary reflection — an entity is wrenched from its experiential context so that it can progressively

153 RM: 80. See infra: “[E]veryday experience, in the apperception of succession, gives us the image, almost the pattern, of what eternity may be.”
154 Ibid.: 105, 104.
emerge as focus of attention. But as Marcel is quick to point out, a penumbral life-world, immediate and concrete, is oftentimes refused us and requires supplementation via patient and methodical description. Once objects are sufficiently discriminated, they become susceptible to becoming arranged into serial orders. In the section of the Gifford Lectures entitled “The Linkage of Facts,” Royce provides a clear and detailed account of this process.\(^{156}\) Marcel sees in Royce a kindred spirit who is not misled by what Whitehead called the fallacy of misplaced concreteness: “[T]he fundamental category of the exact sciences is order, not quality…. In what measure does a science succeed in bringing its objects into a serial order or a system of ordered series? This is the question which should be posed – *not* the question of the extent to which science succeeds in reducing the qualitative to the quantitative, since this reduction is largely illusory.”\(^{157}\)

Marcel recognizes, like Royce, that the world of description is an “abstract” world and not the final expression of the way things are. In order for something to be subject to a defining description, a content must have eliminated from it – namely, those “indescribable,” personal characteristics which are not reproducible. The world of description is a world of *Erfahrung überhaupt* and not *hic et nunc*. Analytic reflection presupposes the continuous world of the concrete. Beneath the segmentations imposed through analysis, there lies a reality in which “direct contact … would be both action and complete realization.”\(^{158}\)

Royce refers to this “true series” of the Self and its expressions as “the world of

\(^{156}\) See *W&I (SS)*: 45-107.


\(^{158}\) *RM*: 96.
appreciation.” Royce’s notion of appreciation is very similar to Marcel’s notion of secondary reflection – a non-analytic process of recuperative encapsulation of beings within the totality of Being. The world of appreciation is a spiritual world as opposed to a world that has been segmented into ideas and concepts. Within the span of “a single and divine moment,” value emerges simply because that which is unique, concrete, and personal takes immediate precedence over that which can be objectively distributed through a series. Marcel uses the example of a close friend who is more than a “whirlpool of molecules,” a social security number, or a picture on a passport. Using a phrase that foreshadows his later use of terms such as “circuit” and “orbit,” Marcel states that “in the creative initiative of the individual the world reveals its essence … the sap of the individual eternally circulates there….“¹⁵⁹

Marcel’s account of Royce’s world of appreciation stresses the universal transparency that exists between members of a universal community:

It is a communion of all in all, the transparency of each for each. Think, says Royce, of an ideal community of beings who would have such a full consciousness of the relations which bind them to the true [S]elf that their collective life would be a whole spiritual communion, so that each’s experience would be an open book for the others. In other words, think of beings who would read each others thoughts with perfect clarity. This highest spiritual world would be … that of the undivided soul, which, while remaining itself, flows inexhaustibly into individual souls.¹⁶⁰

Marcel derives several interesting insights from this aspect of transparency. When one hears the term “transparency” in current parlance – usually in the context of financial or governmental disclosure – it typically refers to a situation in which tools and technology are able to analytically reconstruct all relevant data required for the

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¹⁶⁰ Ibid.: 99-100. See RM, p. 151 where Marcel raises the question “[D]o we have the right to assert, by a daring extrapolation, the possibility, and even the reality, of a being which would transcend [the order of time] and understand it as a totality. This being, or more exactly, this act, would be situated nowhere.”
construction of a “complete” picture. However, this type of transparency only exists at
the derived level of primary, analytical reflection. The type of transparency indicated by
Royce and Marcel is a transparency at the level of secondary reflection – a universal level
wherein individuals are already “directly and organically” connected. The “transparency”
of Wall Street and Pennsylvania Avenue are derivative attempts to somehow reconstruct
this original transparency by substituting a disfigured notion.

This ontological notion of transparency also has interesting implications for the
issue of telepathy. Royce, like Marcel, had an interest in the occult. Royce’s idea of an
“appreciate moment” wherein everything appears like “an open book … [to] beings who
were mutually perfect mind readers of one another…. In such a world of spiritual
intercourse, all the thoughts of one man would become directly the object of his
neighbors thought. In such a case we should stand at the presence of an order in which
the distinction of outer and inner would be no ultimate one.”¹⁶¹ For Marcel – a
philosopher who also takes telepathy very seriously – this Roycean insight has significant
implications both for science and consciousness. The “explanatory” categories of
scientific investigation come upon the scene of “discovery” in a secondary manner and
are oftentimes disruptive of the continuity that precedes thematic investigation. This
disruption vitiates against any disclosure of organic connection such as would be required
for a judicious treatment of telepathy. Likewise, if consciousness consists of an expansive
network, or “field,”¹⁶² prior to being psychologically reduced to a simple egoistic unity,

¹⁶¹ SMP: 395-396. See Royce’s brief, unfinished piece referred to as “The Cult of the Dead” in J. Harry
Cotton, Royce on the Human Self (Harvard University Press, 1954): 7. The context in which it was written
is somewhat haunting. See Cotton, p. 6.
¹⁶² For an interesting account of the “field theory” of consciousness, see Eugene Fontinell, Self, God, and
Fontinell, p. 29: “[F]ields are continuous with other fields; hence there are no absolute, definitive
beginnings and endings of any individual field.”
then perhaps we have been premature in taking our epistemological bearings from the likes of Locke, Hume and Mill. Marcel, from his earlier readings of Coleridge, Schelling, and Hegel knew that despite the diffuse nature of Royce’s ideas of consciousness and telepathy, Royce’s adherence to the idealist tradition gave him a much wider explanatory matrix from which to account for the nature of consciousness.

Royce’s account of consciousness as a social or spiritual order is one such example of his explanatory reach. The worlds of description and appreciation, far from being irreconcilable, are capable of being “reabsorbed into the concrete unity of thought.” As Royce puts the matter: “[I]t is true that human nature, down to the least externally describable detail of its temporal fashion of expressing itself, is a natural phenomenon, a part of universal Nature, and is as much capable of some kind of explanation in causal terms as is any natural fact. But, on the other hand, this very way of viewing man sets to itself its own limits…. [W]hat remains causally inexplicable is precisely my being as this individual, who am nobody else in God’s world.”

Both Marcel and Royce believe that existence is logically prior to possibility. From his investigations into logic, Royce knew that the hypothetical syllogism was derivative from the categorical syllogism. Furthermore, we believe in the existence of others before becoming aware of our own existence. Social relations provide a rich avenue of data from which to react, and grow. As Royce says: “It is nearer to the truth to say that we first learn about ourselves from and through our fellows, than we learn from our fellows using the analogy of ourselves.” Our experience, qua finite, is doomed to incompletion – our social awareness enables us to “enrich and progressively complete”

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163 *RM*: 102.
164 *W&I (SS)*: 325, 326.
165 *W&I (SS)*: 170-171.
that which would otherwise be fated to being merely parochial. It is this process of enrichment and completion that provides a clue to the spiritual dimension of experience. According to Royce, by contrasting and comparing the finite elements of experience, “I get a notion of the boundless world of human meanings, which I can partially, but not wholly, grasp.” Marcel emphatically states that “This is a new and profound insight whose importance cannot be exaggerated.” Our finite slice of spiritual consciousness is “an imitation, a condensation, and an epitome of our literal social life.” Our embeddedness in relations – what Royce referred to a “reverence for the relations of life” – provides much needed fuel for reflection. Through reflection, these relations are “interiorized.” This process of interiorization results in the not-self “becoming an integral part of the self, and that the varying life of several personages, which is displayed in us, or rather which is ourselves, is constituted.” By emphasizing the social dimension of self-consciousness, Royce has attempted to overcome the barriers between self and other. The key to doing so, according to Marcel, is to show “that the objectivity which science seeks to realize, is but a substitute for that higher objectivity which is being itself....” Despite Royce’s creative use of self-representative systems and serially-related orders, however, has his synoptic vision succeeded? An adequate answer requires a comprehensive look at Royce’s “later” philosophy.

§

Faith vs. Cognition: The Transitional Importance of Loyalty

Despite his appreciation of the brilliance of the Roycean synthesis, Marcel’s
suspicion regarding any type of absolute synthesis has been building for some time.¹⁷¹

Marcel’s criticism takes the following form: “It is also doubtful whether the compromise
Royce sought to establish is satisfactory, i.e. between a realist pluralism, according to
which there are purely external relations in the world, and the concrete idealistic monism
which is Royce’s doctrine, according to which the universe is nothing but a totally
explicit meaning that is fully self-conscious.”¹⁷²

Marcel perceives a bit of hesitancy in Royce due to the inability of the latter’s
thought to free itself from the architectonic of Absolute idealism. As a result, Royce is
forced to utilize a stock-in-trade inventory of conceptual tools and language that conflict
with presenting “the concrete unity of freedoms in the midst of absolute freedom.”¹⁷³

While Marcel recognizes the genius of Royce’s metaphysical synthesis, he questions
“whether this theory does not leave us with a ruinous dualism by re-establishing on a
higher level among individuals the barriers it claimed to have broken down forever….  
[Making] individuals proceed from God and … in the end reduce[ing] them to being
nothing but Ideas, no longer Acts, i.e. ends which in the deepest sense create or deposit
themselves.”¹⁷⁴ Marcel possesses a deep appreciation of the heuristic power of Royce’s

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¹⁷¹ It is important to note that Marcel’s criticisms are extremely judicious and, in some cases, akin to
Royce’s own self-criticism. See Frank Oppenheim, Royce’s Voyage Down Under (University Press of
have largely straightened out the big metaphysical tangle about continuity, freedom, and world formula …
and I am ready to amuse you with a metaphysical speculation of a very simple, but as now seems to me, of
a very expansive nature, which does more to make the dry bones of my ‘Universal Thought’ live than any
prophesying I have therefore had the fortune to do.”

¹⁷² RM: 49. Regarding the issue of time and eternity, Royce characterizes the problem between the one and
the many as: “Is this timeless consciousness, which understands as a totum simul, what we are forced to
understand successively, not itself involved in a becoming which it cannot really control.”

¹⁷³ Ibid: 49. For a cogent criticism of Royce’s position from the standpoint of Gabriel Marcel, see Dwayne
Tunstall, “Concerning the God that is Only a Concept: A Marcellian Critique of Royce’s God,” in
404: “Royce’s ethico-religious insight cannot remain a live one unless we separate it from his absolutistic
conception of God.”

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.: 59.
self-representative system to depict how finite elements are joined together as the
systematic expression of an immanent purpose. However, the question remains as to
whether or not the “semi-pluralism” depicted by a self-representative system is uniquely
suited to illuminate the nature of being. According to Marcel, Royce will eventually be
forced to strongly modify the direction of his theory by jettisoning the notion of divine
omniscience. For those who are familiar with the course of Royce’s thought, this will
involve a change of course from an all-inclusive, eternal Absolute – requiring a move to
a more mediated, historical conception.175

Yet despite Marcel’s sincere effort to explain and, to a large extent, defend the
Roycean position, “it is unquestionably difficult to rid oneself of a certain feeling of
uneasiness in the presence of the theory.”176 This uneasiness stems from the challenge of
reconciling the causa sui nature of Being with the existence of radical contingency. For
Marcel, the only possibility for harmonizing these two aspects is by “find[ing] a fulcrum
in the actual [and] starting from the real.”177 Here is where Marcel sees a kindred spirit in

175 Marcel will ultimately comment that “Royce made a daring, but fruitless effort to reconcile a
voluntaristic conception of the individual with the idea of an order which despite everything is given for all
eternity…. We will have to ask ourselves … whether these difficulties are connected with the way in which
Royce understood the ontological predicate.” See Herbert W. Schneider, A History of American Philosophy
(Columbia University Press, 1946), p. 492, 493, for an indication of the shift Royce’s thought eventually
takes: “The emphasis on mind as [an] objective logical structure has grown at the expense of the
Absolute…. Most conspicuous and widespread is the shift toward a temporal theory of reality. Not only
reason, truth, value, and being but also the Absolute itself have been given a temporal context…. [I]dealism
has undergone a major transformation. For according to the newer theories Absolute experience is no
longer divorced from human, temporal experience as an object of religious or logical faith, but is conceived
as factor in actual experience, a human possession in time and at times.”
176 Ibid.: 70.
177 Ibid.: 73. As Marcel indicates in the final moments of Royce’s Metaphysics, p. 154-155: Either: the God
who sees everything is a victim of His own perfection, and is destined to grasp only the cosmic order …
without even suspecting anything of the lateral perspectives…. Or, on the contrary, He is a God with
countless glances who is bound to all the vicissitudes of our individual experiences…. A third alternative
seeks to reconcile these two apparently contradictory aspects … by substituting for the unpredictable
richness of spiritual development, the over-rigid unity of a system…. [We must] transcend the three
alternatives that … are inadequate to the proper object of metaphysics, and [move] towards a less
systematic, but more faithful and profound interpretation of our spiritual life … [that] acknowledge[s] an
order of freedom and love in which the relations of being to being, far from integrating into a single
Royce – a thinker who opposed anything resembling a metaphysical sleight-of-hand. A practical, personal relation to the Absolute is a sine qua non: “[T]his act partakes more of faith than of abstract thought. The relation which is established between God and myself is a relation of individual to individual.”

It is at this juncture that the importance of the Roycean doctrine of loyalty takes center stage. As a finite moment of Absolute consciousness, any form of dualism is now transcended through a relationship of reciprocity: “The Absolute will truly be for me only inasmuch as I serve it loyalty.” As a member of a “spiritual community” – a term that will take on added importance in the later Royce – the self simultaneously exhibits two important dimensions. One the one hand, a person is somehow, qua human, primordially a member of this community by virtue of being born into its unity. In this sense, our spiritual destiny is to some degree initially assured. However, one can become an active member of a spiritual community only through the lived act of “participation” – a term that is near and dear to Marcel: “Individualism is a hollow word and should be mistrusted.” Through participation – an act wherein one exercises one’s unique capacity for free, temporal development – one is able to become quasi-porous and unified with the whole. Loyal participation, unconstrained by the categorical divisions of discursive thought, provides for a more concrete connection between finite and infinite being. In the words of Frank M. Oppenheim, S.J.: “Royce’s musement [concerning rational system … would remain the expression of separate but social beings who partake of God to the extend that they believe in Him.]”

178 Ibid.: 73.
179 RM: 74.
180 RM: 110. See also, p. 111: “[I]t would be an illusion to believe in a specific and irreducible content of the self….”
loyalty] enlivens his thought.”181 This act of loyal participation is an ontological defining, both in terms of the finite moment and the eternal life-plan: “[Without] participation in this community, the being of the finite consciousness … would otherwise not be at all…. [But as] my individuality is only an act, or more exactly an expression of the divine individuality, the act by which I determine myself is indeed identically the act by which God is.”182 The manner in which Royce achieves reconciliation is important to Marcel because, instead of arguing for a “block universe” – a criticism of William James – Royce realized that “metaphysical speculation is consummated by positing a practical relation, a personal relation between the Absolute and ourselves, a relation which … we might have been tempted to interpret in a too rigorously theoretical manner…. [T]he duality between the Absolute and myself can only be apparent.”183 By loyally participating in the eternal unity of a spiritual community, living beings are united and understood – but not absorbed – by That which transcends them.

I become a person through serving a cause. I choose my cause and come into being as the person I am through the act of choosing and serving this cause. As Marcel indicates, the term “autonomy” is etymologically misleading – it does not consist of being a “law unto oneself.” Instead: “It is in the measure that I choose this cause, in

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182 *RM*: 75. Later, it will become more apparent how this notion of loyally serving the Absolute is a pivotal concept in terms of developing a view of the Absolute as the temporal unfolding of a spiritual community of interpreters. Cf. the following comment by John E. Smith, “Introduction,” *The Problem of Christianity* (CUA Press, 2001), pp. 9, 24: “Royce believed that a community of individuals represents a distinct type of being which is neither an external collection of atomic members, nor a super-individual that is supposed to retain its being quite apart from the individuals who constitute its members. A community is neither an individual nor a universal; it is a new and distinctive level of being…. (Emphasis added.) The selves are real and the items relating them to each other are equally real; community is the genuine form of the coming together of a one and a many.”
183 *RM*: 74.
which I make myself, that I am autonomous.\textsuperscript{184} According to Marcel, this shift in Royce’s thought from a metaphysic of Absolute idealism to a theory of loyalty is due to “a sort of reflection on his own system … resulting [in] his discovery that there are certain ideal connections between apparently distinct orders of speculation.”\textsuperscript{185} Royce is attempting to merge metaphysics and ethics in such a way to arrive at the ultimate meaning of conduct. This revitalized ethic remains based in the tradition of rational thought but, at the same time, will be “thoroughly examined and purified.”\textsuperscript{186} As Royce says: “Let us bury the natural body of tradition. We want its glorified body and its immortal soul…. We need a new heaven and a new earth.”\textsuperscript{187}

This “new Jerusalem” – to use a term of William Blake – is achieved through dedication to a “supra-personal” cause. Through loyal service to a cause, “a relation of a special kind is established between an individual and the cause … which assumes both free action and self-subordination.”\textsuperscript{188} For Marcel, the ethical direction that Royce’s metaphysics has taken is not that of a mere abstract dialectic – it reflects the profoundest lesson of life. It is worth quoting Marcel at length here:

> We see clearly here how loyalty is founded for Royce in the nature of Being as his idealistic ontology defines Being. It is by no means a group of extrinsic bonds, but real ones, which are established between a loyal individual and a distinct community. Loyalty

\textsuperscript{184} \textit{RM}: 111. In Royce’s words: “My life means nothing, either theoretically or practically, unless I am a member of a community … to which I essentially and by virtue of my relationship to the whole universe belong” (Josiah Royce, \textit{The Problem of Christianity}, 2 Volumes [Macmillan & Co. 1913]). Hereafter referred to as \textit{PC}. Reference will be made to the most recent edition: Josiah Royce, \textit{The Problem of Christianity}, Intro. John E. Smith, (The Catholic University of American Press, 2001): 357.

\textsuperscript{185} \textit{RM}: 109.

\textsuperscript{186} \textit{Ibid.}: 110.

\textsuperscript{187} \textit{PL}: 12, 9. Peter Fuss claims that “Royce has simply attempted to incorporate the traditional body of Western morals into his principles of loyalty at the outset, instead of having ‘deduced’ such a code from them as he claims.” See Peter Fuss, \textit{The Moral Philosophy of Josiah Royce} (Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 233.

\textsuperscript{188} \textit{RM}: 111.
is the living participation of the self in a concrete order which it undertakes to serve, and which in return confers on the self the only reality it can claim.... It is an advent.¹⁸⁹

There is a serious difficulty in the notion of pure loyalty. Much like the Nietzsche’s critique of Kant’s ethic as “Königsbergian” – abstract and otherworldly – there must exist some type of hierarchy, or order of merit, among causes that might attract our loyalty. For Royce, the idea of loyalty furnishes such a criterion. Loyalty acts as a contagion that spreads “like a yeast with miraculous power.”¹⁹⁰ Through the multiple directions in which loyalty can be served, we can begin to intimate the infinite dimensionality of the Absolute now conceived in ethical terms. This is, indeed, significant for Marcel because Royce’s Absolute need not be viewed as determining finite being by mere analytic implication. In order to be viewed as a logically ordered system, the Absolute now becomes a function of the infinite number and diversity of finite loyal initiatives as “the infinitely specified whole of the modes of manifestation allowed by the spirit of loyalty in the universe.”¹⁹¹

Marcel is particularly interested in Lecture VIII in Royce’s Philosophy of Loyalty – especially the section dealing with “lost causes.” Here Marcel heralds the arrival of “a knot in Royce’s thought ... at the intersection of ethics and metaphysics.”¹⁹² In order to seek the unity of the whole, loyalty must be pursued trans-generationally in perpetuity. Pessimism views this pursuit within the restricted perspective of finite temporality as a venture that is doomed to failure. Optimism, on the other hand, with the help a notion of an infinite conspectus, is able to leverage the relationship between time and eternity in such a way that optimism is no longer forced to succumb to the constraints of realism.

¹⁸⁹ *RM*: 112.
¹⁹⁰ *RM*: 113. See also *PL*: 137-138.
¹⁹¹ *RM*: 116.
¹⁹² *RM*: 118. See also p. 117: where Marcel notes the connection between loyalty and religion.
For Marcel, this point is of the utmost significance: “There are … concrete wholes—and indeed, strictly speaking, nothing is concrete but wholes—and it is in our own consciousness that we find the type of those real totalities, those communities, which it is our function, as individuals, to will and serve.”¹⁹³ This Marcellian notion of the exigience of being – that finite beings, qua persons, are ontologically connected with each other by virtue of a wider connection in Being – is confirmed in Royce’s powerful statement that “the sort of unity of consciousness which individual persons fragmentarily get, … must have this unity [available] upon a higher level than that of our ordinary human individuality.”¹⁹⁴

Nowhere is the notion of loyal service directed toward the pursuit of a higher unity more aptly demonstrated than in the quest for scientific knowledge. In keeping with his synoptic vision – or “speculative empiricism” as Marcel refers to it – Royce views science from both a macro and a micro perspective. Microscopically, the detached individual loyally contributes his small part adding incrementally to the larger epistemological edifice.¹⁹⁵ Macroscopically speaking, the individual contributor is an active part of something greater – the extension of human experience into a greater comprehensive unity. Royce refers to this phenomenon in his famous lecture The Mechanical, the Statistical and the Historical as “the fecundity of aggregation … of various spiritual spectra.”¹⁹⁶ Royce and Marcel were both able to anticipate the ensuing dangers of a post-modern constructivism if the real, concrete basis of experience is denied. Empirical truth requires “upon some higher level than ours, [that which] is

¹⁹³ RM: 118.
¹⁹⁴ PL: 310.
¹⁹⁵ See RM: 119.
experienced in some conspectus of life which wins what we need, which approves our
loyalty, which fulfills our rational will which has in its wholeness what we seek.” This
reality represents “a new and distinctive level of being … [consisting of] a certain type of
logically ordered togetherness realized through the collective interpretive acts] of
individual persons.” This whole consists of spirit historically realized in time through a
progressive, communal act of interpretation. As Royce said near the end of his life: “The
whole intention with which we approach our idealism is the intention to be as realistic as
we can.”

Like Hegel, Royce believed that the mind of God, qua Spirit, becomes actualized
through its particular instantiations within the locus of finite consciousness. Spirit is
revealed historically through the finite activity of self-consciousnesses. Scientific
investigation, directed to the external world, reveals spirit qua objectified – in Blake’s
words “Countenance Divine shin[ing] forth upon our clouded hills.” The whole is
achieved through a process of mutual understanding that “is in some fashion spanned by
one insight which surveys the unity of its meaning … [embodying] the form of [a]
Community of Interpretation, and above all in the form of the Interpreter, who interprets
all to all, and each individual to the world, and the world of spirits to each individual.”

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197 PL: 341-342. See also Josiah Royce, William James and Other Essays on the Philosophy of Life (The
Macmillan Company, 1912): 83. The extension of experience into a larger unity is a connecting theme
running throughout Royce’s thought in its entirety.
198 John E. Smith, “Introduction” to The Problem of Christianity (The Catholic University of America
199 Josiah Royce, Metaphysics: His Philosophy 9 Course of 1915-1916, Stenographically recorded by Ralph
W. Brown and Bryon Underwood. Eds. W.E. Hocking, R. Hocking, and F. Oppenheim (SUNY Press,
201 PC: 318.
The Problem of Christianity: A Synergy of Peircean Logic and Pauline Spirituality

Here we reach a pivotal juncture of Royce’s thought – in Marcel’s term, “a renewal … establish[ing] a closer bond between the results of pure logic and … reflection on social and religious problems.” By recognizing the “extremely close connection” that logic plays in the development of Royce’s theory of community, Marcel again demonstrates his command of the Roycean corpus. Until recently, not much was known about the impact of Peirce upon Royce, nor was Royce given the recognition he was due as a first-rate logician. By emphasizing the continuity between the earlier and the later Royce, Marcel is able to communicate key insights derived from Royce’s own process of self-reflection. Insisting that The Problem of Christianity is “in essential harmony” with The World and the Individual, Royce clearly admits that “There is much in it which I did not expect to say when I began the task here accomplished.” The decisive event was due to a conversion experience – a “Peircean insight” that Royce underwent in 1912, when he realized the power of Peirce’s theory of signs and triadic logic to develop a semiotic view of the self. According to Frank M. Oppenheim, S.J., “By avoiding the traditional dyadic logic of non-relative terms, the late Royce climbed up with Peirce into the logic of relatives. With the infinite triad, Royce came to appreciate an unending teleologically guided process that called selves to strive to promote the great community of humankind.” The creative appropriation of Peirce’s thought helped Royce work his way out of the most ensnaring labyrinth of Absolute idealism and the less than satisfying

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203 PC: 38.
204 Frank M. Oppenheim, S.J. Reverence for the Relations of life: Re-imaging Pragmatism via Josiah Royce’s Interactions with Peirce, James, and Dewey (University of Notre Dame Press, 2005): 35-36. In 1913 Royce stated “The bridge that should connect our logic and mathematics with our social theories is still unfinished. The future must and will find such a bridge” in Royce’s Logical Essays: 223.
attempt of dialectically reconciling the unity of the One and the many. By effectively naturalizing spirit “as the universal mind in which human minds exist only as developing signs … the Absolute [becomes] the perfectly ordered system which is the interpretation of those ideas.”205 As Marcel says, “Peirce [may have] invented the theory of interpretation, but Royce took it up again on its own account and gave it new ramifications.”206

Royce saw the Peircean notion of interpretation as a creative way out of the longstanding dualism of conception and perception. This dualism has plagued modern philosophy up to Kant – accounting for matter either as a given or constructed. Marcel, following James’ penchant for the language of the marketplace, expresses it this way:

[I]f the concept is a bill to which the coins of perception must always correspond, it is only too clear that that your mind cannot be ‘conceived’ by me, for no metallic reserve, no perception can ever detail it for me. There is thus a third mode of knowledge … [called] interpretation…. Monetary exchange will furnish us the best illustration of this process, since it corresponds to the regulated passage from one determined system of values to another.207

Perception and conception inhabit a “deserted world” of insurmountable dyadic relations, i.e. dualisms. Interpretation – consisting of the triadic relation between the interpreter, the interpreted, and the interprettee – forms the basis of both self-consciousness and the spiritual community:

207 RM: 121-122. Pace Marcel, Royce is also concerned with the problem of intersubjectivity – in this case in the form of the problem of the possibility of knowledge of other minds. For Royce, this problem cannot be solved through perception or intellection – only interpretation. See John E. Smith, “Signs, Selves and Interpretation,” in Contemporary American Philosophy, Second Series (Humanities Press, Inc. 1970), p. 322: “A person [and] a community of persons, because both are time-spanning or enduring organic unities peculiar in that they are unified by a centre of intention expressing itself through what can be perceived and conceived, without either unity being identical in type with the characteristic objects of either form of apprehension.”
The life of the self rests entirely on interpretation…. In other words, the past is the text to which the interpretation refers, the present is the interpreter, and the future is the person to whom the interpretation is addressed. This applies to all possible history so that the present can be defined as the potential interpretation of the past to the future. It is thus as a function of this logical triad conceived either as a sort of intelligible cell, or dynamically, as the rhythm of spiritual life, that we must take into account…. 208

The process of interpretation is constitutive of the most basic level of human reality: “[O]ur deepest inner life is always a spiritual commerce, a colloquy or a prayer, and thus can never be given, even by intuition.”209 From Royce’s perspective, a Bergsonian notion of intuition ignores what is most vital in the mind by remaining captive to an illusory conception of interiority. Spiritual reality cannot be made accessible through some exceptional act of pure intuition. Spirit is revealed whenever personal interaction occurs “from the moment when we acknowledge the reality and inner life of our fellows.”210

The later Royce establishes the fundamental importance of interpretation by making it the “main business” of philosophy. By stressing the process of interpretation, Royce is able to place his Absolute idealism on its feet – much like Marx did for Hegel’s idealism – by depicting the conspective unity of consciousness socially through an infinitely conceived, semiotic continuum within which we are able to “establish connections between all of [our ideas], and thus … raise ourselves to that intellection which grasps them as a totality, i.e. as a community.”211

In other words, the living element constituting the basis of our interior life –

“which is always stimulated to fresh efforts by the inexhaustible wealth of the novel facts

208 RM: 122.
209 Ibid.: 123. See PC, p. 285: “[T]here is no royal road to self-knowledge…. [T]here is no direct intuition or perception of the self. Reflection … involves what is, in its essence, an interior conversation, in which one discovers one’s own mind through a process of inference … which guide us in our social effort to interpret our neighbors’ mind.”
211 RM: 124.
of the social world”\textsuperscript{212} – is concretely translated into a sign matrix through which the spiritual order is incarnated. The order is spiritualized by virtue of the fact that “Interpretation looks down from above… Its goal is the ideal unity of insight … [obtained] only in relation to that ideal unity [from which] I can determine the truth of my interpretation.”\textsuperscript{213} It is important to note that the spiritual order is made concrete by the particular interpreter who, acting as both servant and agent, “embodies the divine and human approach more than in any other kind of experience.”\textsuperscript{214} We are now in a position to see the organic connection that exists between loyalty and interpretation. Through the act of loyally committing to an ongoing process of interpretation, we become self-conscious individually, socially and spiritually. For Marcel, this process consists of “the placing of a being in communication with itself … purely and simply by our own activity … find[ing] in ourselves as we act … the revelation in us and for us of our deepest nature.”\textsuperscript{215}

Marcel, noting the close kinship between the early and the later Royce, makes the claim that \textit{The Problem of Christianity} “marks a considerable progress in the explication of Royce’s main positions.”\textsuperscript{216} The omniscient conspectus of Absolute consciousness – a source of dialectical difficulty for Royce in \textit{The World and the Individual} – has been

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item \textit{PC}: 294. See \textit{infra}: “[Interpretation] demands by virtue of its own nature, even in the simplest conceivable case, an endless wealth of new interpretations.”
  \item \textit{RM}: 125.
  \item \textit{RM}: 125. See also page 147: “[T]he doctrine expounded in \textit{The Conception of God} and \textit{The World and the Individual} is only intelligible when God is conceived as a Community…. It is within the Absolute Community that the universe is totally interpreted, or in other words, that all becoming is grasped in both its concrete and eternal meanings and that the most tragic oppositions are resolved in intelligible harmonies.”
  \item \textit{Ibid.}: 125.
  \item \textit{RM}: 127. Although Marcel should be complimented for seeing the organic development of Royce’s thought, he may have not looked deep enough. See George Herbert Palmer’s comment in “Josiah Royce,” in \textit{Contemporary Idealism in America}, ed. C. Barrett (Russell & Russell, Inc., 1964), p. 5: “[Royce’s intellectual growth was ever changing, ever constant. In his first book he treats of a subject on which his thoughts were largely engaged at the time of his death. But how differently the subject was conceived!”
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
reconfigured and concretely transformed into a perpetual interpreter who, mediating between antithetical ideas, is faithfully engaged in the process of attempting to reconcile the whole of reality – “a world that encloses its own interpretation in itself.”[217] Despite the explanatory power of the self-representative system in accounting for the relationship between the finite and the infinite, the idea of an interpretation derived from infinite series of interpretations “form[s] a more living and specific idea than the logico-mathematical schema [offered in The World and the Individual].”[218] Rather than attempt to explicate the nature of Absolute thought conceived in its infinite unity, the focus of Royce’s synoptic vision has now shifted to a burgeoning, historical process consisting of the temporal spread wherein an idea creatively develops through the mediation of two conflicting ideas.

The fundamental notion, for Royce, both logically and metaphysically, is the notion of a sign as “something that requires an interpretation.”[219] Contrary to an inert given upon which one overlays a meaning, a sign is essentially dynamic and concrete, requiring its interpretation in order to reveal its rich dimensionality. The dimensionality of a sign becomes further enriched as it extends across an infinite series of interpretations: “a specific relation joining the initial term to the system to the series it announces and in which it is reflected.”[220] The rich dimensionality” that results from the extended interpretation of a sign provides a perfect segue to Royce’s novel approach to Christianity.

A few contextual remarks are required. Unlike the early Royce, who investigated

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[217] Ibid.: 127.
[219] RM: 128. See also, p. 149 where Marcel expresses “a doubt that the category of interpretation is really, metaphysically ultimate.”
[220] RM: 133.
religious experience independently of sect or creed, the focus of the later Royce, in *The Problem of Christianity*, is the eternal value of the Christian religion: “In what sense, if in any, can the modern man consistently be, in creed, a Christian?”

Traditionally speaking, Christianity has been fragmented into two perspectives – that of the personal teachings and life of the Savior and the interpretation of the religion of Christ. Royce insists upon the priority of the latter perspective because Christ’s personal teachings, purposely put forth in the form prophetic parables, were not sufficient in themselves – requiring a going beyond, or trans-lation, similar to a process of “sow[ing] a seed in the fertile soil of interpretation.”

From Royce’s standpoint, the endless debate over the divine or human nature of Christ is misplaced. Jesus may have provided the initial impetus which initiated the “great current” of Christian life into the world, but it is a mistake to view the hierophantic event of Christ as a moment of exalted, individual psychology. For Royce, the origins of Christian experience were *social*: “The salvation of the individual man is determined by membership in a certain spiritual community, —a religious community and, in its inmost nature, a divine community, in whose life the Christian virtues are to reach their highest expression and the spirit of the Master is to obtain its earthly fulfillment.”

Royce identifies the Apostle Paul as the “true founder” of Christianity conceived as a spiritual community. In Marcel’s terms, “a community … once it is unified by an active indwelling purpose … [is able] to renew the evangelical concept … [achieving] a

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221 *PC*: 62. See *RM*: 131.
222 *Ibid.*: 132-133. William Adams Brown disagreement with this aspect of Royce’s thought is shared by others. See Review of *The Problem of Christianity*, in *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Method*, Vol. 11, No. 22 (October 22, 1914): 608: “[Royce] believes that Absolute truth is revealed in history, but he is also sure that you must not identify it with any particular historical phenomenon, even if that historical phenomenon be one so august and sacred as the Christian religion itself.”
223 *PC*: 72.
perfect synthesis … of passionate devotion to the community and tender affection for the individual.\textsuperscript{224} The eternal implication of a finite life-plan, once conceived within a divine conspectus, has now assumed the more concrete form of loyal devotion to a spiritual community wherein an individual is united, glorified, and saved for eternity. Using the abiding presence of a spiritual community as a backdrop, Royce is able to offer compelling re-interpretations of the traditional Christian doctrine of sin, grace and redemption. These notions, viewed from within the connective tissue of an infinite community of interpretation, are of particular interest to Marcel who stressed the integral connection that exists between a self and a spiritual Other.

Both Marcel and Royce recognize that individuality, atomistically conceived, is an abstraction that is derivative from a more primary, concrete social order. As Marcel says; “[T]he individual consciousness is posited only at the heart of social consciousness and as opposed to it."\textsuperscript{225} Royce takes this notion a step further by arguing that social existence provides the catalyst for individual personality formation. As society extends its reach corporately, it infuses is norms and beliefs into its members. This process is not that associated with Marx’s “opiate of the masses” – it consists in an enriching process in which a higher level of consciousness is achieved. Marcel, a keen observer of the contemporary scene, realizes that this profound truth of Royce has a dark side as well. While this “awakening” of the individual “confers on him a radical power of self-creation which seems incompatible with the conditions of finite existence, [at the same time], a secret and depressed life of sudden destructive force … [is] interiorized.”\textsuperscript{226} Royce, well before September 11 and the notion of an axis of evil, coined the phrase “communities of

\textsuperscript{224} RM: 133, 134.
\textsuperscript{225} RM: 134.
\textsuperscript{226} Ibid.: 135.
hate.” As society becomes more massive, it becomes more “vexatious and oppressive,” leading to the detachment of those members who feel its threatening reach. Frank Oppenheim refers to this process as one “of swirl and sweep … [in which] deep currents of alienation … flood in upon the human self.”

For Royce, this capacity of self-consciousness to destroy the social fabric constitutes the true meaning of original sin. Paul, recognizing the destructive capacity of human nature, foresaw the importance of recognizing that “love must also be loyalty.” Through loyalty to the community, members are able to exist on a spiritual level by extending the otherwise finite reach of their individual deed – a level opposed to Hobbes’ “war of all against all.” The community to which the member belongs – the physiological connotation of the word ‘member’ should not be overlooked – raises the member to a “supra-personal” level by virtue of the community’s capacity to sustain an infinitely extended activity of interpretation. According to one Pauline scholar, “We have no evidence that Paul ever conceived of a solitary isolated believer…. Paul’s followers, no matter what city they inhabited, were brought together by their shared death with Christ….” The community is, in a sense, representative of what Hegel referred to as a “concrete universal.” Through the manner in which the community is able to offer a higher value in which conflicting views can be reconciled and its constituents harmonized through their recognition of a shared past and a common future, it defies characterization as an abstract idea or a concrete particular. As a supra-individual reality, the community

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227 Frank M. Oppenheim, *Royce’s Mature Ethics* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1993): 151. However, suffice it to say that Royce also recognized “currents” that can heal or integrate the human self.

228 *RM*: 136.

bridges chasms existing in the midst of bifurcation and abstraction. According to Marcel, we arrive at the intellectually inspired “divine beatitude” of Aristotle – in which human wisdom (theoria) approaches divine wisdom qua “thought thinking itself” – now in the form of a self-representative system of a Pauline nature. No longer described in terms of an endless Dedekindian Kette, the self-representative system now announces the arrival of a universal community “in which the whole order of time, the process of the spirit, is interpreted, and so interpreted that, when viewed in the light of its goal, the whole world is reconciled to its own purpose.”230 This is a “living reason” unified and directionally inspired by the Holy Spirit – a kingdom of heaven on earth. Robert C. Pollock describes the powerful implications of such a world-view:

But what a drastic alteration in perspective when men can envisage a wide open world in which development, spontaneity, and novelty are entirely at home! … Given this new image of the universe, experimentation and creativity are endowed with a new dignity, for they have gained a status within nature itself. Now looked upon as essential aspects of a growing world, they speak with an authority to which man gladly responds.231

This personal devotion to an order of reality offering the possibility of salvation cannot be explained simply in psychological terms. Grace is now viewed as a “radically free act” which is the fulfillment of purposeful conscious life. Marcel, quite perceptively, “rediscover[s] an essential motif of Schopenhauer’s philosophy”232 – a motif recognizable in some of Royce’s earliest works. In Pessimism and Modern Thought, Royce states

[Our] one goal is the rendering as full and as definite as possible all the conscious life that at any one moment comes within the circle of our influence. Devotion, then, to

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230 RM: 144. See PC: “I shall know even as I am known, an endlessly restful spiritual activity, the activity of the glorified and triumphant Church, fills all the scene. It is an activity of individuals who still will, and perform the deeds of love, and endlessly aim to renew what they possess,—the life of the perfected and perfectly lovable community, where all are one in Christ.”


232 RM: 137.
universal conscious life, is the goal of conscious life itself; or the goal is the self-reference or self-surrender of each conscious moment in the great whole of life, in so far as that whole is within reach.\textsuperscript{233}

Marcel clearly understands the spiritual axis of Royce’s thought – “his religious philosophy [as] the transposition of his ontology [in which] the ethical primacy of the social [culminates in] a hierarchy at the summit [of] specifically Christian ideals.”\textsuperscript{234}

Perhaps the most creative example of Royce’s reinterpretation of Christianity consists of his treatment of redemption. Redemptive acts are not merely pragmatic responses but events which contain the principle of their own intelligibility. The paradigm case of redemption is treason – historically and spiritually represented by Christ’s disciple, Judas. An act of treachery consists of at least two moments – both of which are freely chosen. First, there is the act of loyally committing oneself to a cause; then, there is the act of treachery against that very cause. The two moments, taken together, create an “immanent logic” of irrevocability – nothing can undo the violation against the cause one chose to serve.

The power of Royce’s conception lies in its ability to leverage the relationship between the individual and the community within the context of a decisive act of spiritual reconciliation. The egregious nature of the individual’s sin against the community bespeaks a prior intimacy that has been severed. In order for the traitor to be able to become reconciled with their act, the community must participate in the redemptive process. As will become clear, this process cannot exhibit the features of a contrived, \textit{deus ex machina} type of solution. For that reason, the redemptive act will always exhibit a dimension of tragic imperfection. But it will also be ontologically efficacious albeit in a

\textsuperscript{234} \textit{RM}: 137.
mysterious way: “It must be the work of a creative will triumphing over the act of treason.”

A powerful example is contained in the gospel of Luke. An overzealous tax collector, Zacchaeus, in an effort to become reconciled with Jesus, commits himself to a redemptive act as a punishment for cheating his fellow citizens out of their savings. Zacchaeus’ redemption consists of repaying his victims with half of his possessions and, if that gesture should prove insufficient, paying them back fourfold. The authentic genuineness of Royce’s conception of redemptive salvation lies in its ability to become concretely and relevantly instantiated. As Marcel says: “Let no one reproach Royce for what is purely formal or abstract in this dialectic.” He then quotes Royce in some detail:

Not treason in general, but just this treason shall give the occasion, and supply the condition of the creative deed…. Without just that treason, this new deed … could not have been done at all. And hereupon the new deed … is so ingeniously devised, so concretely practical in the good that it accomplishes, that, when you look down upon the human world after the new creative deed has been done in it, you say first, “This deed was made possible by that treason”; and, secondly, The world, as transformed by this creative deed, is better than it would have been had all else remained the same, but had the deed of treason not been done at all.

Royce’s account attests to the liberating power of redemptive acts to exercise a transmogrifying effect. Royce developed this notion of redemption within the context of community at a critical time in world history when the treacherous acts of nation against nation were being realized in World War I – a time that we know, through hindsight, was yearning for redemption. Marcel, also familiar with the devastation of WWI through his

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235 Ibid.: 141.
236 Luke, Chapter 19: 2-9. The power of this inaugural act of redemption is evidenced by the existence of The Sycamore Foundation – an Australian based agency that attempts to create a spirit of reconciliation between criminals and their victims. The name “Sycamore” is derived from the gospel as Zacchaeus – a man of limited stature – had to climb a sycamore-fig tree in order to view Christ.
237 RM: 139.
238 PC: 180.
participatory role as a non-combatant, recognized too the vital need to exercise “a
reconstruction of the human world.”²³⁹

Here we see the powerful implication of the “primitive” Pauline church – a
church without any borders representing geography, sect, or race. If redemption –
achieved within the context of love and grace – can occur, then the divisive wounds of
treason can be healed within a larger unity. This process partakes both of the human and
the divine. Simply stated, the reconciling acts are human, but only within the greater
unity of Spirit can a greater reconciliation occur. The sufficient condition of a true,
primitive church “is represented on earth by every social group that faithfully serves the
cause of human unity.”²⁴⁰ The Roycean-Pauline church consists of the pursuit of a final
horizon of a unified interpretation. The fact that when two or more people are “gathered”
together by virtue of the *logos*, the foundation is laid both for a church and an
interpretation that should not be taken as mere coincidence. Royce was well aware
through his reading of Paul of the close connection between prayer and interpretation.²⁴¹
A Roycean conception of faith is motivated by a spirit of charity that redemptive acts of
interpretation will result in a higher form of unity, thus providing a clearing for a living
drama depicting the ongoing realization of spirit. For Royce, this is the true meaning of
“the body of Christ.” We should therefore “simplify our traditional Christology in order
to enrich its spirit.”²⁴²

Marcel raises the vitally important question as to how a finite being participates in

²³⁹ *RM*: 142.
²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 143.
²⁴¹ See 1 Corinthians 14:13 “I say, then, that the man who falls into ecstatic utterance should pray for the
ability to interpret.” See also Matthew 18:20 “For where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there
in the midst of them.”
²⁴² *RM*: 145.
that self-interpretation which serves as the life of the universal community. Royce, through his appropriation of semiotics via Peirce, anticipates many leading-edge issues in contemporary systems theory. In order for the world to achieve a goal of “total self-interpretation” – in order for the logical totality to be incrementally realized through time – some degree of “pre-established harmony” – to use a phrase of Leibniz – must exist between the mind and nature. Royce, attuned to the most current scientific developments of his day, was extremely interested in the work of T. L. Henderson who argued for a teleological relation between the human mind and the natural world such that the mind is “attun[ed ] to the universe which our sciences progressively interpret … [and] that the time-world viewed as a whole … is a process which possesses, and includes … a total meaning and a coherent interpretation.”

Royce was exploring how experience and reflection, now unified through the act of interpretation, can reveal the dialectical life of the spirit understood as an activity that proceeds interrogatively through questioning and answering. As Royce said near the end of *The Problem of Christianity*, the essence of a human being is to be mutually implicated, through the power of interpretation in the progressive odyssey of spirit: “[T]he natural world [is] infinite in space and time and … the salvation of man [is] bound up with the interpretation of an infinitely rich realm of spiritual life…. The core of the faith is the Spirit, the Beloved Community, the work of grace, the atoning deed and the saving power of the loyal life.” In short, the teleological fulfillment of a process of self-interpretation – both human and divine – is a Beloved Community consisting of “the kingdom in which all hermeneutic acts receive immediate

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243 *PC*: 400-401, no. 3. For a neo-Roycean attempt to conceive this “whole,” see John Elof Boodin, “God and Cosmic Structure,” in *Contemporary Idealism in America*: 199-216.

244 *PC*: 402. See Josiah Royce, *The Sources of Religious Insight* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), p. 293: “All the ways that the loyal follow lead upward to the realm of the spirit, where reason is once the overarching heaven and the all-vitalizing devotion that binds every loyal individual….,”
confirmation and seal.”245 Only on the basis of this Beloved Community, can the Great Community be achieved – a community that exists through the reconciliation of diverse perspectives achieved through charitable acceptance. At this prophetic moment, humankind stands within the horizon of a new dawn in which “self-realization and fulfillment pass from the sphere of ideality to that of concrete realization.”246

246 John E. Smith, Royce’s Social Infinite: The Community of Interpretation, p. 163. See also L.P. Jacks, “The Universe as Philosopher,” in The Alchemy of Thought (Williams and Norgate, 1910), p. 82: “Philosophy must not be a mere addendum to the universe it professes to interpret…. [T]he mere concept of the world remains incomplete until it includes the interpretation of the world as an element of the world-constitution.”
Part III

Gabriel Marcel and William Ernest Hocking: Companions of Eternity

[T]he term that comes back to me is “companions of eternity,” a term that W.E. Hocking and I used at the time of our first and unforgettable encounter….1

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The Relational Context

William Ernest Hocking provides an important link between Marcel and Royce. Hocking initially came to Harvard to study with William James but quickly became a student of Royce.2 Although the influence of Royce on Hocking’s philosophical development is undeniable, there exists a significant point of disagreement concerning the primacy of intersubjective relations. In The World and the Individual and The Problem of Christianity, Royce viewed intersubjectivity as possible only on the condition of the existence of a “third” – the Absolute or the set of universal symbols through which the Absolute is disclosed. This point of disagreement is described by Hocking in the following: “We have, [Royce maintained] no direct empirical knowledge of ourselves, nor of other minds, and hence, in substance, of our entire social environment….”3

At the appropriate time, Hocking respectfully confronted Royce, his esteemed professor, and it is worth quoting Hocking’s poignant description of this event at length:

There was a magnanimity in [Royce’s] attitude toward criticism…. In an essay submitted to him during my last graduate year at Harvard, 1903-1904, I ventured to differ

1 Gabriel Marcel, Awakenings: 211.
2 See Leroy S. Rouner, Within Human Experience: The Philosophy of William Ernest Hocking (Harvard University Press, 1969). However, when Hocking arrived in 1901 James was in Scotland delivering his Gifford Lectures. Hocking wrote his Ph.D. dissertation under Royce’s supervision.
3 William Ernest Hocking, “On Royce’s Empiricism,” in The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. LIII, No. 3: February 2, 1956, p. 61. See also Rouner, p. 21: “For Royce, individuals are like the monads of Leibniz, except that they are not entirely windowless. They have a skylight open to the absolute…. The line of communication between Royce and his neighbor is always indirect.”
from one of his central doctrines, namely, that we have no direct knowledge of either our
own minds or of other minds…. In this particular essay, I reported an experience in
which, as I read it, I was directly aware of another mind and my own as co-knowers of a
bit of the physical world, a “Thou” and “I” as co-knowers of an “It.” So far as feeling was
involved, that feeling was cognitive … [and] we must extend the conception of empirical
knowledge, and so admit an element of realism within the ideal totality. I was expecting a
radical criticism from my revered professor. Instead, when Royce handed my essay back,
he pointed out the dissenting passage with the comment, “This is your insight: you must
adhere to that!” Without assenting to my view, he had given me his blessing for its
development.4

Marcel would seize upon this important insight of Hocking. Ultimately frustrated
by the idealistic projectory of Royce’s thought, Marcel believed that Hocking’s
“provocative accent on intersubjectivity … challenged Proust’s monadism.”5 In keeping
with his tendency to describe his philosophical development in personal terms, Marcel
discloses that “the magnum opus of W.E. Hocking, The Meaning of God in Human
Experience … I am sure, had a lasting influence on me. But it cannot be doubted that
Hocking’s book was an advance on Royce’s thought, an advance in the direction of that
metaphysical realism toward which I resolutely tended.”6

A shared concern with the cognitive dimension of feeling, the primacy of
intersubjective relations, and the presence of God within human experience served as the
catalyst for a long term relationship between Marcel and Hocking. The relationship
consisted of personal correspondence, visits by Marcel to Madison, New Hampshire and
published commentaries upon each other’s work. In 1919, Marcel published “W.E.
Hocking et la dialectique de l’instinct.” Hocking reciprocated in 1954 with “Marcel and

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5 G. Marcel, Awakenings: 72.
6 G. Marcel, “Author’s Foreword,” to Royce’s Metaphysics: x. See Richard Hocking’s comment that The
Meaning of God in Human Experience is “a masterful study of the metaphysics of intersubjectivity.”
40, p. 118.
the Ground Issues of Metaphysics.” In 1966, Marcel would offer his signature contribution to Hocking’s Festschrift – an essay that superbly crystallizes their affinities on the important issue of overcoming solipsism.

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The Repudiation of Solipsism: Living Out of Doors

The keynote theme of Hocking’s philosophy is the importance of “liv[ing] out of doors … in the inexorable taciturnity of Fact….” Opposed to any principle of immanence in which consciousness is viewed as being located behind a wall, Hocking’s question is “Why are we so made that I gaze and see of thee only thy Wall, and never Thee?” Contra Husserl, who argued that intersubjectivity is achieved through the workings of transcendental subjectivity, Hocking maintained that human beings make contact with each other not by ascending from the transcendental recesses of consciousness but by ex-isting out front in a shared foreground of experience. Sounding a bit like Heidegger, Hocking believed that human beings ex-ist or literally rise up out of Being. Because we are already in Being, life consists fundamentally of a response of being to Being. Unfortunately, modern philosophy has seized upon two premature insights and, as a result, missed the evidential primacy of intersubjective being. When Descartes established the Res Cogitans as the fundamentum inconcussum of “first philosophy,” he failed to grasp an important point. If the isolated Cogito is the

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cornerstone of a modern metaphysic, isn’t Descartes through the act of proclaiming the universal truth of this discovery, making the *defacto* claim that this insight extends *across* the entire spectrum of human experience? Likewise in the case of Leibniz, if all monads are “windowless,” must there not be a universal, non-windowless, panoramic perspective from which the condition of “windowlessness” can be ascertained? According to Hocking, “[N]uclear certitude is composite: in our lonely self awareness, we are not and cannot be solitary; the thinker without something-thought-about is a zero; and something-thought about is something-to-be shared, as common object, with a ‘Thou’ co-present with the self.”

Hocking is clearly a more systematic philosopher than Marcel. The former’s important distinction between a “system from without” and a “system from within” helps to shed important light on a major aspect of Marcel’s thought. A “system from without” results in a type of systematicity of the worst degree – a contrived type of organization in which form, deductively imposed, ultimately determines the structure of any content. Marcel’s approach is diametrically opposed to this type of systematicity. A “system from within,” on the other hand, provides a degree of systematicity more along the lines of an organic integrity through which a body of thought is viewed as an ongoing, developmental process. Hocking argues that Marcel’s thought exhibits this latter type of systematicity. Although Marcel, will ultimately disagree with Hocking over the issue of systematicity, Hocking’s point is to emphasize the *potential universality* of subjective experience. Like Marcel, Hocking is also dedicated to unveiling the connections inherent in experience. Tracing the private *ininerarium mentis* may offer some insight to be sure,

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11 *MGHE*: 152.
but “the ultimate issues of life can never be purely private concerns.” If Marcel jettisoned any hope of achieving systematicity – either from “within” or from “without” – why did he go on to publish his *Journal métaphysique* – a collection of “private” ruminations? Hocking states the issue in the following manner:

The autobiography of passion, like the literature of confession, is of perennial human weight … for its revelation of the meaning of human existence…. I am inclined to the thesis that all meanings, including the wordless meanings of music and other arts, are destined to meet the relentless and ultimately successful assault of the concept. For, after all, the concept imposes no constraint on that which is conceived…. A concept of “the whole” builds no fence around what is meant by it.  

Hocking’s point is that “subjective” feeling somehow exhibits a universal resonance across the spectrum of human experience. We live not only “out of doors” but also “under a common sky.” Universality is ultimately a social phenomenon. A fact is true for the whole conscious universe as well any particular, finite individual. In a letter to Daniel S. Robinson, Hocking once remarked that “Man is born in the freedom and unity of the Spirit, but everywhere he is in the chains of bodily separation….“  

Hocking’s “concept of ‘the whole’” provides the aboriginal apriori, serving as both the backdrop and foreground of experience. Displaying his prior training as an engineer, Hocking equates “the whole” to a textile loom: “In the beginning was, at least, the Loom; and always remains the simple-total frame of things….“ But the loom also weaves a fabric of growing and changing knowledge – an intricate structure of “mid-world knowledge.” Hocking’s major argument against pragmatism is not that knowledge has a volitional, telic aspect. Hocking clearly recognizes the purposive dimension of

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12 *Marcel and the Groundwork of Metaphysics*: 441.
13 *Marcel and the Groundwork of Metaphysics*: 441. See MGHE, p. xvi: “There is no inaccessible truth. If any object has possible bearing on human interests …there is some cognitive way to it.”
14 See Daniel S. Robinson, *Royce and Hocking: American Idealists* (The Christopher Publishing House, 1968): 160. It should be noted that Hocking was ultimately unsatisfied with this characterization.
15 MGHE: 97.
experience. His criticism is that pragmatism fails to see that “Possibility is neither a human product, nor a mere form of expectancy: it is an objective property of things, antecedent to our action.”

Once produced, the texture of the weave exhibits no visible sign of the loom – but the loom’s presence is felt nonetheless as a “non-impulsive background.” As Hocking says, “[A]n idea of the universe can never have been wrapped up in small compass for gradual unfolding…. He who comes into the world at all comes at once into the presence of the whole world.”

§

Fact, Idea, Feeling: Hocking’s Absolute Empiricism

Hocking’s brand of empiricism is absolute – its goal is “to understand … the given world which, as given, is one stupendous fact.” Hocking stresses the organic continuity existing between feelings and ideas, culminating in an awareness of God’s presence. Despite his training as an engineer, Hocking preferred biological explanations over mechanical ones – mechanistic accounts simply cannot do justice to dimensions of infinitude and incessant change that reality exhibits: “[R]eligion is the function of inletting, or osmosis, between the human spirit and the living tissue of the universe wherein it is eternally carried.” Hocking’s refers to this project of deepening of our understanding of feeling and providing a more substantial basis for religion as “the retirement of the intellect.” Reminiscent of Dewey’s distinction between “religion” and

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16 William E. Hocking, “Action and Certainty,” in *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 27, No. 9, (Apr. 24, 1930): 236. See *MGHE*, p. xvii: “[P]ragmatism … is a self refuting theory. The only kind of truth which in the end can comply with the pragmatic requirement that power shall be conserved is a non-pragmatic truth, a truth which has an ultimate aspect....”

17 *MGHE*: 95. See also p. 50: “Religion is a reaction … of small and highly aspiring beings in a huge – perhaps infinite – arena.”

18 *Fact, Field, and Destiny*: 525. In *Marcel and the Ground issue of Metaphysics*, Hocking refers to “experience in the verbal sense of experiencing … a higher-level or reflexive empiricism (pp. 439-440).”

19 *MGHE*: 23. See also p. 542: “[P]sychical categories are complementary to physical categories.”
“the religious,” Hocking offers the following diagnosis of the contemporary spiritual malaise:

With the rise of the critical business of thinking and philosophizing, the decline of religious vitality keeps even step. As passion cools, theology spreads; and as theology spreads, passion cools even more…. The stream which at its source is impetuous, fierce, channel plowing, here at its mouth lies lazy, divided, straggling off to the dead-level of religious homogeneity, through the arms of shallow reasoning sects….  

If genuine religious experience withers under the yoke of rationality, so too do other facets of experience. For Hocking, thoughts are the circuitous means by which we struggle to attain externality. Make no mistake about it: “That which in human nature is fundamental, intimate, genuine, private, and wholly owned is feeling: in feeling we substantially exist.”

For Hocking, religion must be understood from the inside. Sensitive to Kant’s notion of a “dialectical illusion,” Hocking is acutely aware of the adverse consequences of trying to frame religious experience in terms derived solely from a fixed conception of experience. Hocking’s solution lies in “attacking the division already set up between feeling and idea.” Feeling and idea are inseparable – a distinction without a difference. What is mistaken as a dualism is actually a divergence within continuity: “[T]here is no such thing as a feeling apart from idea; the idea is an integral part of all feeling; and that it is the whole meaning and destiny of feeling to terminate in the knowledge of an object.” Through ideas, the self is able to participate in the object – an idea is that part of the object that has been affectively assimilated by the self. According to one

20 Ibid.: 41.
21 MGHE: 44. See infra., p. 48, where Hocking refers to “the tap root of human instinct….” See also, p. 66: “Feeling is outward-pushing [that is directed towards that which is] other-than feeling … consciousness of an object.”
22 Ibid.: 63.
23 MGHE: 64. See p. 69 where Hocking refers to “idea-feeling couples.”
commentator, “[E]xperience, in so far as it has been able to be expressed in idea, becomes a permanent part of the self. This is to say that ‘ideas’ are not what we think of, but what we think with.”

Feeling, qua e-motive, etymologically suggests the active capacity to stretch – a nascent intentionality directed towards a beyond. According to Hocking: “[T]hat which will restore the stability of this [feeling] self lies not within its own border but beyond it.” The terminus ad quem of all feeling lies in the experiential knowledge of an object. There is no epistemological gap to be bridged here: “In the satisfaction of feeling, the guiding idea coalesces immediately with the object then known as present: to the including mind there is perfect continuity between prophecy and fulfillment….”

Hocking is aware of the destructive capabilities of thought severed from feelings. Having read Bergson, Hocking recognizes that when we think with static, rigid ideas, what we think of is impacted in an adverse way. Static, codifying ideas “contain enough truth to be exceedingly useful, enough also to be exceedingly seductive … [but such] logic itself may appear to be nothing more than a sort of space-play or topology [in which] our thinking possesses a sort of ‘geometrizing.’” In the interest of specificity and universality, our ideas necessarily exhibit a degree of abstraction by incorporating a definitive set of inclusions and exclusions. What is needed is the ability to inject dynamism into ideas – providing refreshment against the ever-present possibility of what Bergson referred to as mésalliance – the threat of mechanization.

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25 MGE: 66.
26 Ibid.: 68. Emphasis added. See infra: [C]ognizance and feeling are but different stages of the same thing.” One is reminded of Plato’s conception of eros here.
27 MGE: 80.
From his work with Royce at Harvard, Hocking understood that “all ideas contain an infinity — though an uncounted infinity.”28 In other words, every idea — no matter how basic must be “on duty forever” — potentially ready to assume infinite iterations of instantiation. This leads Hocking to make what appears, at first glance, an extraordinary claim: “So far as the idea’s object is concerned, it seems to me doubtful whether there are any finite ideas at all…. To the question, Can we think the Infinite? Let me propose the answer, We think nothing else.”29

Hocking arrives at the infinite capacity of ideas by invoking the primordiality of the concept of the whole. Knowledge is not a arrived at simply through a genetic process, in the way Locke conceives it, in which atomic propositions combine to form more complex, molecular clusters of atomic units. Knowledge essentially consists of a process that moves from whole to part. Using the example of space, Hocking argues that “we do not learn to see space little by little. The child’s space is as great as the man’s, — namely, whole space…. [R]eality, in its full infinity and wholeness, is now before me and has been so from my conscious beginning.”30 This concept of the whole is not conceived statically – the whole is both perennially present and, to use a Whiteheadian phrase, cumulatively in the making. Like Royce’s eternal Logos, the dynamic, emerging nature of “the whole” makes it “no idle spectator of mental progress, but partaker of all mind growth and evolution.”31

28 MGHE: 92. See also p. 544: “[T]here is a biological equivalent for the permanent identity (sometimes called the ‘timelessness’) of an idea … but also to show that the idea has a more continuous presence in consciousness than the experiences in which it is subsumed from time to time.”
29 Ibid.: 93, 94. . See also Andrew J. Reck, “Hocking’s Place in American Metaphysics,” in Philosophy, Religion and the Coming World Civilization, p. 34: In Hocking’s Meaning of God in Human Experience … [he] attained the irenic perspective of the Olympian.”
30 MGHE: 95-96
31 Ibid.: 99.
The subjectivist orientation of modern philosophy has caused this concept of the whole to be peremptorily dismissed. If this objective whole cannot be grasped by means of a finite idea-predicate, then the “whole-idea” must, in fact, be “no-idea.” But according to Hocking, the irony of the “no-idea” argument is that “in spite of all difficulties the assault continues, unremitting, through all mental eras.”32 Despite our numerous failed attempts to “hit the mark” of the whole, there exists a nagging sense of an “identity of Idea.” We possess a concrete, a priori sense of the infinite, even if we are oftentimes unable to definitively articulate what “the whole” is. In fact, this capacity to conceive the whole may be conceived as our “ontological birthright” – we cannot claim to be fully human until we are able to tap into this “Idea” of the infinite whole. For Hocking, “the foundations of religion lie deeper than idea …. deeper than idea is Idea.”33 If our destiny lies in reconnecting with the foundational source of life, our infinite ideational capacity must somehow be re-attached to our deep capacity for feeling.

For Hocking, idea and feeling are organically continuous and two things that are organically continuous cannot be separated except through great labor. Despite this connection, “the world of ideas does aspire to be independent of the current flux of feelings.”34 Ideas have the capacity to function in the absence of feeling and in many cases this capacity is to our great benefit. For example, a military leader – in the interest of planning expediency – must invoke an “idea” of war that is strategic. However, at the same time we know the vast “feeling dimension” brought about by war – not only death and destruction but patriotism and heroism as well. As abstract as the theoretical

32 Ibid.: 100.
33 MGHE: 107-108. Concerning our understanding of the whole as an ontological birthright, consider the following: “Unless God is that being for whom the soul is inescapably destined by the eternal nature of things, the worship of God will get no sufficient hold on the human heart (p. 152.)”
34 Ibid.: 110.
dimension may be, “[w]ere it not possible to lift the eyes from the movement of affairs in
course to other idea regions without at once experiencing the full feeling-effect of these
ideas, humans could scarcely move in any such roomy spiritual place as it now
possesses.”\textsuperscript{35} In other words, ideas, when liberated from feeling, can exhibit a wider
reach. Aristotle was clearly aware of this when he placed the intellectual soul over the
sensitive. But as James warned, feeling can be deceptive – cool, intellectual detachment
is as much a product of feeling as white, hot fervor! The splitting of ideas and feelings is
the result of no simple “throwing of a switch” – it is a “hard-won accomplishment.” From
Hocking’s perspective, ideas are connected to feelings universally but, at the same time,
“externally … by way of annex … always as additional and extraneous fact.”\textsuperscript{36} Hocking’s
insight is the basis of his critique of pragmatic instrumentalism. Take the example of
grape wine. For the pragmatist:

[W]ine is something to be drunk: yet wine cannot be so defined…. Wine must be defined
… by its relation to the grape, ultimately by its root in nature…. All meanings must be
made to touch base in a region of indifference before they may spin lawful alliances with
feeling and action…. What ever the impulsive foreground of an idea, there will
necessarily be a non-impulsive background, and in this our idea-meanings will rest.\textsuperscript{37}

This non-impulsive background constitutes “the aboriginal fact of
consciousness.”\textsuperscript{38} Consciousness is pre-reflectively connected with the world
ideationally. Ideas connect us to prior and independent unities belonging to a reality not
of our own making. Hocking believes in the power of the self through its capacity for
framing ideas, to extend infinitely and to regain contact in medias res with a world that
the self is pre-reflectively already a part: “It means, in the first place, priority of being….

\textsuperscript{35} MGHE: 111.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.: 117.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.: 118.
\textsuperscript{38} MGHE: 120.
[T]hough all reality be in truth spiritual, the finite knower knows realistically; the being of the object is prior to his own.”\textsuperscript{39} From his time spent with Husserl in Göttingen, Hocking became acquainted with the \textit{Wesensschau} approach of the early Husserl, but it was Hocking’s initial predisposition towards the primordiality of intersubjective experience that prefigured the direction of Husserl’s later approach would assume – a philosophy rooted in the \textit{Lebenswelt}. As Hocking said much later: “To Husserl’s technical \textit{Wesensschau} … we must add for the further widened empiricism of our opening era, a just recognition of the presence in experience of \textit{three aspects of metaphysical reality} – the Self, the Other, and the Thou.”\textsuperscript{40}

Feeling serves as the engine that unites ideas with reality. Our experience “is attached in its ‘external meaning’ to the idea of reality.”\textsuperscript{41} Reality, for Hocking, serves as the foundational source of \textit{value}. In order to understand the nature of value, we must understand the valuational process ultimately in terms of our fundamental drive to attach ourselves to what is real:

Our values, then, remain essentially unexplained…. [O]ur interest in reality … [is] by a sort of distillation … an instance of pure value…. I have no doubt that … interest in reality has priority…. Work done by us on the idea [of reality] … is the creation of the very fabric of value.\textsuperscript{42}

Reality is not, as Russell and Moore would have it, something that exits in complete independence of our capacity for ideation. Our ideas, or what Hocking refers to as our “apperceptive mass,” prepare us for the process of experiencing the world in a way that reflects its infinite variety. This “apperceptive mass” consists of a collective reservoir

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Ibid.}: 571.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid.}: 125.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ibid.}: 125, 126, 127.
of shared experience “referred to reality.” As Hocking succinctly states it: “Value varies with idea-resource.”

In order for a “mutual fitness” between ideas and reality to occur, this apperceptive “idea-mass” must seek out its “meaning terminus” in reality. For Hocking, qua idealist, we think using ideas. Our idea of “the whole” – resulting from the sedimentation of this “apperceptive mass” – serves as a determining fore-conception of experience. When we frame an idea about a particular thing, that thing is viewed as “a case, more or less complete, of what reality [as a whole] means to us.” The question that Hocking poses is whether this “reality-idea” serves as the determining fore-conception, i.e. “determining the level at which all our values will stand.”

Feeling consists of the process through which the idea is “at work,” actively seeking out the realization of its object. It makes no sense to speak of an idea that is not intentionally directed towards an object – “the destiny of feeling is to fund itself in idea.” As our ideas journey towards their objective resting place, the idea of “the whole” comes into play. Regardless of whether a finite idea is being considered solely as limiting case, or whether one is concerned with “thinking about every other object upon which it may even remotely bear,” an idea must be affectively stretched, or spread, across the entire spectrum of experience. The e-motive stretch is obtained through our extended capacity for feeling. The example Hocking uses concerns the idea of a hat:

“With what idea, pray, do I think hat? With the hat-idea, to be sure. Yes, but is the clothing-idea unconcerned? — or the city-street-idea? Or the civilized-society-

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43 MGHE: 129. Hocking construes this notion of “apperceptive mass” or “idea masses prepared beforehand in some more elemental experience” (p. 233) broadly to include experience that is personal, cultural, historical, ancestral, and instinctual.
44 Ibid.: 130.
46 MGHE: 72.
47 MGHE: 131.
extraordinary-requirements-ideas? Or the man-and-woman-ideas? …With all these, and with all other ideas summing themselves up currently in my whole-idea, hat is thought.\textsuperscript{48}

Like Hegel, Hocking recognizes the hierarchical stratifications of meaning that exists within experience. The simple pleasure one finds in noting a case of resemblance – or the ability to engage in the activity of generalization – are, for Hocking, indications that the human self is ultimately a “total self” or “mind-total.” Consciousness in this emergent capacity is essentially cumulative: “The real is the permanent and the ancient, as well as the germinal and creative.”\textsuperscript{49} But the vast scope of the whole cannot be accessed without the emotive capacity of feeling to expand, or stretch, our ideational capacity. Feeling, for Hocking, “constitutes the very tour de force of objectivity.”\textsuperscript{50} This desire for comprehensiveness provides the basis of any attempt to grasp reality through the use of ideas – “[A]ll idea making, is [feeling] itself directed to reality.”\textsuperscript{51}

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The Refractory Kernel: Our Experience of God

Hocking’s idea of “the whole” is a pivotal notion in the transition to the idea of God. Our belief in God defies any type of orthodox account. Religious consciousness is evanescent – an experience of what Hocking refers to as “intellectual equipoise.” Regardless of the age we inhabit, multiple historical accounts exist concerning some vague notion of this vast “whole” and its ability to threaten things of value. Throughout history, the “whole-idea” has assumed a variety of names – Jaweh, Deus, and Nature are to name but a few. This recognition of our futility in the presence of an all-embracing,

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Ibid.}: 131.
\textsuperscript{49} MGHE: 46. See also p. 134: “[T]o see everything as bearing upon the whole is both genius and happiness. To see all things \textit{sub specie aeternitatis} is the joy of religion itself.”
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Ibid.}: 135.
\textsuperscript{51} MGHE: 135. For another reference to the cognitive dimension of feeling, see p. 72: “[L]et us say, metapathy, a state beyond feeling, not beneath it … feeling exist[ing] as a heightened value diffused over all experience … present as a measure of cognitive penetration.”
overwhelming power is the first step to religious conversion because this awakening of
the feelings of futility, resentment, and self-assertion somehow combine to generate a
feeling that “will[s] that my reality should be a living and responsible reality.”\(^{52}\)

Hocking’s propensity towards idealism is clear. The presence of divinity in the world
requires the willingness of human beings to adopt a non-dogmatic attitude under a
“dome” of reverence. Hocking supplants the more traditional “seek and ye shall find” of
the gospel with the more philosophical question “Whatever we impute to the world
comes back to us as a quality pre-resident there — is this not the whole illusion of
reality?”\(^ {53}\)

If God’s presence cannot be experienced prior to the adoption of an attitude of
reverence, then how is it possible – especially in this age of growing secularism and
fanaticism – to re-awaken a humanity that is desensitized to any presence of Spirit. For
Hocking, the key to religious experience lies within human experience: “If [experience] is
to be re-animated with worth, it must be by that miracle which continually repeats itself
in our experience — the Spirit breathes upon it from its own resources the breadth of
life.”\(^ {54}\) This is the point where Hocking’s robust empiricism is able to work in tandem
with his idealism. Hocking believed that the key to religious experience lies in a
heightened appreciation of the “metaphysical density” of secular experience. Through a
heightened appreciation of the secular, we can trace the systematic connections residing

\(^{52}\) \textit{Ibid.}: 146. As in the case where the “whole-idea” was the source of value, the “God-idea” assumes the
role of a “postulate of moral consciousness (p. 146).”

\(^{53}\) \textit{MGHE}: 147. See also p. 573: “[L]ogic is nature … the only form in which nature can now be approached
by human consciousness.” Cf. the remark by Novalis: Hypotheses are nets: only he who casts will catch.”

\(^{54}\) \textit{Ibid.}: 148.
in secular experience, ultimately viewing experience in its metaphysical amplitude – that “original and evanescent experience of God [now] established as veritable truth.”

This tracing of experience begins with sensation. Within the history of philosophy, several attempts have been made to derive meaning from sensation. Descartes, in his *Meditations*, entertained a skeptical view of sensation and, as a result, arrived at his epoch making discovery of the ontological primacy of the *Cogito*. Hocking refers to these attempts to explain the baffling nature of the external world by securing safety within the internal domain of consciousness as the “reflexive turn.” As one might expect of a thinker whose passion was to live “out of doors,” Hocking had no patience for solutions that look strictly inward: “The absolutes that are found in the reflexive turn are not useless…. [T]he reflexive turn reveals never alone the Absolute within, but always the Absolute within in conjunction with the Absolute without.”

Human beings exhibit a pre-reflective, anterior awareness of the Absolute. As we engage in thinking about reality, we undergo a nascent experience of God. Our “whole-idea” is contained within the fringe – to use a term of James’ – of the entertainment of any finite idea. This leads Hocking to claim: “[T]he infant’s first thoughts are metaphysical, that is to say thoughts of reality — though not by name and title.” However, it is important to understand the source of our “God-idea.” Historically, the existence of God has been arrived at by reasoning from God’s effects in rebus naturae. This approach works against Hocking’s sense of wholism, in which experience must be interrogated completely – “[W]e must be free to open ourselves, wholly, in imagination

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55 *MGHE*: 155.
56 *MGHE*: 202.
to the whole of human experience.”58 As we open ourselves to the entire spectrum of experience, we have a definite sense of not fully comprehending “the whole.” This sense of mystery pervading the whole gives rise to a vague comprehension that although I do not know, somehow “it is known.” According to Hocking: “[M]an first realizes his ignorance only in so far as he becomes conscious of mystery; the negative side of his experience is made possible by some prior recognition of a positive being, on the other side of his limitation.”59 Hocking views this nascent intuition, as does Royce, as the source of a potential rapprochement between science and religion. If reality is viewed as essentially knowable, the project of scientific discovery is given a metaphysical foundation. At the same time, religion secures what Hocking refers to as a “vicarious attainment” because there is “nothing in the world that will prove wholly refractory to the work of idea-making.”60

In order to understand Hocking’s conception of religious experience, it is important to be clear as to how he conceives the possibility of knowledge of other minds. The problem of “other minds” has pre-occupied modern philosophers since Descartes. According to Hocking, the reason for the perennial preoccupation with this problem is that philosophy has hastily adopted an “over-dogmatic” conception of knowledge. Both continental rationalism and British empiricism fail to overcome the epistemological gap, offering “no sense by which we can discern another mind.”61 At the risk of oversimplifying, both schools of thought begin with a concept of knowledge located in mente – holding no key to escape this prison. Breaking with tradition, Hocking attempts

58 MGHE: 218.
59 Ibid.: 236.
60 MGHE: 238. The similarity between Hocking’s position and Royce’s notion of the infinite community of interpretation should not be missed here.
61 Ibid.: 242.
to transcend this problem by viewing knowledge ec-statically as standing out front “at [its] periphery” within the shared space of human traffic with nature. Nature, synonymous with Hocking’s notion of Substance as the non-impulsive, real background of experience, provides the pivotal notion here. Our shared experience of the “common ground” of nature provides the link required for the possibility of social experience. No longer confined within a false prison, consciousness is ahead of itself by virtue of a shared, intentional grasp of an independent real.

Hocking stresses the dialectical relationship between the subjective self and objective nature. As recipients of the project of modernity, we have become accustomed to Descartes’ notion of the ontological primacy of the Cogito. At the same time, we experience a recalcitrant objective world that seems to exist independent of our thinking. For Hocking, this dilemma of modernity – between subjectivity and objectivity – is avoidable. Hocking argues, à la Hegel, that this knowledge of objective nature is our knowledge – objectivity is an intra-conscious notion. Building upon his early exposure to Husserl, Hocking stressed the intentional character of thinking. One does not think simply in vacuo – we think intentionally about something – nature is the realm of both objective fact and concrete action: “[A]n idea is always an idea of something, and the all-available first something is physical stuff, whatever else it may be.”

When two subjects experience the world, they are intra-linked by virtue of the presence of a shared world. Hocking refers to this fundamental insight as the “refractory kernel” of his metaphysics:

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62 See MGHE, p. 260 where Hocking refers to as “Substance, doubtless first seen behind Nature…. “ See also, p. 119: “Through serving all idea-differences, this background looms large: background and all foregrounds merge into one vast non-impulsive World-object…. Such World-object, in its complexity, is partially summarized in our idea of Nature…..”

63 MGHE: 260.
I have sometimes sat looking at a comrade, speculating on this mysterious isolation of self from self…. How would it seem if my mind could at once be within thine; and we could meet and without barrier be with each other? And then it has fallen upon me like a shock—as when one thinking himself alone has felt a presence—but I am in thy soul. These things around me are in thy experience. They are thy own; when I touch them and move them I change thee. When I look on them I see what thou seest; when I listen, I hear what thou hearest. I am in the great Room of thy soul; and I experience thy very experience.64

Reality cannot be detached from experience. Intersubjectivity is no longer constructed out of the ineffable vapor of consciousness—our identity with others within the central foreground of common experience: “[M]ind must, as it were, abrogate itself in order to appreciate itself; it must wander in a world alien to its nature and come to itself again.”65

Hocking, much like Royce, recognized the inability of the finite intellect, left to itself, to achieve any type of synoptic vision. He once wrote in a letter that “In short, it is God who from the beginning shares all of our objects and so God is the real medium of communication between one person and another.”66 Nature is a realm of mind but a realm of “mind” other than one’s own. It is the potential to be known that is exhibited by objects which serves as the basis of the connective link between selves: “The best originality of the mind is but the truth of nature; it is the master stroke of release, the release of nature into the condition of idea.”67 When we gaze upon the objective world,

64 Ibid.: 265-266. Emphasis added. See also p. 483: “The ultimate appeal of man to man is built on man’s grasp of God.”
65 William Ernest Hocking with the collaboration of Richard Boyle O’Reilly Hocking, Types of Philosophy (Charles Scribner and Sons, 1959): 186. This notion is of mind losing itself in order to come to itself is Hegelian. See G.W.F. Hegel, “Preface,” Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 32, where Hegel refers to the self-moving soul: “The movement of a being that immediately is, consists partly in becoming an other than itself, and thus becoming its own immanent content; partly in taking back into itself this unfolding [of its content] or this existence of it, i.e. making itself into a moment, and simplifying itself into something determinate.”
66 Cited in Rouner, Within Human Experience: p. 41. The letter was dated 1920. Unfortunately, Hocking’s copy contained no salutation and Hocking could not remember the name of the recipient.
67 MGHE: 566. See A. Luther, W.E. Hocking on Man’s Knowledge of God: “The inherent publicity of nature, the fitness of objects to be communally experienced is no empty potentiality, but one founded on
we derive a deep sense of what Hocking refers to as the “cloud of witness” – a sense that this fact belongs to others as well. This is the point at which Hocking diverged from Royce. Instead of social experience being derived from “the background” through an inward experience of the Absolute, social contact is lived out front, in “the foreground” of experience. The sheer immediacy of this sense of connection is indicated by Hocking in the following: “I can imagine no contact more real and thrilling than this.”

Authentic social experience within a common world requires a continuous basis in reality. Hocking once remarked that “I cannot find a genuine social experience at all except as a continuous experience.” Our experience of the environing world of nature extends beyond the scope of any limited encounter. The world of space and energy, for Hocking, remain a “constant object.” This “unvarying field for these varying locations,” extends in all directions indefinitely, interpenetrating “reach[ing] me and my place, reach[ing] Substance – that same Substance which I also reach as my ultimate object.”

This connection to the environing world is autochthonic – interlocked and inseparable. We are equiprimordially in the world of another. Any concept of isolation must utilize in some notion of barriers which can be conceived as barriers only within the context of some prior notion of continuous experience. In many ways anticipating the pragmatics of communicative discourse, Hocking recognizes that the possibility of any type of intersubjective being necessitates the existence of a common field: “If … experience

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68 MGHE: 266. On p. 261, Hocking qualifies his account somewhat: “I do not say that knowing thus the objects of another is equivalent to knowing that mind; I say that such knowledge of the objects is a necessary, an integral part of social consciousness, even ideal social consciousness.”

69 MGHE: 269.

70 MGHE: 271.
ever becomes actually social, it has, in more rarefied condition, always been so; and hence is, in the same fundamental sense, continuously so.”71

Hocking recognizes the danger of fixated realism. If nature is absolutely independent of our awareness, solitary experience is possible – there is no possibility of weaving any referential connection between the self and other. Hocking’s position is subtle and nuanced – Nature is “That Which” serves social consciousness: “this social reference … rides on the outside of nature.”72 How does Hocking reconcile this independence of nature with the possibility of social experience?

Hocking argues that through its obstinate independence, nature assumes the aspect of another mind. Recognizing the importance of empiricism, Hocking affirms the importance of taking in what is given. At the same time, his appreciation of the subject’s “apperceptive mass” enables him to view experience as a projective activity, running ahead in anticipation of the experiendum. Hocking reconciles this apparent contradiction in the following way: Outer reality provides the “irruptive material … [that] in its constant action … is creative of me.”73 Emphasizing the creative impact external reality exercises upon the mental formation of the self, “Nature begins taking on the aspect of an Other Mind.”74 For Hocking, nature is a self-in-its-otherness. As one perceiving self among many, I somehow reside in nature’s “deepest objectivity.” Said differently, the objectivity of nature is constitutive of nature’s selfhood – a level of selfhood that is somehow greater than that of the finite self. Hocking states the matter somewhat

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71 Ibid.: 273. See p. 280: “We look at nature through the eyes of a social world.”
72 MGHE: 283.
73 MGHE: 286.
74 Ibid.: 287.
cryptically in the following: “The objectivity of the physical world is derivative: it shines by reflected light, not by its own.”75

Our cognitive experience of the objectivity of nature yields an immediate experience of the “active decisiveness” of an Absolute Other. This is an immediate experience. Experience does not consist of some type of privileged immediacy in which shared knowledge is somehow teased out through some type of magical inference. Objectivity, grounded in what Hocking refers to as the “Other Mind,” serves as the fundamental substratum upon which of the continuity of experience and the connection of selves arise. As a “private” self receives something from without, it assimilates an “objectively shareable core experience.” The whole that surrounds this fact is the basis of community: “the presence of this uniting selfhood provides the assurance that the common experience of mankind has an indwelling purpose, a telos, in which the I-am also participates.”76 Experience qua objective is the basis of community.

The basis of this shared community is God – “a region of literal common mind.”77 Echoing Aquinas, Hocking believes that we will always be more certain that God is than what He is. God is the basis of that unity which makes the world conceivable as a whole – a unity grounded in the God’s nature as Absolute mind. No longer must one hibernate in the solipsistic isolation of the reflexive turn. Nature becomes a “living language … [a] net which being hung out in experience will gather in what supplementation of my own fragmentary meanings … may be discoverable there.”78 From his metaphysics, Hocking

75 MGHE: 285. See also p. 301: “We are looking for man, and we found God.”
76 William E. Hocking, The Coming World Civilization (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956): 32. The existence of community is due to the fact that once objectivity is conceived as a function of the Other Mind, “the empirical factors of experience extend thus through my whole self-hood” (p. 289).”
77 MGHE: 299.
78 Ibid.: 297. See also p. 541: “[W]e should naturally look for our principles of synthesis in that same region of things which reveals a cleavage.”
is able to derive an ethic of missionary service dedicated to restoring the unity originally provided through God. Hocking characterizes religion as a “heightened consciousness of self” and nature as a region in which “spirits wander as shapes embedded.” Acting as mediators, our responsibility is to articulate and share the presence of God. This relationship is best viewed in terms of a “metaphysical syllogism.” The Absolute is the major premise; the self is the minor premise: “The world has its nature; the self has its character: when nature and character come together, action results.” However limited our means to reach our destiny, each one of us must somehow “reproduce the relation to God in a visible relationship within God’s world.” True to his idealism, behavior assumes a symbolic dimension – there can be no such thing as “nature” considered in absentia from any reference to acts of human character.

Hocking’s understanding of God as a concrete a priori adds an interesting twist to his reappropriation of the ontological argument. Traditional versions of the ontological argument have built upon the speculative connection believed to exist between an idea of perfection and the reality of that idea. Hocking approaches the issue differently. We are not “justified in inferring from any idea to its reality that reality can be present to the idea in experience.” God exists at the level of sensation. Contrary to epistemological accounts that have abrogated sensation to the lowest realms of the cognitive ladder, Hocking characterizes sensation as “essentially metaphysical.” Sensation provides access to a dimension of “literalness” possessing a sense of definite, individuality. This

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79 Ibid.: 298.
80 MGHE: 190.
81 Ibid.: 298. William Adams Brown characterizes this spur to activity in the following: “[I]n order to insure the most effective social activity one must from time to time withdraw into oneself for renewal through contact with the primal founts of being (“Review: The Meaning of God in Human Experience: A Philosopich Study of Religion,” in The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods, Vol. 10, No. 9, [April 24, 1913]: 246.)
82 MGHE: 313.
literalness provides what Hocking refers to as “the line of our limitation” – the line where we meet God. As God is the basis of the whole-idea, “we can interpret the whole individuality of Nature as one with the individuality of God in its communicated form.”

The path followed by this revised version of the ontological argument is not deductive. Instead it consists of a “clearing of the mind” so that the rich connections residing in experience can be seen. Similar to the activity of prayer, the “filament” depicting the organic connection between God and man must be traced.

The manner in which Hocking traces this “lifting of the mind to God” is reminiscent of Royce’s argument for the Absolute. Hocking begins with affirmation of the reality of nature. Any construal of nature as illusory can be articulated only within the context “of some moment of unusual clearness of perception … a moment of ‘illumination’ in which the relation of myself to what is beyond my self becomes presently distinct … not abstractly, but in experience.” Likewise, if nature is conceived as self-sufficient, i.e. there in its own right, then where does the interdependency of nature come to rest? With man? No, says Hocking: “the original source [of the knowledge of God is] an experience of not being alone in the world, and especially the world of nature.”

Within this space of illumination, one experiences a “play of unrest” in which the dialectical relationship between contrary terms is overcome. A positive content is reached in which “this [play of] unrest does not apply…. [The] absolute object … whatever idea I

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83 MGHE: 301-302. See also p. 543: “[T]he shape of nature are but the intaglio of the spirit.”
84 Ibid.: 310, 311.
make of it is an idea derived nowhere but from *experience.* This is not a syllogism of formal logic but a report of experience. In other words, the validation of the self and world qua *real* require a deeper foundation than either self or world can provide. The feeling of defectiveness which accompanies this search contains, albeit to a faint degree, the notion of a positive object that is free from defect and limitation. This event is ontologically decisive for Hocking:

Any reflection that can infallibly break the walls of the Self, opens at once upon an infinite World-field. A single point outside of ‘Bewusstseins-immanenz,’ and I am free to open myself to all reality and to all men…. Here, in the immediate, is my absolute escape from immediacy … my window opening upon infinity, my exit into God.

For Hocking, authentic religion provides the genuine possibility of human being escaping its self-enclosedness and participating in the unity provided by spirit. This unity is available through thinking – human being is uniquely capable of comprehending its world into greater unities. What we have come to understand separately as predicates, facts, truth, and objectivity are really instances of the unity of spirit. Aquinas recognized this very fact when he stated that the purpose of human being was to gather, or collect (*colligere*), finite instances of knowledge so that the great chain of Being could become *universum* or, turned towards unity – back to its originating source in God. Needless to say, our experience of the God is necessarily finite: “Religion … is the present attainment in a single experience of those objects which in the course of nature are only reached at the end of infinite progression. Religion is anticipated attainment.”

“Anticipated attainment” is possibly only within the context of some type of existing rapprochement between the self and God. The whole is always ontologically decisive for Hocking:

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86 MGHE: 311.
87 MGHE: 315, 316.
88 Ibid.: 31. See p. 352 where Hocking claims that “[T]hinking is definable as partial worship” and p. 376: “[P]rayer is, in effect, a process of self-reminding … which the activities of living tend to obscure.”
primary – even prior to the instances of divine revelation that follow. Drawing upon the distinction within the Holy Trinity between God “the Father” and God “the Son,” Hocking makes the following point:

We have God the Son…. But while God the Son may now have become our necessary way to practical union with the Father, yet the Father must first be known before the Son is recognized as God. Without the Father, the Son is a mere man: for the incarnate is always bound and infected by the finite thing it touches. Until the human spirit knows the self that is more at home in the Infinite than here among Things, it has not yet found its Self nor its God. 89

Hocking views the relation between the self and God organically. Because inner relations assimilate themselves to outer relations, members within an organic system appropriately reproduce within themselves some feature of the systemic whole. A similar case exists in the relation between the self and God – God is first, the self is derivative: “We may find our thought of God following in arrear of the best conception we have of ourselves; but it is only because we know that whatever selfhood we have is an involution of the selfhood of the Whole….“ 90

Regardless of the organic sense of unity pervading the whole, action requires dualisms, abridgements, and choices. Hocking addresses this problem through his “principle of alteration.” Although life requires concrete acts of decision making, the presence of God in the world is not foredoomed: “God and the world … must be worked in with one another forever: forever they must be pursued in alternation.” 91

Hocking develops a critique of abstraction and a notion of primary and secondary reflection very similar to Marcel. Abstraction, an important intellectual tool, is a necessary act that leads to greater acts of comprehension as well as to our survival. If

89 MGHE: 330.
90 Ibid.: 335.
91 Ibid.: 407.
Euclid could not understand the difference between a triangle and triangularity, our geometry would be called something other than Euclidean. On the other hand, if Joshua Chamberlain had pondered the nature of “bayonetteness” at the battle of Little Round Top – instead of giving the order to “Fix Bayonettes!” – it’s questionable whether the Union Army could have maintained its tactical advantage and been victorious at Gettysburg. Hocking identifies the appropriate balance: “We know what the tools for intellectual discovery are…. But we know too that there comes a moment where these very things … become poisons. [Our] technique cannot serve us unless we can see beyond it. The self must be withdrawn and re-oriented: it must turn its back on itself, and revert to the whole.”

The key is to integrate both aspects of knowledge – the universal and the concrete. At the center of day to day experience – albeit not immediately visible – are substance, reality, and God. Hocking creatively describes this “vision” artistically: “My total picture of this world is drawn like an artist’s sketch—not by a line continuous and adequate in the field of vision, but by a series of lines which err, and which are broken in their course by recurrence to the (undrawn) idea. God is in the world, no doubt: the plural and visible aspect of things is divine also – that is, if we are able to see it so.”

Hocking’s principle of alteration requires stepping back from a functional, pragmatist orientation – through which we “get into our own way” – and reacquaint ourselves with the whole. We have become so obsessed with our power to analyze that

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92 MGHE: 408. See also pp. 413-414: “[T]he practical will is necessarily theoretical, and, so far, abstract, incomplete. We gain firmness in the saddle of self-possession only by condemning to death a certain margin of our consciousness.”

93 Ibid.: 410. See also p. 412: “[O]ur physical existence … requires us to recover our spiritual integrity by bringing the whole down among its parts, and treating it as a thing of time and space like ourselves.” The sketches of Paul Klee are wonderful examples of Hocking’s point.
our ability to synthesize has grown puny in comparison: “The process of ‘objectification’
normal to the physical sciences, with its ideal of knifing the thing thought about clearly
off from the thinker, and vice versa, would, if applied to existence, through its very
success, destroy the life of its subject-matter inseparable from being felt.”94 A widening
breach occurs between the “artificial self” and the “natural self” – the self originally
connoted by the phrase *homo religiousus*. We digress from the metaphysical doctrine of
the concrete universal – in which God and the world are together – to a doctrine of the
“abstract universal” in which “I find *nothing individual in my world*…. My universals
have parted company with my particulars. I find illustrations of value; things good in this
respect and bad that; specimens of general concepts; but no individual.” Normativity
becomes a failed project – *Deus absconditus*.

The hegemony of the abstract universal creates a condition of spiritual fatigue and
spiritual death. Worship is required in order to reacquaint ourselves with the whole that *is*
common to *all* things. In our time where the quotidian “work-a-day” holds complete
sway, Hocking has many relevant observations – some developed as early as 1912! It is
not simply external failure à la Elmer Gantry that causes an appeal to the act of worship.
What drives one to despair is “the internal decay of the incentive of work, the drooping of
the sails of ambition … the mysterious vanishing of the *raison d’être* of life as a sphere
for the theoretical will.”95 Worship is a response to the foundational question of the
meaning of existence by *recovering the natural vigor of the whole-idea*. What is
important to note is that our everyday encounter with things is a form of worship writ
small. To understand this important fact, we must return to Hocking’s initial insight that

95 *MGHE*: 418-419.
“all ideas contain an infinity.” The plasticity of our ideas, coupled with the extensive reach of feeling, contain the potential expanse similar to that which is experienced through worship. Our problem is that we are not aware of the extent of this reach.

Hocking explains it this way:

It is nothing more than doing with the whole self, and consciously, that which in blinder and more fragmentary fashion we are doing at every moment in our waking lives…. In reality, in the logical and the eternal order of things, these two phases of experience belong together, and in time are also finding their way together: but in the natural history of the mind, they fall apart, and must be pursued separately.96

The principle of alteration is Hocking’s way of maneuvering through a Scylla of vicious abstraction and a Charybdis of mystical dissolution. More than simply a case of executing the power of will, a vision of the Absolute is required: “[S]ight does its own transforming: sight turns the energy of our own desires into the work of their own re-making.”97 Similar to the condition Plato describes at the conclusion of the “allegory of the cave,” philosophy understands that it is important to recognize that “sight is there.” What is necessary, then, is to turn the soul in the right direction – re-inscribing one’s thought and action within the context of that vision.

Experience of novelty is achieved as familiar things become disclosed in an unfamiliar light, reflecting the appearance of being reborn – what Heidegger referred to as die Pracht des Schlichten or “the splendor of the simple.”98 This phenomenon of creative emergence is the result of tandem acts of consciousness and reflexion: “[T]he event of this birth is to be traced … to this touching to the quick of self-consciousness: the old idea has penetrated the self; the self has been stung by it; and in the reflexion

96 MGHE: 422, 427.
97 Ibid.: 437.
thereby occasioned, the new thing is engendered."99 Through the “reflexive” act of reflection, self-consciousness emerges out of the quotidian, object-centered world. The key to understanding this process is to follow the trace from the object per se to the wider relational context within which the object exists. If we follow this continuous thread of associations, we begin to enter into an understanding of the relationship between a self and the whole. Displaying the influence of Royce, Hocking states the issue in the following way:

There is no criticism of any self or system except in the context of a present view of a positive content beyond them. And that which is outside any finite system … is precisely the absolute….I am able to reflect upon any world-self system because and only because I have experienced something beyond it…. In brief, all of my partial reflexions are parented by some previous total reflexion. Total reflexion, reflexion on the whole of things temporal, is precisely the cognitive side of mystical experience.100

Hocking views induction as a mental process akin to reflection. Taking a position in stark contrast to those engaged in the ongoing debate concerning “the problem of induction,” Hocking sees induction as the original, paradigmatic religious insight. Induction is a product of genius – attention directed towards the same “scent for reality” as reflexion. Induction and reflexion are both engaged in the pursuit of greater wholes in a non-linear fashion. Reflexion traces the wider arc of the empirical self; induction unifies external things within a concept of a whole. For Hocking, “Induction is external reflexion; and reflexion is internal induction…. For the most part, these operations are simultaneous, parts of the same mental movement.”101 Our ability to create, invent, and generalize is dependent upon a distinguishing fact of consciousness – an activity, internal

99 Ibid.: 470.
100 MGHE: 473.
to the self, that is dialectical in a sense reminiscent of Kant, i.e. “restless and groping for further predicate-giving.” This insight is confirmed by the fact that a truly creative artist is severely challenged to identify the difference between the external focus of his activity and their personal, interior musing. Whereas most modern discussions of induction have focused upon induction as a problem – due to the fact that induction cannot claim deductive validity – for Hocking, induction is deduction. While this claim may shock contemporary epistemologists and logicians, Hocking’s reasoning is as follows:

Every induction is induced by a prior induction, ultimately a total induction, or judgment about the whole of things … derived from whatever knowledge of the whole and of God my experience has built up for me. Every induction is at the same time a deduction, then,—an ‘It must be so,’ parented, though from the background of consciousness, by an insight which is in its origins religious.

Hocking’s metaphysics and epistemology, when combined, provide for the possibility of a “mind-cure” approach to well-being similar to that offered by William James. For Hocking, as for James, the conditions for happiness lie within the self, not in the verdict of history, external circumstance, or pharmaceutical research and development. Hocking’s notion of the Absolute as formative of the finite self offers a rich pool from which to draw: “Nothing befalls us which is not of the nature of ourselves…. Happiness … is the idea of the whole in unhindered operation upon experience.”

Incorporation of the whole within experience enables the self to overcome its divisiveness and reunite the fragments of a consciousness operating under the illusion of

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102 MGHE: 477. See Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Norman Kemp-Smith (Macmillan & Company LTD, 1964), p. 7 where Kant refers to the desire of human reason to” transcend all its powers.”

103 MGHE: 477. See also p. 541: “We have not first to deduce the thing and then its application; but if we find it at all, we shall find the application first and the thing in the heart of the application.”

104 Ibid.: 488. See infra: “The controlling conditions of welfare lie within … [our] destiny.” Cf. William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (Mentor Books, 1958), p. 58: “[T]he controlling energies of nature are personal … the powers of the universe will directly respond to your individual appeals and needs…. "
divisive technique. Experience, although at times appearing atomic, springs forth within a great canopy sub specie aeternitatis. Our task is to inductively re-unite experience under the dome-like presence of the whole. It matters little what shape the means to this end assume – almost any positive fulfillment of a project will suffice: “It matters not how we regain our singleness of thrust—whether by ascent of a hill, or in prayer, or through a book or a human being: the ground of blessedness of such a moment … lies in its power to recall the divergent channels of our attention into a unity, to ‘make us whole’ from [the] center.”105

Hocking’s conception of reality as amenable to our hopes and aspirations leads him to develop a notion of consciousness as prophetic. Prophetic consciousness refuses to see reality as a “realm of chance” in which spirit may or may not be naturalized. In order to avoid any type of dogmatic pronouncement, Hocking qualifies the notion of prophetic consciousness with great care. While recognizing that the actual occurrence of prophecy may be difficult to prove – its possibility is nevertheless necessary: “[E]very soul of us knows the whole, and feels in his own limbs the thud and impulse of the engines of reality, it must be possible, then, for our wills, to some degree, to contain the will of the universe…. The arc of the destiny of that idea must now coincide with the swing of his own arm.”106

105 MGHE: 492. See also p. 535 where Hocking discusses deliberate reflection: “Experience, in this matter, as in all matters, brings about the possibility of conscious control of uniting the disjoined fragments of selfhood.”

106 Ibid.: 502, 511. Emphasis added. See also page 505: “Our conscious enterprise is three-fourths experiment; but it steps out from a vast substratum of the indubitable.” This conception of experimental of reality is emphasized by Robert C. Pollock: “But what a drastic alteration in perspective when men can envisage a wide open world in which development, spontaneity and novelty are entirely at home! Given this new image of the universe, experimentation and creativity are endowed with a new dignity, for they have gained a status within nature itself.” (“Process and Experience,” in John Dewey: His Thought and Influence, ed. John Blewett[Fordham University Press, 1960]: 165.
Prophetic consciousness represents the epitome of religious experience simply because it enables the self to recognize both the divinity inherent in the present moment and the need to act in its behalf. Mystical experience, in order to make some type of difference in fact must partake of some degree of prophecy. Prophetic consciousness acts through what can be referred to as a “looping effect.” Viewing experience in terms of a “looping effect” is diametrically opposed to the notion of a scientific empiricism which adopts a stance of objective, passivity towards the world. For Hocking, classical empiricism is “but half the story: it is the backward gesture for a forward throw.”

Classical empiricism is “backwardly” docile only after having “forwardly” put nature, in Baconian terms, on the rack. Yes, we have to assume a stance towards nature; but let it be a stance that is conducive to achieving unity. In order to engage reality prophetically, reality must exhibit a permanence that leads to the conservation of values: “The fluid mass of free wills conserves nothing…. A world which promises to conserve must itself be unitary and eternal.” But if a foundational unity cannot be found in the world, the self must create such unity. The self establishes unity through a form of “social contagion” that is self-perpetuated: “[I]t begins to crystallize its environment, that is, to organize the social world upon its own principle…. That environment is created which this same type of will requires … adopting as its own special responsibility the extension of its own unity….” A complete experience of the whole, denied the finite self, is now made possible through the prefiguration of an all embracing form disclosed in history.

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107 Marcel and the Ground Issue of Metaphysics: 447.
108 MGHE: 517.
109 Ibid.: 519. This process of inductive unification is different than that of abstractive analysis. The latter is described on p. 530: “The focal center of life hardens, polishes its surface, and tends to perpetuate its own quality.”
110 Martin Luther King’s vision, or “dream,” of racial equality is a powerful example of the social contagion of prophetic consciousness.
For Hocking, the Absolute is not to be conceived tyrannically or dogmatically as a superimposed outcome that predetermines the diversity required for life. Instead, the Absolute is the creativity that “nourishes and sustains” human existence by allowing for the expression of the widest range of diversity in a way that these diversities are mutually sustaining – what Whitehead referred to as the unity of felt contrast. Within Hocking’s metaphysics, the “continual recovery of coherence together with the acceptance of innovations, this widening of coherence in the life of every individual as he matures from infancy to some level of attainment, and this extension of coherence through a sequence of generations when a culture is being created, is … the work of the ‘whole idea.’”

§

Experience as a Field of Fields

Hocking’s treatment of the self as a “Field of Fields” emphasizes the role of invention and pure imagination in the concrete exercise of freedom. For Hocking:

Freely thinking and groping human minds, as they perceive the inadequacy of thoughts which have been guiding them, … turn toward something better, [with a] general intuition of a way to move beyond. Ideas contain action as the valley walls contain the stream…. [T]here is no automatic motion onward … it waits the arrival in human heads of a truer idea. There is no prior social organism: there is an organism to be built … by individuals endowed with the joining function. [M]an is by nature an active agent.

Take, for example, the common phrase “Here we are.” This simple phrase is “the most compact expression of our elemental intersubjectivity.” The expression bespeaks a relational expanse in which “I exist,” “we exist,” and, most importantly, a “third entity

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The field in which ‘here’ lies – that somehow binds us into a ‘we.’”\textsuperscript{114} The “native air” we breathe consists of a latent intersubjectivity, a “trans-pathy of existence,” resulting from an awareness of participating in a field of ontological commonality. This native intersubjectivity is latent or unfulfilled: “There can be no genuine community among men except through their several hold on the universal.”\textsuperscript{115} In order for the universal to be realized, a “space-time assemblage” of persons must exist in order to provide the contextual field needed for realization – a clearing in which the “flitting universal” can be fastened to concrete fact.

For Hocking, “intersubjectivity is either everywhere or nowhere.”\textsuperscript{116} Intersubjectivity is “intra-uterine” – traceable to the inaccessible beginnings of mental life. But there is also a dimension of intersubjectivity that is in the making, marked by a transition from sensation to thought. This emerging dimension of intersubjectivity results from the act of constituting a world – a process in which the flux of sensation is framed within a stable, unifying concept. Hocking characterizes this process of world constitution as a response: “A moral act in which the incipient human will commits itself to a destiny of intersubjective truth seeking.”\textsuperscript{117}

Hocking’s original insight is his insistence that the things most certain in experience are not physical objects but centers of conscious rational activity. In order to comprehend his insight, we must follow the direction of his thought as it moves from a consideration of the nature of factuality in the direction of a “con-subjectivity” consisting of a nexus of the self and God. Facts constitute the “given” aspect of experience.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.: 451. Emphasis added. See \textit{intra} where Hocking describes this “third [as], in part, a region of coincident selfhood and therefore of direct intersubjectivity.”

\textsuperscript{115} Marcel and the Ground Issues of Metaphysics: 456.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.: 458.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.: 459, 460.
Although we are active in the process of receiving facts, facts demonstrate a “firmness” of their own – reception of is prior to reaction to. Hocking agrees with his Harvard colleague C.I. Lewis that it is “the thick experience of the world of things, not the thin given of introspective immediacy, which constitutes the datum for philosophical reflection.”

As the German word for object, *Gegenstand*, implies, objects “stand-against” a conscious that “stands before” (*verstanden*) in a relationship of under-standing.

Hocking’s analysis of factuality is nuanced – there are contrarieties in the structure of facts. Facts exhibit a contingency Hocking characterizes as “the necessity of the unnecessary.”

Since Hume, we take it for granted that facts could be otherwise – the sun may not rise tomorrow. Facts also exhibit what Hocking refers to as “an internal opposition.” On the one hand, facts qua pure particulars leave us unfulfilled – we want more, craving that which we don’t have. The particular potentially embodies the status of the universal: “Will not factual usage, unopposed, in time create a right of way?”

When this right of way is traversed, experience manifests itself as religious: “biographies merge into sacred history … often beginning to glow with almost sacred warmth.”

Philosophy must make sense of this potentiality of fact. Facts do exhibit a dimension of non-deducibility – but this does not condemn facts to meaninglessness and absurdity as Sartre would have it. As speculative philosophy has long been aware, facts do not stand alone in isolation – they must be incorporated within a wider context of

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119 *FF&D*: 529.

120 *Ibid.*: 529-530.

121 *Ibid.*: 530. Cf. Hocking’s “Fact and Destiny (II),” in *Review of Metaphysic*, Vol. IV, No. 3, March 1951, pp. 339-340: “In action, we adopt particulars into our life circuits … the deed is ‘executed’ … some relic hunter makes away with the quill! Gandhi fasts, and breaks his fast by drinking a cup of orange juice; someone spirits away the cup, as emblem of a turn in Indian history…. The physical object is no longer its impersonal self: it has become a symbol.”
understanding. As Dewey once remarked, “[N]eglect of context is the greatest single
disaster which philosophic thinking can incur.”122 Building upon the metaphysical insight
of Bradley, Hocking’s objective is to illuminate the importance of the relations between
facts – bringing relations out of the background and into the foreground of metaphysical
investigation.

Hocking refers to this relational context as a “field.”123 Appropriating some of the
most recent insights of quantum theory, the idea of field exhibits the properties of
overlapping continuity while maintaining, at the same time, distinctness and
interdependence. Objects participate in a series of fields: submicroscopic (protons,
neutrons), microscopic (cells and molecules), macroscopic (individual organisms) and
ultra-macroscopic (earth field, solar field, galactic field, universal field). The self, in
addition to the above fields, participates in a wider field-series: the unconscious, the
dispositional, the historical, the cultural, the conceptual, the personal – there are more.
This image of the self as a plurality of subfields exhibiting a vector-character radiating
outward – overlapping and being overlapped by numerous other fields – is indicative of
the self as a “field within fields.”

Time and space are examples of macroscopic fields. Kant understood space as a
container – the removal of the “contained” object in no way affects the “container.”
Unlike the Newtonian-Kantian understanding of space and time, Hocking depicts fields,
as John Dewey does, as strictly derivative of events. In Experience and Nature, Dewey
argued that the substitution of “qualitative events” for “fixed substances” is indicative of

123 For an excellent account of field theory from a pragmatic standpoint, see Eugene Fontinell, Self, God
a shift in the conception of mind and matter “as significant characters of events presented in different contexts, rather than underlying and ultimate substances.” Contents within a field are related contextually – relations make a difference in the relata.

Hocking views this “background-continuum” as not undifferentiated. Distinct, albeit tentative, boundaries exist within a field – the submicroscopic is to be distinguished from the macroscopic. Fields are processive-relational realities as opposed to rigid and complete substances. As Dewey insisted, events are characterized by historical continuity and are therefore unfinished, incomplete, and indeterminate. Whereas objects can be known, events are “felt” – objects are events with meanings. But qua continuous and interdependent, a field has no fixed boundary – the submicroscopic resonates across the entire experiential field. Fields are given all at once – in Jamesian terms, a field is all shades and no boundaries. As Hocking is fond of saying: “If you have any space, you have all space; if any time, all time.”

Hocking uses his understanding of fields to argue against naturalism and in favor of metaphysical idealism. If fields are derived from events, then the possibility exists for independent events and independent parallel, fields: “Infinitudes [of fields] do not imply their interpenetration…. That being said, there is an entity through which all independent systems are related. Hocking refers to this entity as “the self … the vinculum between various possible spaces, possible nature systems, possible histories.” This

125 See *Experience and Nature*: xi-xiii, 159.
126 *FF&D*: 532.
128 *Theses*: 689.
comprehensive nature of the self as a field within which the members are total fields causes Hocking to refer to the self as “the field of fields.”

Hocking’s construal of the self as a field of fields has rich implications. The self is a pivot standing between actuality and possibility. Although embedded in an actual field, attending to a possible field enables the self to realize independent possibilities. Given the existence of internal relations, the particular possibility that is made actual will reverberate across the entire spectrum of actuality. According to Hocking, “This is the concrete meaning of freedom.”

Hocking’s development of field-theory provides him with a more mature version of the refractory kernel, the hinge leading to an understanding of God:

The field within which … nature systems are related is not a function of events within any such system. Hence, the mind, as a vinculum between possible nature systems, cannot be a function of events within any one nature-system. Naturalism is thus cancelled as a possible description of fact. Metaphysical idealism remains, inasmuch as the self is not merely a field of fields, but a concrete event determining the field of fields.

This creative capacity of the self is the key to transcendence. Thorough its capacity for creative decision-making, the self has the ability to engage in what Hocking refers to as “field-reckoning.” By appropriating possibility within the realm of actuality, “the phenomenal world [may be] a closed system, [but] the real universe is to some extent ‘open towards the future.’” Said differently, a teleology of the particular exists in which the particular inductively participates in a series of more cumulative meaning relationships. This is not subjective idealism: “The teleology of the world is apparent

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129 Theses: 690.
130 Ibid.: 690.
131 FF&D: 542. Hocking’s notion of “field-reckoning,” does not lead to relativism: “There is a reality and it is living; but it is one, not many.”
chiefly in this, that the particulars which environ us prove to be such as we can clothe little by little with the meanings for which they have waited.”\textsuperscript{132}

§

Body, Self and Immortality

Hocking’s propensity for unity is apparent in his treatment of the mind-body relation – “distinctions are necessary; but dualisms are delusive.”\textsuperscript{133} Mind and body, although different, must be viewed as belonging together within a single system. Descartes failed to realize this, believing that a rigorous attention to ideational content could secure a connection with the external world. As a result Descartes’ mind-body dualism remains “the most brilliant speculative failure of history.”\textsuperscript{134}

Like Marcel, Hocking emphasizes the foundational role of the body as an intramundane medium between the self and the world. The body is situated in a natural field subject to the laws of space, time, and causality. The mind, however, is endowed with the gift of envisioning multiple spaces and a span of time that extends into the past as well as the future. Through the powerful reach of the mind, the self has unique ability to be “space-free … [and] time-free, as the body is not.”\textsuperscript{135} Hence, the self can be conceived two-dimensionally as the “excursive self” and the “reflective self.” The excursive self is the empirical self – created, finite and bound by space and time. The reflective self, on the other hand, is creative, potential, and infinite.\textsuperscript{136} Reminiscent of

\textsuperscript{132} Fact and Destiny (II): 341.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.: 53.
\textsuperscript{134} SBF: 48.
\textsuperscript{135} SBF: 31, 35. See pp. 30-31: “[T]he mind is capable of thinking of not only all-of-space but, but also of more than one such space-total, as, let us say, the space of waking hours and the space of some dream…. Plural spaces are related only \textit{via} the self. The relation of the self to its space-worlds is not a spatial relation. Hocking offers a corresponding argument for the time-free dimension of the self.
Aristotle’s discussion of the intellectual soul in Book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the reflective self partakes of a divine element” and is to some extent immortal, capable of traversing a depth of being otherwise unattainable.

In order to understand Hocking’s philosophy of the body, a complete conception of the self is required. The self has an extensive quantitative and qualitative reach: “[T]he kingdom of philosophical truth is within…. A recall to such self-knowledge … is one of the perennial functions of philosophy.” Influenced by William James’ investigations in psychology, Hocking believed that the self-world distinction is more a matter of degree than of kind, arising out of the diaphanous, tissue-like contours of experience – a distinction that is taken as opposed to a dualism that is given. In keeping with his tendency towards field-theory, Hocking cautions us to “[l]ook at mind and body as systems of events rather than as substances, and the differences between them seem to become tenuous and reconcilable.” Within the context of this event-field, human experiences exude a reflexive dimensionality within which self and world are interstitially co-constituted and mutually implicated in the development of each. Echoing the bravado of James, Hocking boldly exclaims that “the self is thus the counterpart of the whole of the observed world: … there is as much of the self as there is the world: ego and non ego are on par with each other.”

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138 SBF: 23.

139 SBF: 7. See also, p. 123: “[T]he self … is but half of the world it perceives.” Cf. William James, *The Principles of Psychology, Volume II* (Dover Publications, 1950): 568-569: “When an idea stings us in a certain way, makes as it were a certain electric connection with our Self we say that it is a reality. When it stings us in another way, makes another connection with our Self, we say, let it be a reality. To the word ‘is’ and to the words ‘let it be’, there correspond particular attitudes of consciousness which it is vain to seek to explain…. [T]he transition from merely considering an object as possible, to deciding or willing it to be real … is one of the most familiar things in life.”
In order to understand Hocking’s remark that “What my body as a whole does, that I do”\(^{140}\) we must examine his important distinction between fact and meaning. As a phenomenon within the world of nature, the body lacks the capability of being space-free and time-free. The mind, on the other hand, has the ability to transcend its instantiation within a particular space-time locus and traverse an extended array of meaning directions. Hocking characterizes this situation succinctly: “The body is a set of facts, and the mind a set of meanings.”\(^{141}\)

The mind has the power to act dynamically through its ability to determine its perspective within the context of a determinate meaning-focus: “Brain connections mean something only if there is some meaner in the offing. Meaning is like light: when it exists anywhere, everything takes on color as if it existed in its own right.”\(^{142}\) Hocking, following a long teleological tradition that includes Aristotle, James, and Royce, emphasizes the importance of hope in the emergent process of the articulation of meaning. The telic dimension of our thinking cascades upon the multi-faceted data of experience, shaping its “details” within the context of a growing unity: The self is “a system of purposive behavior emerging from a persistent hope…. Meaning descends from this single source upon the details of behavior.”\(^{143}\)

In defense of dualism, no one ever perceives the mind in the act of affecting the body, nor a body affecting the mind. There simply are no observable facts there. At the same time, we do not hesitate to say that body-changes typically cause mind-changes, and mind changes commonly cause body changes. Hocking describes this process of

\(^{140}\) SBF: 23-24.
\(^{141}\) SBF: 35.
\(^{142}\) Ibid.: 38
\(^{143}\) Ibid.: 46. For a pragmatically-based account of the persistent, meaning dimension of hope, see Patrick Shade, Habits of Hope: A Pragmatic Theory (Vanderbilt University Press, 2001).
mind-body interaction circularly: “Except in the simplest reflexes, … no stimulus has its own mechanical way with us. It depends upon us which of the thousands of appeals raining upon our sense organs every moment we shall attend to…. Our response to outer things is thus ‘circular,’ and the self stands at the head of the cycle.”

We are now in a position to understand the importance of the mind-body nexus. The self’s ability to be both space-free and time-free is the source of its ability to derive the possible from within the actual. Much like Aristotle’s comparison of the sensitive and intellectual soul, our visionary capacity exhibited through hope is creative of a condition in which “hope is a hold on a good which is not actual, but only possible.” However, the self must be embedded in a natural context – it can derive no natural nourishment through anything resembling an “angelic eye.” Without the intramundane capability of the body, the self is permanently related to a condition of “being on the outside looking in,” with no ability to access to a full-bodied world: “the body, instead of being an additional fact, is required by the mind as a part of its own being.” Through the ability of the body to insert the self into the world, thought now becomes actualized through its ability to transform latent possibilities *in statu nascendi* into emergent realizations: “[T]he body as we are directly aware of it, is the region in which thought turns into actuality. Emotion is simply thought becoming concrete, showing its meaning in the body.”

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144 SBF: 68. See also William James, *Psychology: Briefer Course* (Dover Publications, 2001), p. 42 “Each of us dichotomizes the Kosmos in a different place.”
145 *Ibid.*: 46.
147 *Ibid.*: 83. See infra, p. 84: “Purpose enters into time; but will enters timelessly into space. The body, then, as a necessary condition for the possibility of will, is an essential region of the self.”
The body is neither an epiphenomenal appendage of the mind nor an independent instrument. The body is an “inseparable organ” of the mind. As a system of purposive behavior, the self stands in a symbiotic relation with the world: “In order to carry on this intercourse, it must appear in the world in a form akin to that world in structure … for the income and for the outgo, I must be of that world. If it is bodily, I must be bodily.”

Despite Hocking’s desire to re-instate the bodily dimension to its proper place within the experiential continuum, he is not on par with thinkers like Hobbes and Schopenhauer who insist that the world is an epiphenomenon of bodily states:

There is, first, this steady feeling of homely warmth, as of the hearth-place of life, a sense of being, which is usually a sense of well-being. It is only by second thought that I qualify this pervasive sense of being as ‘bodily’ warmth or as coenesthesia, and when I do so, I suspect that I have left something important out of it.”

Hocking’s reluctance to collapse the distinction between self and body should not be taken as a denial of their mutual relatedness. Through what he refers to as the principle of persistence, Hocking stresses the important relationship existing between the transversal capability of the self and its localized instantiation in the body:

To exist and to have particular existence are inseparable, and the body is to us that sphere of existence which is completely particularized…. The life of a self is a spreading circle of experiment—experimenting with new goods, and with new ways of reaching old ones. But if this moving on were like the progress of a grass fire, which has to leave its old ground or die, because there is nothing else for it to live on, the self would bear no resemblance to ourselves. As we move on, something is kept permanently.

Our body is an interlocutor within a system of “radical exchange” between the self and the world. The body serves as “the port of entry of new experience…. And through this portal, the self peers out into a dark cavernous background in which the

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148 Ibid.: 94. See infra. pp. 95-96 where Hocking describes the concrete unity of the mind-body relation: “The self is a hold on possibility, but not without its own actuality: it is an actual holding of possibility.
149 SBF: 78-79.
150 SBF: 85.
perspectives of its living past merge insensibly with the vast shapes of physical nature.\textsuperscript{151} The body cannot be explained away simply as an embodiment or objectification of the self. Its essence is to be transitional: a between. As a unified arrangement of perceiving organs, our body provides our primary means of access to the world. The appearance of the world is inconceivable without the embeddedness of the body within it: “Like most between-things, it has a wavering allegiance…. It is, in fact, more like a frontier between self and not-self, and a function of both.”\textsuperscript{152}

For Hocking, the human self exists in the world as a unified whole. Simply stated, the body is the receptor of brute being. However, brute being is never a pure given – the real is always mediated by the Janus-like head of the mind and its ability to transcendently direct experience into frontiers oftentimes levels removed from their point of entry:

Habit has its body; but that body is not out of mind! [This] means something more than my body has certain abstract possibilities of action: it means a positive element of awareness that these possibilities are available…. [T]hese possibilities in their sum constitute what we feel each moment as a volume of selfhood, a quantity with which, as an equipment, we are meeting experience.\textsuperscript{153}

§

Importance of Destiny

The self-modifying process is slow—glaciers are swifter—but it is indubitable…. Man’s self-consciousness is an active destiny, partly a magnet luring him forward towards what he thinks he is, partly a lash driving him to self change. Self-criticism is an ominous gift of the gods…. [I]n all psychological history there is, as there should be, a mighty ballast. But in it all there is a slow and strong movement ahead.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{151} SBF: 108, 110. The depth psychology of Freud and Jung provides some intimation of the “dark cavernous background” to which we can be admitted through the mind via the body.

\textsuperscript{152} SBF: 106.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.: 93. For a Thomistic account of this “volume of selfhood,” see W. Norris Clarke, S.J., “Living on the Edge: The Human Person as ‘Frontier Being’ and Microcosm,” in International Philosophical Quarterly 36 no. 142 (June 1996): 183-199.

For Hocking, purposive human action, once formed, is formative – enabling the self to inject “an occasional touch of telos in our own purposive action…. The destiny of particular beings is a particular destiny.”\textsuperscript{155} Despite the telic dimension of the self, our ability to create is “fractional.” Hocking’s distaste for a facile pragmatism precludes him from conceiving creativity completely \textit{ex nihilo} – rearrangement, rather than production, more aptly describes Hocking’s position. Creativity must be dependent upon a “prior realism,” the non-impulsive background that is not of our own making. Creativity is “maternal,” requiring a sensitive balance between a caring effort and docility on the part of agent: “It is the maternal brooding, in cooperation with nature, that brings the child to the crisis of birth…. Though the child has been given her, it is hers. The impersonality of the co-operati[ve] background leaves human authorship valid and salient.”\textsuperscript{156}

Given Hocking’s understanding of the self as “a field of fields,” it is not surprising that the individually engendered \textit{telos} assumes a wider arc. Our thoughts and actions have a destiny that reaches beyond. Destiny is an empirical category, not an other-worldly notion. Fields are present \textit{hic et nunc} in their “full-range.” We have become captivated by a discrete, itemized conception of experience and we consistently fail to recognize that “the simplest fact is seen in the light of what it is not…. [E]very included fact … becomes as if lost in an infinite shadow.”\textsuperscript{157} Hocking’s field concept enables a view of the world in terms of “simply felt unity.” Failure to embrace such a unifying, comprehensive conception leaves us with a bleak alternative “in which … we


\textsuperscript{156} \textit{FF&D}: 544. See \textit{Fact and Destiny (II)}, p. 338: “In so far as I have the experience of altering reality, I feel myself to be real.”

\textsuperscript{157} Hocking, \textit{Fact and Destiny (II)}: 328. Hocking continues: “The arrival of this conception may be considered as marking the dawn of human reason.”
might forever pass in review our shard bits of knowledge as in some nightmare quiz show…. “158

In order to retrieve this infinite, penumbra-like, shadow of experience, we must re-emphasize the importance that Hocking and others have placed upon our capacity for feeling. Like his colleague Whitehead, Hocking stressed the vector character of feeling – the forward, intentional direction feeling assumes as it strives to “meet the total object-over against-me.”159 This sense of something greater – the whole, and the pursuit thereof – constitutes destiny.

Destiny is our sense of the horizon of possibility. Although not immediately felt, it consists of a nascent awareness of potential fulfillment – “a nuclear intimation of outer expectation.”160 Like Marcel’s conception of the exigence of being, Hocking’s notion of destiny bespeaks of a condition of unfulfilled possibility, luring us on to a wider understanding. It is important to stress the empirical element of destiny. We possess a “Destiny-sense” within our own telos – an awareness of a directive within which all of our partial ends are collectively integrated. This sense of direction is open. This sense of openness is powerfully suggested by Benjamin Blood, a contemporary of William James:

Not unfortunately the universe is wild, –game flavored as a hawk’s wing. Nature is miracle all; the same returns not save to bring the different. The slow round of the engraver’s lathe gains but a breadth of hair, but the difference is distributed back over the whole curve, never an instant true, –ever not quite.161

Hocking’s critique of instrumental pragmatism provides an integral part of his view of destiny. The non-impulsive, inanimateness of nature provides the potential

159 FF&D: 546.
160 FF&D: 546.
161 Benjamin P. Blood, The Flaw in Supremacy, cited by William James in the “Preface” to Will to Believe and Other Essays (Dover Publications, 1956): ix. This leads Hocking to deny destiny the status of fate – characterizing it as a “destiny without predestination.”
freedom required in order for reality to undergo the shaping required for the fulfillment of
destiny. Hocking was forever insistent that the circumstance that we are primordially
confronted with a world of fact provides a perfect receptacle for the potential array of
meanings we may impose: “A world of conscious and especially social enterprise would be impossible without such an impassive base.”162

Hocking’s desire to keep the path of destiny unshackled by the decree of fate should not be mistaken as authorization for a moral holiday. The fulfillment of destiny is at the same time personal and universal, free and necessary. Maintaining his preference for examples derived from nature, Hocking emphasizes the inner necessity characteristic of destiny:

To the salmon after thousands of miles of sea-wandering there is just one stream in the world where it can breed and die; that stream is carried with it in the implications of its own body, and presumably also its sense of being. It is not less true of higher creatures that their worlds of fact enter into the definitions of their selves.163

But whereas the salmon possesses a sort of homeostatic homing-device, humans are endowed with a higher-level functioning that is exhibited through their capacity for theoretical reason. The self, through its ability to combine the data of experience intentionally and synthetically, is both the “organizing principle” and, more importantly, the “owning principle.” The cognate ability of the self, its capacity to serve as a vinculum or reflexive bridge to higher levels of reality, is the basis of its potential for freedom. The German word Geistigkeit is instructive here – our mental capacity is at the same time our link to the world of Spirit. Reflexion is a processive activity in which the self turns inward and, through looking at itself, makes itself an object of contemplation. The course of this activity leads to a burgeoning awareness wherein the self becomes more or

162 SBF:135.
163 SBF: 141.
less aware of the critical breach arising between the present self, qua observed, and the future self it desires to be: “Reflexion is the beginning of freedom”\(^\text{164}\)

Similar to the way in which a tributary stream feeds into a river, the act of reflexion enables the self to serve as a sluice entering and contributing to a wider circuit of meaning. Employing his penchant for both engineering and natural analogies, Hocking stresses the subtle changes that can take place in both the sources of motion and the direction of movement: “[E]nergy is being sent into the circuit, as it were, through its pores…. Reason is building the meaning of every impulse or passion into the body of its hope; and the courses of outgoing action are being turned into channels in which the promise to promote that hope.”\(^\text{165}\) Meaning is necessarily reflexive; our metaphysical “dream-shapes” cast an immense foreshadow, determining our acts and restructuring our sense of the world. When our ideas are channeled in the directions of our hopes, a wedge is driven into the tissue of experience and possibilities are evoked that resonate across the experiential field like a series of concentric circles. We reap what we sow:

[Experience moves … like a reaper’s swath,—concerned at every point with the particular … masses and bundles of grain, while having before it generalities of higher and lower levels. The result of this reaping of experience is nothing is left standing…. Everything is now brought into relation to the purposes of the reaper. No natural impulse can become a matter of experience and remain unchanged.\(^\text{166}\)]

Our capacity for reflexion, as an act of self-awareness, provides the hint of a promise of a surplus – the self that knows itself to be caused, causation has ceased to be the whole truth. The ensuing range of vision is greatest when contending impulses are

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\(^\text{164}\) Ibid.:150.


held in suspense, while the self considers which impulse shall become the standard bearer of its meaning. Reminiscent of Hegel’s powerful declaration that the owl of Minerva flies at dusk, Hocking provides this powerful account of the liberating affect of self-consciousness:

There is nothing in the field of natural causation entering into me upon which I may not thus reflect…. [A]ny series of natural consequences which flows up to me becomes distinct from me when I discover it. If I find that my body is the last term in some evolutionary series, I cease to be that last term. *I am never merely the last term of any series which I observe.* The clock strikes twelve: to the physical order, the last stroke is the last, and no other. To me who listen it is “twelve;” for I am keeping the others in mind with it. I am with the other strokes while I am with the last stroke: so what is true of the last term of such a series is never all the truth about *me*…. The self is free from the single-series determination of whatever it makes its object.167

§

**The Coming World Civilization**

The era of “civilizations” being past, what we now enter is either the era of civilization or the era of universal desolation.168

The self in its exercise of freedom looks into a world of imagination, another space-time order, but with an intention different from that of a dream: its intention is that this other world shall become real, and it does so.169

Hocking’s last major work, *The Coming World Civilization*, weaves the dominant themes of his past efforts into a unified vision for civilization. The advent of a new “world civilization” is not a deterministic *fait accompli*; it is an event that must be shaped by the creative vision and courage of humankind. The possibility of a world civilization rests upon the successful realization of universal intersubjective being – a life-long preoccupation of Hocking’s. Seeing the difficulty of recognizing the primordiality of intersubjective being in a post-Cartesian world, Hocking begins with a careful

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167 *SBF*: 151-152, 155.
169 *SBF*: 176.
examination of both horns of the Cartesian philosophy: the private certitude of the
*Cogito, solus ipse*, and a mathematical, value-less philosophy of nature – what Whitehead
meant by the phrase “vacuous actuality.”

Despite the epoch making significance of Descartes’ inference – *Cogito ergo Sum*
– the self-referential implications have been largely overlooked. Descartes’ private
certitude, in order to do its work, had to become *de facto* universal certitude – resonating
across the entire spectrum of intersubjective experience. A deepening of subjectivity is
required in order to transcend the appearance of insularity. Subjectivity possesses an
inherently liberating capacity. Following the logic of solipsism to its illogical end – that
point at which solipsism runs up against the “paradoxical immediacy of otherness” –
provides the bridge leading to a passage beyond modernity.

Recognizing the importance of the intersubjective insights of George Herbert
Mead – and anticipating those of Jürgen Habermas – Hocking recognizes that the I-think
is molded through language and social interaction. A more perceptive analysis of
experience is required that attends to the dimension of “an intersubjective Thou-art,
inseparable from each subjective I am….”170 What is commonly assumed to be “private”
experience can be *taken* as such only to the extent that it partakes of a *common* dimension
of objectivity – Hocking’s non-impulsive background. Our conception of solitude can
only arise in the context of what it means *to not be alone*. Solipsism is self-refuted from
within the experiential field. Our common recognition of objects is embedded within a
singular world-unity that has always served as the basis of our common intuition. In fact:

Our empirical receptiveness to the sensed world is something more crucial and inward
than an observing of variegated qualities out-there: it is also a receiving of my own life
from a life-giving entity, which can by no stretch of imagination be a physical “stimulus,”

170 *CWC*: 31.
and nothing more. That is what “experiencing” literally is—a process in which the not-self is continuously becoming self…. While the self is being sustained in being … it is being created. We might now take it as a self-evident proposition that whatever creates a self can only be a self. We … have arrived at our goal.¹⁷¹

Different selves overlap through their shared perception of a common world. Each person is not merely an fragmented episode consisting simply of “I think,” but is instead a “noetic-noema” combined center of activity—there is no thought without an intentional correlate. Through the act of participating in shared experience, a self is linked to other selves—a connection grounded in the existence of the common world. For Hocking, the continuity with the natural world that was realized through the body is now reinscribed at a higher level through a noetic continuity realized per mentem—a continuity wherein the self is creatively sustained in being. Reflexion leads to an aboriginal and intrauterine experience of the “firm pressure of being” within a field of experience that is not mine alone:

For something of association adheres to the growing mind: to associate with any person is to associate vicariously with his associates…. [T]he relation of mental with-ness is transitive: if A is with B, in this sense, and B is with C, the A is with C; for B, having associated with C is now, whether he likes it or not, and always, B with C—that is what he is! Such a chain of intercourse clearly extends without limit to all participants in any historical nexus.”¹⁷²

From out of the interstitial depth of subjectivity, we become grafted upon the intersubjective nature of being. The intersubjective depth of human subjectivity is like a compass needle pointing to “an intimation of our destined way of living.”¹⁷³

A revitalized notion of the soul is required—an integral, spiritual conception of the human self in its dealings with its total horizon. The hegemony of the mathematico-

¹⁷¹ CWC: 37-38. I have taken the liberty of slightly rearranging the sentence order for purposes of emphasis.
¹⁷³ CWC: 40. I substitute ‘our’ for Hocking’s ‘your.’
physical world-picture and the resulting predominance of the abstract universal creates a condition of separation and lack of balance. According to Hocking, we must recover sight in both eyes:

The truth is the healing fact of which we are in search, a fact as simple, as ever-present, and as easily overlooked as the fact of one’s own existence. It is accessible to every man … on the same terms; yet it falls short of being notorious common knowledge because of the same single-eyed industriousness of inquiry which loses sight of the soul…. It is the truth that the world, like the human self has its unity in a living purpose. It is the truth of the existence of God.174

As Whitehead was keenly aware, objectivity is a necessary abstraction required for social progress. In order to avoid the pitfalls of scientific reductionism, it is necessary to re-inscribe objectivity within the wider domain of consciousness that Hegel spoke of:

“Thus as what consciousness affirms from within itself as being-in-itself or the True, we have the standard which consciousness itself sets up by which to measure its knowledge.”175 Recognition of this fact is of paramount importance for understanding that science and religion are engaged in similar projects. Science oftentimes fails to recognize that the methodology of scientific investigation is very much inscribed within the activity of consciousness. Failure to recognize this important insight leads one critic to comment that “Science is inherently not only realistic, trying to describe the way things really are, but also imperialistic, bent on proving the only genuine description.”176

To demonstrate the possibility of a rapprochement between science and religion, Hocking draws upon the work of Francis Bacon – a prophet of the modern scientific method. Most scholars focus upon the Bacon’s remark that we “put nature to the rack” in

174 What Man Can Make of Man: 59. For poetic expression of “single vision,” see William Blake:
And twofold Always. May God us keep
From single vision & Newton’s sleep!
175 Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit: 53.
order to force her to reveal her deep secrets. Hocking takes a different approach, focusing on the Baconian dictum that in order to master nature we must first yield to her in obedience. Yielding in obedience to nature involves an awareness of a sense of fundamental unity existing prior to the rack of explanatory “efficient” causes. Once the whole of this unity is thematically grasped, Christianity can be viewed as the birth-right of humankind because the kingdom of God lies within the awareness of each and every person. It is necessary to appreciate the philosophical register of this teaching from the gospel. The self, through its capacity to reconnect with a whole of which it has always been a part, is a microcosm of the whole – a participant in the universality of experience. Experience, not as a brute given but the Wesensschau of Husserl, yeilds the universal thread of meaning that is inherent throughout the expanse of Being. Religion can now assume a cosmic as opposed to sectarian form. Religion is the reflexive “binding together” of the finite self within the unity of the whole – access to which requires the re-collection of the self in its prior unity. In the authentic Christian sense, “to be chosen” is to participate in the “pervasive spirit of induction” that is represented by the teachings of Jesus. Through the multiple examples of understanding, reconception, and integration a logic can be discerned – a λόγος in the sense of a unified, gathering of the whole hic et nunc. Here lies the path to being reborn:

If a man can somehow fall in love with the Real, as a source of life, he may fall out of love with his self-absorbed self; it is hard to see how else he can be “reborn”…. [R]ebirth … must come to a person as all values come—through discovery, through an encounter with some character in things that elicits spontaneous allegiance.177

Christian life is best viewed as a constant “rearrangement of the permanent” obtained at the cost of suffering and sacrifice. As Hocking powerfully states: “[T]he

177 CWC: 92.
deepest reach of the Christian ethic is an immediate consequence of the deepest reach of its worldview, whereby each person participates in the life of God.\textsuperscript{178} When this ontological condition is realized in praxis, we understand the true sense of “Thy Kingdom come.” For Hocking the shared experience of religion and philosophy is “an immediate perception of, and commitment to, the forward thrust of being.”\textsuperscript{179}

For Hocking, echoing Augustine, “the city to be built, already present in its conspectus—\textit{universus hic mundus nam una civitas}—is still in its architecture out of sight.”\textsuperscript{180} The architecture remains in the making and the human person – qua ontologically speaking, a “frontier being” – stands on the cusp of participation in the \textit{civitas Dei}. The individual is not divine \textit{per se} – we participate in the divine nature but our degree of participation is a function of our liberty. We have the choice of acting as an isolated ego or as a contributing partner of the divine purpose.”\textsuperscript{181} Drawing upon the insight of Marcel, Hocking insists that the \textit{telos} of human being is realized within the process of ordering oneself to the cosmos as opposed to ordering the cosmos to the needs of man – recuperative, secondary reflection partakes of a higher order than primary reflection. Human achievement must be continually re-assessed within an emerging context of novelty. The real remains, in many ways, a riddling Sphinx but “\textit{the unreal

\textsuperscript{178} \textit{Ibid.}: 94.
\textsuperscript{179} \textit{CWC}: 97-98. See also “Epilogue: The Reach of Experience,” in \textit{The Meaning of Immortality in Human Experience}, pp. 245-255 where Hocking discusses the ontological aspects of experience of creative love, the experience of dying, and the beatific experience of Nirvana in Hinduism. Each experience offers “a unique sense of initiation—as if by a new hold on an \textit{a priori} one should always have been living by—an awakening that knows its own awakeness—no completed truth, but an anticipation of ultimate attainment (p. 254).”
\textsuperscript{180} \textit{CWC}: 184.
\textsuperscript{181} \textit{CWC}: 182. See \textit{Human Nature and Its Remaking}, pp. 426-427: “Recognition is an act of the mind which thought can lead up to, but never quite enforce…. It must come as a positive datum, something itself personally experienced or ‘revealed.’ It is here that religion takes the issue out of the hands of philosophy.” Aquinas’ notion of philosophy as making what is \textit{revealed} more manifest in human knowing is relevant here.
must lead to the real.” In the presence of this aboriginal philosophical mystery, we must proclaim the potential divinity of the individual soul. Human being is on the way to being:

\[\text{Opus hic terminatum} \]
\[\text{Sed non consummatum} \]
\[\text{dico}^{183} \]

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\(^{182}\) CWC: 173.

\(^{183}\) CWC: 187. “I say that that work here has come to an end, but not consummated.”
Part IV

An Inward Morning: The Experiential Philosophy of Henry Bugbee

“Metaphysical thinking must rise with the earliest dawn, the very dawn of things themselves.”

“Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn.”

§

Introduction

I first heard the name “Henry Bugbee” several years ago in a graduate seminar on Heidegger. After discussing the mystical-poetic aspects of Heidegger’s later thought, the question was posed as to what prospects were left for philosophy. A silence fell over the classroom. The professor quickly filled the void by offering the example of a philosopher who “moved to Montana and took up fly fishing.” I approached my professor after class inquiring about specifics. At that moment, I became acquainted with the name “Henry Bugbee.”

Anyone who knows anything about Henry Bugbee realizes that his thinking defies any type of category or label. Calvin O. Schrag once described Bugbee as one of the more marginalized philosophers of the twentieth century while Willard van Orman Quine characterized him as the ultimate exemplar of the examined life – years after Harvard University denied Bugbee tenure for lack of scholarly output. Aside from a handful of published papers, his *The Inward Morning: A Philosophical Exploration in Journal Form* (1958), consists of a series of journal entries reminiscent of Marcel’s *Journal métaphysique*. In its title alone, this work contradicted the two reigning genres of

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1 Henry G. Bugbee, Jr., *The Inward Morning: A Philosophical Exploration in Journal Form* (University of Georgia Press, 1999): 52. Hereafter referred to as *IM*.
philosophical writing: the “treatise-in-tome” monograph and the argument-based, refereed journal article. Bugbee’s work has come to signify a transcendence of the academic register, both in terms of rational economy and disciplinary focus. Already keenly aware of the limitations of formal philosophical writing as an undergraduate, he confesses: “Certainly anyone who throws his entire personality into his work must to some extent adopt an aesthetic attitude and medium.”

Harvard’s loss was philosophy’s gain. Bugbee was eventually able to secure a tenured position at the University of Montana where he remained for many years – a place welcoming both to his unique philosophic sensibility and his love of the outdoors. The story of Bugbee’s important place in American philosophy is just beginning to be told; but one major example of his contribution is his close relationship to Gabriel Marcel – with whom he attended Heidegger’s lectures at Cerisy-la-Salle in 1955. Marcel found a kindred spirit in Bugbee’s thought – their shared emphases on concreteness and place, the peripatetic nature of reflection, and the personal testimony given to the ethical, aesthetic, and religious dimensions of experience caused Marcel to comment that “Henry Bugbee and I inhabit the same land … [a land] illuminated by a light of its own.”

According to Bugbee: “Marcel’s writings … spoke to my condition…. Marcel helped me to find my own voice…."

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4 Henry G. Bugbee, Jr., In Demonstration of the Spirit (Princeton University, 1936), unpublished undergraduate thesis. Hereafter referred to as DS.
5 Gabriel Marcel, “Introduction” to The Inward Morning: A Philosophical Exploration in Journal Form: 18.
The Undergraduate Thesis: *In Demonstration of the Spirit*

Every time I retrace the course of my reflections since ‘their beginning’ in my undergraduate years I discern as central this preoccupation with [the] ‘somewhat absolute’ in experience….7

My task has been … to accommodate the life of spirit with all [of] the mind.8

Bugbee’s propensity for concreteness and originality can be traced back to his youth. The son of a successful physician, Bugbee grew up in Manhattan where he cultivated a deep appreciation of classical music, art, and jazz. Urban legend has it that while an undergraduate at Princeton, he would purposely turn up the volume of a Mozart recording at lunchtime. This would catch the attention of Albert Einstein who routinely passed by Bugbee’s dormitory room on his way to lunch. Bugbee was aware of the power of classical music to lure the famous physicist off his habitual path, all for the purpose of engaging him in conversation. It will become immediately evident that “[T]his is no ordinary thesis, and no ordinary college senior.”9

Bugbee’s undergraduate thesis was directed by Werner Fite. Little, if any, attention is paid to Fite today. This is unfortunate because it was Fite who first exposed the young Bugbee to the importance of concreteness and the primacy of the personal.10 Bugbee’s thesis begins with a pointed indictment as to how prevailing philosophical doctrine has led to a balkanization of fact and value, resulting in “a dichotomy of

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7 *IM*: 131-132.
8 *IM*: 10.
9 Edward G. Mooney, “Mediations on Death and the Sublime: Henry Bugbee’s *In Demonstration of the Spirit*,” forthcoming in *Journal for Culture and Religious Theory*. For an account of the “urban legend,” see note 9, p. 87. I am most grateful to Professor Mooney for proving me with a copy of Bugbee’s undergraduate and graduate theses.
10 See Werner Fite, “The Impersonal Point of View and the Personal,” in *Contemporary American Philosophy, Volume I*, ed. G.P. Adams and W.P. Montague (Macmillan Company, 1930), pp. 357, 360: “A mind without prejudice—it may be a tabula rasa, a mirror, a cinematograph, or any of those contrivances which psychologists substitute for mind, but it will see nothing…. [F]or me, only persons are real and only persons are significant. All impersonal things, including the objects presented by science, are abstractions, constructions, fancies.”
experience … produc[ing] one of the most fundamental and evasive problems ever to persist.”11 The thesis begins with a preliminary account of consciousness, followed by a phenomenology of moral and aesthetic experience and concludes with a treatment of Unamuno’s “tragic sense of life” – a harbinger of Bugbee’s later experiential philosophy. A brief, personal “Epilogue” completes the work.

One observation that immediately strikes the reader is the religious “tenor” of the thesis – a tenor that will set the tone for Bugbee’s appeal to an absolute “dimension” of experience. The religious dimension is immediately apparent by virtue of the inclusion of the word “Spirit” in the title. But what is perhaps more revealing is that each of the first three chapters begins with a biblical epigraph, and the work concludes with a quote from Saint Paul: “To this effect I have not spoken ‘with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.’”12 Bugbee’s salutation “Amen,” followed by his longhand signature, leaves the reader with a profound sense of having witnessed a personal revelation of some significance on the part of the author.

Another observation is the evidence of a clear sense of self-consciousness on the writer’s part as to the severe limitations of “formal” academic philosophy and the vital need for philosophy to be developed in personal terms. Philosophy must speak directly to what Bugbee repeatedly refers to as “the whole man.” This unapologetic, self-consciousness, when combined with a religious sensibility – quite remarkable for a writer of Bugbee’s age – reveals a form of “demonstration” that is neither deductive nor dialectical. The Spirit to which Bugbee calls our attention must be understood

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11 DS: 2. See infra where Bugbee indicates “Many great philosophers have been greatly troubled by it, [but] each of us in turn must cope with it himself.”
12 DS: 96.
evocatively as an “unfold[ing] not as wisdom but as revelation or ephiphany, a showing or ‘demonstration’ … that attends to the things of creation in their bounteous unfolding.”

Bugbee’s “final word” in the “Prologue” offers a provocative intimation of things to come:

A final word – you will realize that my efforts, while wholly tentative and probably quite inadequate, represent a most serious and valuable attempt to think my way out of the particular situation in which I have become vitally involved. I hope to accomplish more than the fulfillment of certain requirements, for a good deal of my future depends upon what may be considered Philosophy. If it is the strictly limited pursuit – in regard to method – which it may possibly turn out to be, then I am afraid I will have to break the confines of the medium, for images and a full conscious life beckon me more than their purified reflection – ideas.

**Consciousness as Sympathetic Engagement**

Despite the wide range of interests of such thinkers as Spinoza, Kant and Hegel, modern philosophy has, to use a phrase of Hocking, continued to “polish the surface of the mirror,” resulting in a narrower and narrower preoccupation with the problem of knowledge. According to Bugbee, the empirico-deductive method “sets the type and the topic for an alarming amount of Anglo-Saxon, if not other current Philosophy as well….” The names of these quasi-scientific models of philosophical inquiry are well known: Logicism, Positivism, Instrumentalism, and Realism represent a few of the most tenacious examples. Such “rigorous” attempts fail due to the peremptory dismissal of a vast amount of potential evidence – “Consciousness is unique in that it cannot be represented in the Spatio-Temporal dimensions of Science … if for no other reason than that such observation fails to take account of the tremendous amount of data rendered inaccessible by the very nature of the case.”

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13 Mooney, “Meditations on Death and the Sublime: Henry Bugbee’s *In Demonstration of the Spirit.*”
14 *DS*: 5.
15 Ibid.: 8.
16 *DS*: 8.
inquiry, but an exclusive preoccupation with scientific method yields an extremely narrow focus – a focus unable to reveal that which is most important for human-beings. When the scientific method holds sway, reality becomes compartmentalized – those aspects of reality which cannot be scientifically confirmed become cognitively invalidated or, as the logical positivist claims, “meaningless.” At this point, Bugbee demonstrates a wisdom well beyond his years: “[T]he departmentalization of consciousness, in particular for philosophical purposes, … seems to me a grave error, for we don’t experience life that way….”\(^{17}\)

Bugbee proposes a wider empiricism than that offered by Locke and Hume. An empiricism based largely upon an ocular model is inadequate to the breadth of experience – a breadth which extends into moral, aesthetic, and religious dimensions. In fact, Bugbee argues that “the more an experience transcends or interpenetrates categories in general the more significant it may be…. The crying need of man is a faith fostered in the[se] latter spheres of human nature….\(^{18}\)

Bugbee is not the first philosopher to question the limits of scientific explanation. The issue one must confront is how do we go about “verifying” those aspects of experience that transcend the merely empirical? The clue resides in a more “interpenetrative” understanding of experience:

This, then, is the unique character of consciousness, whereby many elements are combined within a unified personality, and thus the Spirit represents the supreme embodiment of both the one and the many, an integrally logical manifold of infinitely diverse particulars. Such is the logic of personality, and it must furnish the basis of any living philosophy.\(^{19}\)

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\(^{17}\) \textit{Ibid.}: 12.

\(^{18}\) \textit{Ibid.}: 12, 13.

\(^{19}\) \textit{DS}: 14.
In other words, a *logos*, or structural unity, pervades reality at all levels, i.e. the concept, the person, the work of art, and serves as the basis of an implicating-interpenetrating relational network. The experience of such unity cannot be felt at a distance – at some point we must enter into a sympathetic relationship with things. Recognizing the influence of Fite, Bugbee understands that philosophical reflection is necessarily instituted from one perspective or another. What is typically associated with the notion of “objectivity,” – or the “view from nowhere” – is, in fact, a condition in which the content of reflection is wrenched out of its rich context of discovery and filtered through a narrowing lens of justification. This is a mistake. When personal observations are cut off from their originating context – the only context which can “veritably vivify their significance – it seems inevitable that our efforts will culminate in an insecure skepticism.”

Taking his bearings from Kant, Bugbee believes in the fundamental existence of noumenal reality, requiring a deeper understanding than that offered by scientific method. Echoing Fite, Bugbee recognizes that “in our personal relations, we are apt to satisfy the demand for validity along different lines.” Reality, whether in the form of a work of art or the presence of a person, is *compelling* – the receptive consciousness is confronted with a “ground bas[s]” of the real which “render[s] possible the understanding even of things in themselves to some degree and furnishes the basis for faith in noumenal experience.”

Noumenal experience is best accessed through intuition. Intuition, for Bugbee, is “full-bodied,” providing a direct sense of a melding of the one with the many. Intuition is

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20 *DS*: 16. See p. 25(a): “It is essential that we regard [consciousness] as a unit … [A]ll experience has aspects which are fundamentally merged in any given phase of conscious time.”


no mere sub-faculty of our rational make-up – it is the typification of consciousness:

“[I]ntuition thus interpreted most completely typifies consciousness as the experience of unity in plurality, and it is this synthetic realization of life which constitutes the soul and substance of Philosophy…. “23 Through intuition, we sympathetically penetrate into the depths of experience. Entering these depths of experience is illuminative due to the synthetic fusion of ingredients contained therein:

When we place our ears close to the stream of life we do not hear a ticking of segregated consecutive instants but rather a constant hum, a mingling of harmonies interposed by epoch changes in key and imperceptible blends…. What I advocate is a sympathetic imaginative insight into the understanding of the agent, fortified by what can be learned from the more protracted and remote speculations of the observer.”24

Philosophy must demonstrate a more rigorous empirical orientation – inclusive of the entire spectrum of human experience. No longer simply the business of a professional elite, philosophy must speak to the vital concerns of the human. Sounding much like Hegel, Bugbee believes that the human personality participates in the life of Spirit: “[A]s if in a single act of understanding, … the subject consciousness may indeed incorporate the object…. [E]xperience of this sort is characteristic of human life functioning most comprehensively as a whole through imaginative insight, thus becoming aware of itself through itself…. ”25

**Noumenal Nature of Man: Personality as the Expression of Morality**

It is clear from reading Bugbee’s undergraduate thesis that the spectre of relativism was not unique to the college campus of the 1960s, but was clearly visible in the 1930’s as well. As a champion of the foundational nature of experience, Bugbee must

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23 *DS*: 20. Bugbee cites C.M. Joad: “This intuitive awareness of reality confers the most valuable experiences which the human mind, at its present level of evolutionary development, enjoys.” (C.M. Joad, *Return to Philosophy* [Dutton, 1936], p. 31.) Note that at the end of Chapter I, p. 27, Bugbee states: “[I]ntuition is never ultimately adequate, and in fact proof itself may be finally reduced to a series of telescopic intuitions more or less conclusively inviting agreement.”

24 *DS*: 22.

discredit relativism and, to his credit, he does so quite effectively. Again, showing a maturity well beyond his years, Bugbee quickly asserts that the relativist is a relativist about everyone’s moral experience except his own. Concerning his own moral experience, the relativist is a staunch defender! Much like the scepticism that followed from the egocentric predicament of modern epistemology, Bugbee will argue that moral skepticism arises out of the impersonal stance tacitly assumed by moral theory. A return to the context of sympathetic engagement is required: “Moral Philosophy must start at the other pole, first of all with one’s own moral experience, and from a careful attempt to get at the meaning of this it will perhaps be possible to infer what that of others may mean.”

Taking his lead from Kant, Bugbee is deeply convinced that our noumenal nature – our “locus of value” – is rooted in consciousness and cannot be grasped phenomenally. In fact, the moral experience of the other, obtained through sympathetic insight, gives us access to the spiritual universe of value – localized through the concrete embodiment of the human personality: “The individual personality is in the widest sense the expression of morality … certain elements of morality remain more or less constant throughout.”

The notion of noumenal freedom provides an important clue for understanding the spiritual dimension of the human being. Determinists claim that all action is conditioned by law. But like his cousin the relativist, the determinist often rejects such determination when it comes to characterizing his own existence. In moments of impassioned action, we are neither relativists nor determinists – our actions are *sui generis*. Each one of us lives our life to some degree as a testimonial to what we consider to be just. Moral experience reveals a “maze of interlocking consciousness” exhibiting a spiritual

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26 *DS*: 29.
dimension that is oriented around my life: “[T]he individual is both generic and specific … one in many.”\textsuperscript{28}

Acts of devotion provide \textit{prima facie} evidence of the moral essence of our being. The fact that the problem of moral knowledge has persisted throughout the ages is not evidence of the truth of relativism but a testimonial to the universality of moral experience: “That the moral problem in general has remained relatively constant in the memory of man I will suggest is also corroborated by … every man not completely anesthetic to the central perplexities of life.”\textsuperscript{29} What appears to be a string of contradictions upon further examination reveals itself as an enduring essence. Moral philosophy must consist of more than a shell game – a “shuffling of words with an eye for their consistency. It stands for an attempt necessarily participated in by every one, by which some unity of purpose and integrity of character comes into being.”\textsuperscript{30}

Much like the way in which the pure intuitions and the categories of the understanding give shape to the phenomenal character of experience, the “teleological autonomy” of the noumenal self is given shape through a unity of moral purpose. The variety of these attempts to “give shape” is the universal. Through the medium of sympathetic insight, we must see into the motives upon which we act as concrete individuals, finding a moral value intrinsic to noumenal experience. Here again, intuition provides a key to unlocking the door to the noumenal. Wanting to avoid the Kantian bifurcation of thought and experience – fact and value – Bugbee moves within consciousness much like Hegel does, attempting a reconstruction of “the most

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{DS}: 32.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid.}: 33.
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}: 36.
consummate and complete phenomenal intelligence that is possible….31 By moving within deep folds of human experience – not merely through analytical dissection – we are closer to capturing the synthetic unity and relational intensity that is appropriate for the noumenal – and much closer to a more adequate understanding of the universality of value experience.

**The Connection Between Phenomenal and Noumenal Reality: The Justification of Life as an Aesthetic Phenomenon**

Bugbee’s philosophical project is clearly at odds with the single-vision characteristic of a rigid dogmatism. An appeal to the metaphorical aspects of thought and language is necessary in order “to free consciousness within its own medium, to prompt its flow through a mingling of associations, double meanings, overtones, plastic and dynamic contrasts, all the vivid channels of imaginations which break through the narrow limitations of static and barren logical procedure; in this sense ‘imagination is the true realm of man’s infinity’….32 Art represents the closest approximation of phenomenal intelligence with noumenal reality – judgments of taste are universal, necessary and, at the same time, non-conceptual. Aesthetic judgments, like moral judgments, do not necessitate universal agreement on any given work of art, yet “aesthetic experience critically analyzed suggests the regulative necessity for some sort of aesthetic universality through the unique yet similar coerciveness of the object of aesthetic experience.”33

When Kant spoke about the disinterestedness of the aesthetic truth, he was both right and wrong. Kant was correct that art is to a large extent disinterested as to moral, intellectual, or mimetic correctness. Yet at the same time, art bespeaks a vital interest – according to Bugbee, “I cannot conceive of men participating in a form of life which could be more...
vitaly interesting than in some form of art."\textsuperscript{34} Any appearance of aesthetic neutrality presents itself as a sublimated transfiguration of a prior “organic and inherent focus upon Aesthetic experience.”\textsuperscript{35} Contrary to any appearance of neutrality, art consists of “a unique and tremendously significant mode of communication rivaling pure conceptualization as an interpretation of Reality … for the aesthetic experience can be as intensely and widely synthetic as any consciousness of which man is capable.”\textsuperscript{36} The intensive unity and relational structure of the work of art provides the clue to a dimension of experience which is aesthetic – intensively unified and relationally extended. Although typically couched in abstract intellectualist terms, the response to an aesthetic object is one of our most commonplace experiences – a transformation of the commonplace. According to Bugbee: “I have discovered deep sensitivity and even an essential though embryonic aesthetic attitude among many men to whom the cultivated circles of the select are foreign … their approach is usually through ‘natural beauty’ … all of which is apt to be a little vague and decidedly unreal to the typical ‘man of the study,’ or rocking chair philosopher.”\textsuperscript{37}

For Bugbee, the process of engaging in aesthetic responsiveness is a constitutive act of the human-being. Art, much like the young Nietzsche conceives it, represents the highest task and truly metaphysical activity of life because the person, in its most defining moment, acts as an artist. According to Nietzsche:

Art is neither performed for our betterment or education nor are we the true authors of this art world. On the contrary, we may assume that we are merely images and artistic projections … and that we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art—

\textsuperscript{34} DS: 53.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.: 53.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.: 54.
\textsuperscript{37} DS: 57.
for it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified….\textsuperscript{38}

\textbf{The Tragic Sense of Life: The Experiential Constellation of Life and Thought in Miguel de Unamuno}

Bugbee was introduced to the thought of Miguel de Unamuno by Fite who translated de Unamuno’s novella \textit{Mist}. De Unamuno spurs a deep seated desire in Bugbee to be true to experience – not through “a system of metaphysics or a cosmology, but rather a \textit{Lebensanschaung} or view of life … as the synthetic manifestation of a total unified spiritual existence.”\textsuperscript{39} This unified view is called by de Unamuno a “tragic sense of life.” Embracing a tragic sense involves harboring a sense of skepticism in the presence of a compelling undeniable faith in noumenal reality. The persistent synergistic character of this conflict results in the perpetuation of a Socratic style of philosophical reflection “prompt[ing] attempts at expression in almost every direction of human activity.”\textsuperscript{40} The importance of de Unamuno, for Bugbee, extends far beyond the telling example of the philosophical spirit he dramatically embodied. His ultimate significance lies in the manner in which de Unamuno was able to give expression to “a gnawing restlessness … implicit within human nature itself.”\textsuperscript{41} Unamuno is an example of the manner in which the life of “the whole man” strives to realize a synthetic character, or “vital unity,” wherein aesthetic and moral values are given concrete expression within the wider context of noumenal reality. Unamuno contrasts an “intense vitalism” championing the primacy of the living with the Nietzschean conception of “Socratic” rationalism that is anathema to life. Much like Nietzsche’s “Alexandrian man” – blinded by the dust of

\textsuperscript{38} Friedrich Nietzsche, \textit{The Birth of Tragedy} in \textit{The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner}, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Vintage Books: 1967), p. 52. The comparison of Nietzsche and Bugbee can only be taken so far, but their shared interest in Wagner (see \textit{DS}, pp. 64-69) is indicative of their shared understanding of art in a most comprehensive sense.

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{DS}: 4.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Ibid.}: 70.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{DS}: 70.
books and printers’ errors – modern man is also at risk of becoming both blind and dead through the unilateral embracing of a static, mortifying “criterion of reason.”

For Unamuno, reason exhibits a profound lure which, if blindly followed, leads to “an empty and bottomless well … lead[ing] to the annihilation of consciousness in the deepest sense of vitality.” A life-saving link, or thread, is required, similar to that provided by Ariadne in Theseus’ battle with the minotaur, in order to escape the devastating implications of complete rational enclosure – a “dead view” of the world. A life-affirming view of the world requires a more catholic approach than what can be achieved through science. Unamuno is not in favor of jettisoning scientific rationality, but simply “awaking the soul” to its vast possibilities in the presence of a resigned acceptance of a “doomed universe.” The synergized unity of scepticism and hope constitutes the “high noon” of Unamuno’s Lebensanschaung – a set of conflicting antinomies, as exhibited in the battle between reason and faith, has haunted and continues to haunt mankind: “[L]ife itself consists in the conflict of these faculties and herein we must make our peace.” There is no shortage of examples of this struggle – however much they are overlooked by academic philosophy. The relativist and the determinist may leave their texts on the nightstand, but in their dreams they are neither a relativist nor a determinist. In Unamuno’s words “primum vivere, deinde philosophare” or, as the young Bugbee asserts, “[T]he essence of life – tautologically – is living, and not intellectual understanding.”

The scene in which this conflict between the phenomenal and the noumenal most passionately comes to pass concerns the problem of immortality. Humanity’s perennial
concern with the immortality of the soul is reflected in the works of great art, literature and philosophy – significant examples include Michelangelo’s “The Creation of Adam,” Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*, and Plato’s *Phaedo*. However, the deeply personal issue of the immortality of the soul is not the exclusive property of high-brow culture – it resonates in the heart and soul of each and every human alive to its possibilities: “[T]he problem of immortality … this noumenal realm … the realm of value … constitutes the matrix of the soul which man feels a vital longing to perpetuate.”\(^{45}\)

It is unlikely that the impersonal philosophical treatise or academic tome could adequately express this inner logic of “the whole man.” Through his acquaintance with the life-work of Unamuno, the young Bugbee is on the way to a more radical version of Kant’s Copernican Revolution in which “the impulse to self-revelation [comes] from within … mak[ing] himself the subject of artistic exposition.”\(^{46}\) It is only from within this perspective of self-revelation, disclosing an experience of compelling, personal response, that “the most important function of the world of objects [can be seen as] that of a medium for the manifestation of value.”\(^{47}\) Herein lies the value of the aesthetic object as a material object that must be recognized as real and, at the same time, directing one’s attention to the universals bodied forth. Bugbee concludes this chapter with a word of thanks to Unamuno for awakening the young man from his dogmatic slumber, but perhaps more compelling is a quote from Unamuno that will serve as the mantra for Bugbee’s later philosophizing: “[I] believe that there is another world within our world and mysterious dominant forces in the depth of our spirit, those who speak the language

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\(^{45}\) *Ibid.*: 80.

\(^{46}\) Paul Bekker, *Beethoven* (Dutton Press, 1932): 79. Bugbee cites this text to illuminate the personality of Beethoven, but it is clear that he is making a wider claim as to the noumenal dimension of personality.

\(^{47}\) *DS*: 89.
of the heart and many who prefer not to speak at all.” This serves as a prophetic vision, coming from a young man who would be denied tenure at Harvard years later for reason of lack of scholarly output.

§

Graduate Studies at Berkeley: The Sense and the Conception of Being

As I put it years ago in my doctoral thesis, reality makes its stand here and now in existing things.

[T]he experience with which this thesis is so largely concerned cannot be shaken…. Following his graduation from Princeton, Bugbee traveled to the University of California at Berkeley to take up graduate work in Philosophy. The routine of graduate study was interrupted in 1942, when Bugbee was called to serve in the United States Navy, resulting in combat duty aboard ship in the South Pacific. Few academics today can relate to such a call to duty. Bugbee’s military service kept him from his graduate studies for four years. He returned to Berkeley, completing his Ph.D. in January of 1947 with a dissertation entitled The Sense and Conception of Being. Two things stand out about this dissertation. First, unlike the sense connoted in the title, this is not a work inspired by the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition of metaphysics. According to one reader, “Being, for him, is fundamentally experiential, something sensed rather than primarily conceptualized.” Another observation is that there is no presence of any post-war sensibility, or “shock-effect,” in the work. Oftentimes, an experience of this magnitude takes time to recollect and to process – but what is especially telling is that his Inward Morning, a work “written in a continuous awareness of death” consists of several

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49 IM: 162-163.
accounts of Bugbee’s time at sea. It remains a mystery as to why these experiences of the recent past did not find a way into his Ph.D. dissertation, only to surface less than a decade later.\textsuperscript{52}

The dissertation is signed by Jacob M. Lowenberg, Stephen C. Pepper, and George P. Adams. Recognizing that the Ph.D. dissertation is the work of the author and not the committee, this committee provides a very receptive audience for Bugbee’s innovative approach to philosophy – an approach existing \textit{in statu nascendi} while at Princeton.\textsuperscript{53} The dissertation abstract provides a concise, compelling account of things to come:

\begin{quote}
Th[is] dissertation attempts to work out the meaning of being, not merely as abstractly conceived, but as it arises, through special awareness of the \textit{presence} of things in their definiteness….

Ultimately we must be told what kind of world it is that either precludes or permits some fundamental, comprehensive understanding of its nature; therefore, criticism of the metaphysical enterprise must be viewed as a revision of it from within; one does not repudiate this enterprise without repudiating his position as a knower in and of the world, reflecting its nature in the way he does and does not know it.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

\textbf{The Possibility of an Empirical Metaphysics}

The question as to the possibility of metaphysics, empirical or otherwise, is perhaps \textit{the} perennial philosophical question. Bugbee’s dissertation was composed at a

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\textsuperscript{52} See Bugbee’s comments regarding his graduate studies in \textit{An Inward Morning}, p. 141: “[I]t seem to me that I left man out of account … I entirely failed to connect the meaning of existence which I was trying to bespeak with the experience of acting, of commitment, of standing forth as a man…. After five years of graduate schooling in the mode of reflection, perhaps I am ready to revert to the experience of life with men at sea, as the situation defining my task.”

\textsuperscript{53} At the risk of not seeing the tree for the forest, Bugbee’s dissertation committee – all Harvard Ph.D.’s – consisted of two members who were students of Royce, e.g. Adams and Lowenberg, as well as a metaphysical aesthetcian in the grand tradition of Whitehead, e.g. Pepper, who studied under Ralph Barton Perry. This is a committee that was quite open to the novel approach taken by Bugbee.

\textsuperscript{54} Henry Greenwood Bugbee, Jr., \textit{The Sense and the Conception of Being}, Ph.D. Dissertation, (University of California: Berkeley, 1947): page unnumbered. Hereafter referred to as \textit{SCB}. The influence of Werner Fite, in terms of the importance of the personal, reflexive nature of inquiry, is obvious:

“As the dissertation should make clear, little originality could be claimed either for the sense or the conception of being that is presented her – no more than that which might characterize the experience and reflection of an individual on a theme that should permeate the experience and thought of creatures having experience and thinking, if this thesis has its modicum of truth (\textit{SCB}: ii).”
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time when metaphysical inquiry resulted oftentimes in a “storm-center of controversy.” Bugbee recognizes that an anti-metaphysical position is a metaphysical position because in order to render metaphysical knowledge impossible, a conception of the world that is non-susceptible to metaphysical scrutiny must be explicitly conceived or, at the very least, implied. In short, metaphysics must be “self-substantiating” – the possibility, or impossibility, of metaphysics requires a metaphysic.

Bugbee’s approach to this question, qua empirical, is developed infra-experimentally, “in the making, … follow[ing] the actual plan of discovery and disclosure enforced by strict adherence to the empirical method….“ An “empirical” approach to metaphysics has taken a back-seat to a “rationalistic” approach because the former is viewed as unable to exhibit the comprehensiveness required in order to capture reality as a whole. Although human knowledge is manifestly incomplete, experience does provide a rich kernel of metaphysical insight. Experience confronts us with a plethora of things – in Jamesian terms a “booming, buzzing confusion.” From Bugbee’s perspective, in our day to day dealings with things, we encounter a world present as meaningful and indubitable – “all this is inviolable before any attempt at theoretical or conceptual reduction.” The key is to observe. The American novelist, Annie Dillard, once remarked with irony that single celled organisms interact with the world in a more direct way than humans, due to the absence of mediating conceptual obstructions in “lower functioning” organisms. Our human failure to engage in direct contact with brute fact causes our conceptions to “wash off,” as Bugbee liked to say, and “break down into a

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55 SCB: 3.
56 SCB: 16.
meaningless, circular verbal chase.”

Unlike seeking recluse behind a sheer sheen of sense-data, a return to experience in the Bugbeean sense is a return to experience in its “thickness.” His vision for an empirical metaphysics is both prolific and powerful: “It balances a stress on the organicity of entities with an equal emphasis on their insularity. And it insists on viewing the world as a going concern, in which the nature of anything is as much a linear development as a cross-sectional state.”

An empirical metaphysics requires understanding reality in terms of the full reach of its cross-sectional and linear development. Considering the real as both “collective” and “distributive,” Bugbee turns to a consideration of things in their temporal dimensionality in order to move beyond any limitations imposed by the immediate present. Through a consideration of the ecstatic nature of temporally – a present, according to Leibniz that is “big with the future” – Bugbee argues that “we are faced with the conclusion that in so far as the distribution of reality is wider than any existing situation, reality as a whole cannot be construed … as itself a particular existential situation.” For that reason Bugbee is critical of systems of Absolute Idealism, as in Royce, in which the world of process becomes transfixed – a fait accompli within Absolute consciousness. In order for the “totality of fact” to exist, a dynamic world must have some how run its course. What has posed as the problem of metaphysics is not the result of any innate deficiency of human awareness, “it is at least the obdurate dynamicity of things that precludes their forming a reality that is whole in its extent…. Bugbee’s empirical approach to metaphysics moves in a counter direction to the Lockean version

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57 Ibid.: 17. See infra where Bugbee refers to the importance of knowers “seeing eye to eye.” This notion of an encounter while seeing “eye to eye” will take on personal significance in The Inward Morning.
58 SCB: 18.
60 SCB: 26
of “something, I know not what.” Instead, Bugbee pursues a course more along the lines of an Aristotelian consideration of immanent first principles:

The focus of metaphysical attention is not characterized by a direct stretching and extension until it blankets an all inclusive situation, but rather by an intensive analysis of the concrete world of our experience until those of its features which are ultimate, and so engaged in any possible situation are elicited into view.61

First principles are principles constitutive of the “immanent intelligibility” of things. Bugbee’s attention to first principles as intensively immanent enables him to avoid the pitfalls of an extensive metaphysics of the whole. However, it is important to point out that first principles, due to the fact that they necessarily arise out of actual experience, remain, in an important sense indemonstrable: “their discovery [can] never be merely cognitive.”62

Bugbee presents brief categorical scheme of first principles in order to set the stage for his later analysis of Being. The first principles highlighted therein – relationality, insularity, quality, and dynamicity – provide only an anticipatory glance of the vision to be explicated. Nevertheless, the focus remains steadfast in its commitment to empirical concreteness. Unlike Nietzsche’s claim in Twilight of the Idols that the concept of being represented the last gasp of an evaporating reality, Bugbee’s sense of being is neither arid nor dialectical: “[L]et our invocation be that we may see what we are talking about. But sometimes the plainest of things is the hardest to see. Thus the ultimate condition of any experience or knowledge may pass unnoticed, – unreflected upon, and without selective empirical recognition.”63

61 Ibid.: 28.
62 SCB: 28. See p. 34, where, regarding indemonstrability of first principles, Bugbee indicates that our knowledge is descriptive: “[A]ll that cognition is essential to is their apprehension.”
63 SCB: 51.
Unlike the Aristotelian-Scholastic conception of prime matter, Bugbee’s conception of a first principle is not that of a transcendental cause or ground: “Matter can be nothing, if it is not the definite materials experienced, which come in pieces, lumps, masses, portions, and parts…. Materials as known to us are known in terms of their concrete properties.” Reality is also fundamentally relational – a non-relational situation can only be conceived in abstracto from some relation. Insularity, qua first principle, is indicative of the discreteness and plurality the universe exhibits. Insularity, despite any appearance of separateness, is at bottom relational – insularity provides the condition that enables the degree of separateness or independence of an entity which, in turn, enables the possibility of their relatedness. A quality, on the other hand, is constitutive of a “center of definiteness.” Qualitative definiteness provides the basis of relatedness in so far as the unique structure of a thing is the result of qualities organically related in a way that is inherent as opposed to accidental. The principle of dynamicity causes us to undergo the experience of being “thrust ahead.” Despite recourse to gerunds and verbs, language is necessarily strained when it comes to accounting for the transitive character of the universe. Although reticent in his treatment of each of these principles, Bugbee focuses the most attention upon dynamicity: “A thing is as much a center of energy as it is a center of qualitative definiteness … a creative advance … hylicly singular and related beyond itself.

Bugbee’s intent is to delineate a scheme of first principles that will facilitate his understanding of being as intensive. Being, qua intensive, is contrary to the notion of reality as an extensive whole. Echoing Aquinas’ comment that all conceptions are resolved in being (ens), Bugbee states: “Being is the principle of inclusion of the items of

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64 Ibid.: 33.
65 SCB: 37-38.
reality ... as a principle of inclusion it is all-inclusive, without implying that reality exists as a whole.... It is because this principle applies to any reality, rather than to a limited all, that it is all-inclusive, comprehensive in its embrace." Bugbee’s treatment of being qua intensive is crucial to his project of establishing an empirical metaphysics. Whereas an extensive conception of being necessarily results in the problem of the inability of a finite self to grasp “the whole” empirically, an intensive view of being – by considering being as a “root concept”— allows an intensive wholeness that is sui generis. It is worth quoting Bugbee at length on this point:

Being is undifferentiated; there are no degrees of being, no qualitative shades, no islands of being, no differential relational systems. Being gives to reality a uniformity and simplicity which is not that of singularity, a cohesiveness that is neither contiguity or continuity, it gives it completeness and self-containedness which is not systematic comprehensiveness, nor quantitative totality, and a perfection that is not the realization of any end. [Being] is eternal in the sense that it is a-temporal; it is infinite, not in the sense of indefiniteness, but in the sense that the categories of limitation are not germane.... Such is the ontological wholeness of reality. Being is absolute. The extensive wholeness of reality is founded on an intensive wholeness.

Much like Hegel intimated in the Phenomenology of Spirit, the world is intensively present whenever there is anything present at all – to the extent that something is presented as incomplete, a nascent sense of its completeness is revealed at the same time. At the risk of saying too much, an empirical, intensive metaphysics views the world as being pre-reflectively given all at once. The ramifications of this insight, will take Bugbee far into the reaches of experiential philosophy: “[T]he basis for the metaphysical perspective of any actual or possible situation must be at least theoretically accessible in any ... such situation that are accessible to us.”

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66 Ibid.: 44, 45. See also, p. 47: As a “root concept,” the principle of being is “concretely manifested wherever, or whenever, there is anything at all....”
67 SCB: 45-46. Emphasis added.
experience of the concrete world provides the stimulus for metaphysical speculation—philosophical reflection must be tied to the actual situation in which we find ourselves. Paul, one of the major characters in Norman MacLean’s novel *A River Runs Through It*, sounds very much like Bugbee when he says: “All there is to thinking … is seeing something noticeable which makes you see something you weren’t noticing which makes you see something that isn’t even visible.”69 Whenever there is a conscious recognition of presence, we stand within the presence of being – if only latently understood.

The Direct and Immediate Apprehension of Being

In order to understand being intensively, we must begin with presence. Sounding much like Heidegger – whom Bugbee had not read at this stage in his development – he writes: “It is the presence of things in their definiteness which occasions the sense of being.”70 As the sine qua non of our awareness of things, presence is “inescapable” – but for that very reason, the experience of presencing per se can assume the character of a “monotonous undertone,” concealed by virtue of its very familiarity. How do we go about raising this muted undertone to a level of resounding audibility?

Resisting the pull of the purely practical and the lure of the material are necessary first steps. As our American experience becomes characterized less by meandering pathways and more by speeding highways, we run the risk of becoming blind to that which is closest to us – “let[ting] the universe pass by, just as one can speed up getting from here to there to the neglect of the country lying between.”71 Our practical

69 Norman MacLean, *A River Runs Through It* (University of Chicago Press, 1976): 92. See SCB, p. 51: “But sometimes the plainest of things is the hardest to see.” The fact that the setting for *A River Runs Through It* is Montana – and that it is concerned with fly fishing – is interesting in terms of its potential relevance to Bugbee’s thought.

70 SCB: 52.

orientations and our material pursuits cause us to become numb and presence to become mute.

Our tendency to abstraction is another source of the loss of the primacy of presence. As Whitehead was quick to point out, we live our life under the sway of dominant abstractions which reduce the wealth of detail associated with the particular under a determining rubric. However, there is no set of abstractions adequate to articulating the rich dimensionality of life! According to Bugbee, we must regain a Cusanus-like orientation where the center is everywhere and the limit is nowhere. Much like the orientation we associate with that of a child, any recognition of the sense of being requires “the transition from an egocentric to a cosmocentric point of view.”

Despite the necessity of stepping back at times from our intimate involvement with the world – taking refuge in the pragmatic, the material, and the abstract – the experiences of these prior involvements are not disposed of – the are reinscribed within a full conception of being. Scientific investigation supplies a perfect example. Regardless of the methodological constraints required for scientific discovery, there remains a deep attachment to sheer factuality. As Bugbee explains it:

[T]hat curiosity exercised within the precincts of science is a special case of philosophical curiosity, and the wonder that must grow through engaging in the scientific enterprise is potent with a kind of wonder, bordering on reverence, that is philosophically fundamental. This is not reverence for science, but for what science is getting at, and steeping itself in…. It is an experience of being that is meant here, of the presence at all of reality in its definiteness, of the unanalyzable and utterly unaccountable actuality of anything whatsoever that may be discovered … or anything else discoverable.

Yet no person is simply a scientist, an accountant or a carpenter – every practical orientation is “shot through” with a concern for ends that are non-utilitarian. As Aristotle

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72 SCB: 59.

73 SCB: 60-61.
is famous for saying, “All men by nature desire to know.” In Bugbeean terms, an “obdurate objectivity” provides the backdrop for any human undertaking: “Wherever a man gets in and takes hold of something with persistence, sensitivity, curiosity, receptiveness, imagination and some degree of reflectiveness, he is moving towards a sense of being.” This sense of being may come unexpectedly – like a thief in the night – but oftentimes our experience of being is like a continuous murmur or halo that surrounds the most commonplace. To hear the murmur or experience the halo, we must adjust our look to an oblique, or “retrospective backhand,” perspective so that the presence of the commonplace can slip into our purview. Presence does not withhold itself by residing behind a phenomenal screen – “things are manifestly on the common plane of being, they are in a sense universal; therefore the sense of being is a walking with simplicity and alertness in the presence of this universe…. [T]he silence with which the world sings … articulates being as well as anything else.”

For Bugbee, attending to the ontological dimension of presence brings us to the threshold of philosophy. Philosophy is born out of the experience of presence – Why is there anything at all? – as well as the resulting sense of wonder that bursts upon us with the realization that resonates within this question. As Aristotle indicated, wonder and mystery accompanies the realization “that things are as they are.” This is not a reason to embrace despair, for we are now well poised for a positive apprehension of things qua beings – instances of a manifest presence that is determinate in its own right.

74 SCB: 63.
75 Ibid.: 67, 72. See also p. 72: “Being is both cosmic and one-dimensional.”
The Field of Value Experience

Bugbee’s concept of being arises out of an initial, concrete empirical apprehension of things. His is a full-bodied notion of being – a conception realized within the order of sense perception. Bugbee’s interrogation of the realm of sense perception anticipates his later experiential approach:

If it should be asked how to proceed and what to attend to if we were to encounter being, face to face, perhaps no better answer could be found than by attending to the stars, the living air, the moving waters, the earth, the stretch of forests and deserts, the wild creatures in their alertness and grace, the myriad things great and little to be seen and heard and felt and meditated upon. It cannot be taken for granted that we have seen and heard such things with adequate discernment upon easy and undriving acquaintance. Intense and practiced seeing and hearing, relentless and persistent, are as fundamental in the development of the sense of being, as their cognitive equivalent…. The world of the sense of being is vivid with the infusions of sense perception.\(^{77}\)

Contrary to the tendency to abrogate sensation to a lower rung of the cognitive ladder, the *sine qua non* of Bugbee’s ontology is sensation. He refers to one dominant characteristic of sense perception as “impact.” In order to be present, something must present itself with a degree of force in such a way as to allow it to stand forth within the experiential field. Being may be constant, but “through uneven stresses the even plan of being [becomes] tilted and faulted to meet the eye.”\(^{78}\) In order to provide the justice which is due to the wide spectrum of ontological presencing, the traditional psychology of the faculties must be supplanted by a psychology of the person. For Bugbee, it is the *person* who perceives, and he or she does so using a wider array of proclivities than those offered by the traditional inventory of faculties. The *significance* of any given instance of impact must always be considered within the experiential constellation of concrete human reality.

\(^{77}\) *SCB*: 93.

\(^{78}\) *Ibid.*: 95.
Another dominant characteristic of sense experience is “poise.” Poise acts as a counter-balance to the effect of impact. The importance of poise, for Bugbee, lies in its ability to modulate the intensity of impact: “Impact and poise prescribe complementary ‘moments’ of the sense of being.” In terms of Nietzsche’s famous distinction between the Dionysian and the Apollonian, the sudden impact of the Dionysian becomes transfigured through the perspectival stance of Apollonian poise. However, the detachment characteristic of Apollonian poise is not that of Socratic alienation – any reflection upon being must arise out of, and return to, experience. For this very reason, the experience of being must be viewed as a fundamental example of “value experience” – the balanced-intensity characteristic of poise and impact leads to an experience of being “as intelligible in, through, of, and for itself.”

This “field” of value experience is vast, ubiquitous, and interstitial. As Aristotle insisted, every moment in the life of a person has a telic dimension. Value experiences are “consummatory” in the Deweyan sense of culminating in an intensive unity that is sui generis. Value experience is a key ingredient in determining the sense of being because the experience of value bespeaks the reality of the world that gives rise to them. As Bugbee well knew as an undergraduate, purely academic issues can be debated ad infinitum with armchair impunity because nothing life-threatening hangs in the balance. But when the stress of life bears down upon us, “we come to know the world in its earnestness, and implicit in such experience is the immanence of reality as a demanding and commanding presence….” Through value experience, a sense of ultimate significance is engendered through the realization of things as solid, foundational, and

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79 SCB: 97.
80 SCB: 99.
81 SCB: 103. Bugbee references the passage from scripture, “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.”
eternal. The best examples of the ultimacy of value experiences are those adverse experiences that strike with demanding magnitude. Adversity makes a devastating claim upon us through its objectivity – a fait accompli. This sense of “inexorable irreversibility” – when coupled with the determination to face life as it is – raises the specter of eternity in so far as we experience a sense of absoluteness which “though … relative to ourselves, the absoluteness is not, for it takes us up and absorbs us into itself…. [T]he sense of being is precisely this: the striking of the roots of consciousness into absolute ground … which is solid and foundational.”

The notion of being as reflected in value experience is contrary to any realistic-mechanistic conception of reality. Yet despite its initial resistance to scientific explanation, value experience need not be merely quixotic. Value experience has the potential to reflect reality on its own terms. Aristotle’s treatment of the contemplative life in Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* offers a compelling insight into the important connection between being and value experience. When Aristotle establishes contemplation as good in itself – worthy in the sense of aiming at nothing beyond itself – so that contemplation of “things noble and divine” make human being more godlike, he is affirming the intimate connection between metaphysical insight and value experience. According to Bugbee, “understanding is an end, even a supreme end, in itself, lead[ing] to the conclusion that the moment of understanding and the moment of value experience must be consummated in and through an identity of activity in so far as they represent an

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82 Ibid.: 107, 108. For the notion of the ubiquitouness of being within value experience, Bugbee was influenced by the work of Curt Ducasse (See “A Defense of Ontological Liberalism,” in *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XXI, no. 13, pp. 337-347.) For an indication of the importance of value experience in discerning the sense of being, see William James’s comment: “The inmost nature of the reality is congenial to powers which you possess (“The Sentiment of Rationality,” in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays* [Dover Publications, Inc., 1956]: 86.)”
end achievement." The implication of this thesis is that the data that attends to value experience may serve as a conduit to metaphysical insight as much as strictly cognitive data. If being is as intensively continuous and ubiquitous as Bugbee so ardently maintains, an empirical approach to being must in some sense be grafted onto being already – it is no longer necessary to resort to rarified levels of philosophical understanding.

**Anticipations of the Sense of Being: The Example of Fine Art**

Fine art provides a fertile domain for investigating the metaphysical implications of value experience. Reminiscent of Heidegger’s famous lecture, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Bugbee’s intent is to demonstrate the manner in which works of art articulate being. First, the work of art must demonstrate *impact* through its power to convey intensity and definiteness. The degree of impact a work of art has directly contributes to its presentation as an aesthetic object “being appreciable in and for itself, as occasioning value experience.” Bugbee is adamant that he is not advocating a theory of “art for art’s sake.” Through our human capacity to express value, we are all in some degree artists. Like Whitehead, who firmly believed that the constitution of experience is, at bottom, aesthetically motivated, Bugbee is intent upon showing “the capacity for the work of art to affect us with a *presence* that is pure and absorbing, in the image of being.”

Our appreciative awareness of a work of art provides the key to recreating a sense of being. By making its claim upon us, the work of art emits a degree of aboriginal

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83 *SCB*: 130.
84 *SCB*: 140.
85 *Ibid.*: 142. See *SCB*: 202 where Bugbee cites Dewey’s remark on p. 85 of *Art as Experience* (G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1980) that art “does not operate in the dimension of correct descriptive statement but in that of experience itself.”
compulsion that bespeaks a sense of intensity appropriate to being real. A work of art, through its degree of poise, is self-contained within its luminosity. Most importantly however, the work of art culminates in aprehensive unity such that it may be viewed as “hang[ing] together; its complexity and detail and the phases of its unfolding must be relevant to it.” 86 This experience of the art object as a self-contained occurrence of vivid value enables its significance to be appreciated outside of its phenomenal context in which it initially presents itself. This moment of appreciation, in which the work of art somehow steps out of its localized context, provides a key moment in Bugbee’s attempt to articulate the sense of being through the medium of value experience: “[By] lifting it as an occasion of complete significance within itself outside of the phenomenal context and postulating it in experience as a compacted being in its eternity… [a work of art exhibits] a significance of experience attained that rings with the timbre of eternity, though it is attained in the here and now, and not hereafter.” 87

Bugbee’s doctoral dissertation is replete with examples from literature and music of the way in which works of art ecstatically convey the impact of reality by “stand[ing] out in high relief …assert[ing] and substantiat[ing] itself as a definite presence.” 88 Being may be intensively continuous – albeit varying in degrees and concentrations – but when things stand out to meet the human eye, a sense of definiteness occurs that is being. Such an experience is highly personal, but not subjective: “[P]hysical things furnish us with the

87 SCB: 148, 149. See p. 157 where Bugbee uses the example of Gregorian Chant “as fully reposed and composed, with the repose and composure bestowed in the sense of that which is absolute, and held fast in joint experience, reverence, and expression.”
88 SCB: 198-199. See p. 196: The mind … seized by Moby Dick is hurled against something that will not yield, crack, or give way; that is the earnestness of reality. To apprehend it is to know the sense of being.”
language of existence…. [I]n the long run, it is each man for himself; let him take his
evidence whenever and wherever he may find it.”  

A Conception of Being

Despite his recommendation for each to follow his own way, Bugbee’s way is
marked by a keen understanding of the Western metaphysical tradition beginning with
Parmenides. Like Hegel, Bugbee finds the Parmenidean conception of “being” as a
plenum, without deficiency, to be problematic – a caricature wherein pure being is
equivalent to pure nothing:

If the proposition that only being is means that only being exists, then the conception of
being must be lost in the fatal attempt to postulate a simple, indeterminate ‘isness’ that
would exclude from reality any context within which the conception of being may
assume a positive meaning…. [B]eing must be distinguished from among other
categories … without denying the relevance of the other categories from which it is
distinguished.  

Contra Parmenides, Bugbee will assert the reality of the temporal wherein being
and becoming are “woven together.” Being does have a meaning other than pure Istigkeit
– being is capable of articulation in so far as “reality is ever so much more than merely
being, … being is limited, not by a nothing that still must be something in order to limit
it, but by the more than being that things are and can be.” Being, for Bubgee, has an
objective reference that is more than its ontological status.

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89 Ibid.: 201-200.
90 SCB: 218. For Hegel’s perspective on Parmenides, see The Science of Logic, trans. A.V. Miller
(Humanities Press International, Inc., 1999), p. 94: “Parmenides held fast to being and was most consistent
in affirming at the same time that nothing absolutely is not; only being is. As thus taken, entirely on its
own, being is indeterminate, and therefore has no relation to an other; consequently, it seems that from this
beginning no further progress can be made—that is, from this beginning itself—and that progress can only
be achieved by linking it on to something extraneous, something outside it.”
91 SCB: 215.
To understand the ontological basis of objective reference, Bugbee turns to Kant. Much has been written about Kant’s denial of being as a “real predicate.”92 For Kant, there is no real difference between one hundred real and one hundred imaginary thalers – in this sense, perhaps, being is not a “determining predicate … a predicate which is added to the concept of the subject and enlarges it.”93 Kant could not articulate being phenomenally within the context of his categories, but Kant did offer a noumenal depiction of being as existing an-sich. Bugbee takes Kant’s decision to ground being noumenally as an indication of objective reference:

\[\text{[T]he self existence of specific determinations is not reducible to any self-existent determinations; self-existence is, however, a positive feature of any specific determination to which we may refer…}. \text{The ontological status of these determinations defines their nature as more than specific…..}^{94}\]

Being, although not specifiable as a given instance of determination, it is conceivable as an “object of discovery” – as belonging to the ubiquity of being. We must be sensitive to the recalcitrant nature of being and its reluctance to simply succumb to definition. We must, according to Bugbee, “steadfastly bend our minds to the conception of being….”95 One of the great stumbling blocks of metaphysics and ontology is our continued dependence of the subject-predicate structure of thought and language – as Nietzsche said, we believe in god because of our belief in grammar!

The subject-predicate form of Western languages has given rise to a substance-attribute metaphysic which assumes the forms of a substantial “something” that lies behind its attributes or appearance. Bugbee is clearly against this type of metaphysical

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92 For an especially cogent account, see Oliva Blanchette, *The Philosophy of Being* (Catholic University of America Press, 2003): 111-114. According to Blanchette, “Kant failed to grasp this transcendentality as it regards being… The notion of being includes the notion of thing, but transcends it insofar as it includes an actuality as well that is distinct from the essence of a thing.”


94 SCB: 227.

orientation; “[B]eing belongs as much to the what of reality as any other feature of reality disclosed in, for, and through experience. Being is no more a matter of inference and no less a matter of direct experience than the most available specific determinations, through the presence of what is being experienced.” 96 Characterizing this view politically, Bugbee’s metaphysics is a “metaphysical democracy” – a democracy of the plurality of fact – as opposed to a “monarchy” of single-vision. As a metaphysical democracy, his metaphysics is opposed to any Aristotelian-Scholastic conception of ontological gradations, or degrees, of being. A scaled hierarchy of degree of being is absurd and constitutes a crass objectivication of “being.” Degrees of value can only be articulated within experience. We must distinguish the sheer impact of being from any normative configuration within we configure being. Bugbee’s argument against the notion of degrees of being is informed by a close reading of the appropriate sections of Aristotle’s Metaphysics. According to Bugbee, Aristotle simply confuses metaphysics with epistemology; “[E]ven if we accept [Aristotle’s] definition of degrees of truth, it must be observed that the degree of truth is relative to correct thinking about some state of affairs, and does not itself constitute any basis for postulating either ontological differentiation in reality….“ 97 Said differently, the locus of truth is in mente or in sententia – the locus of being is in omnibus rebus.

Aristotle’s notion of degree of being results in many of the same problems that plagued Parmenides. If being is conceived according to degrees, then some degree must be more essential than others. The problem is that the inessential degrees of being are only inessential when compared to an essential degree of being – a degree which can only be deemed essential when placed in contrast to the inessential. The fact that the

96 SCB: 232.
97 Ibid.: 239.
essentiality of being can be preserved only within the context of the inessential
necessarily establishes the inessential as essential – partaking of being. Any hierarchical
understanding of being is fatal to the understanding of being: “[Being] obtains in the case
of any specific determination that may be encountered, without implying [what those]
specific determinations are….98

It is such instances of “specific determination” that establish factuality as a
primordial fact and provide a hint of the Absolute: “[H]owever finite and dependent the
state of affairs may be to which we do appeal … the appeal to fact is nothing short of an
appeal to something absolute….”99 Bugbee’s point is simple and profound: Yes, we do
possess knowledge of fact and such fact confronts us in its definiteness. But with
Descartes and Kant, knowledge has lost its “empirical compulsion” – its ontological
force of determination. According to Bugbee, without any sense of compulsion, our
knowledge “is simply cast adrift unless we actually moor it to its proper mooring, which
is supplied by the metaphysical conception of being.”100 Knowledge makes contact with
the real through a direct awareness of presence – a presence which is being. Philosophy
must begin, not with technical terms, metaphysical abstractions or “second level” orders
of discourse – philosophy must begin with a consideration of the things themselves: “Lest
the simplicity of being and the abstractness of its conception be confused with vacuity or
met with indifference, let the sense of being reaffirm its significance in human

98 SCB: 251. See also pp. 252-269, where Bugbee will devote a fair amount of energy to critiquing the
Spinozistic distinction between being in-itself (esse in se) and being-in-another (esse in alio) as a
“contextual notation” in order to establish the primacy of being as being.
99 Ibid.: 271.
100 SCB: 277. See infra “Yet, curiously, Kant does not press the conception of being and its implications
sufficiently to prevent his entire [metaphysics] from assuming a downright subjectivist cast, with only the
thing in itself as an anchor to windward to secure experience from an aimless and autonomous drift through
an ontological vacuum.” One can only speculate how much Bugbee’s time spent at sea conditioned his use
of nautical metaphor.
experience.”¹⁰¹ Leaping trout in Montana, a chapel bell ringing in Harvard Yard, a kamikaze pilot in the South Pacific – all are indices of the intensive panorama of being.¹⁰² But was the profession of philosophy – what William James referred to as the “Ph.D. Octopus” – willing to embrace the earnestness of that which is simple and direct?

§
Finding One’s Own Voice:
The “Precarious Business” of Professional Philosophy

Get down as far as possible the minute inflections of day to day thought. Get down the key ideas as they occur…. Write on, not over again. Let it flow…. Don’t be stopping to jam the idea down somebody’s throat. Give it a chance. If there can be concrete philosophy, give it a chance. Let one perception move instantly on another. Where they come from is to be trusted. Unless this is so, after all is said and done, philosophy is arbitrary and idle.¹⁰³

With a freshly minted Ph.D. in hand, Bugbee entered the professoriate with a unique combination of skills and experiences. His emphasis – in both undergraduate and graduate work – upon the empirical immediacy of being, coupled with the extraordinary experience of his wartime service, combined to form the basis of an experiential approach to philosophy not seen in America since Thoreau. After a brief stint at both the University of Las Vegas at Reno and Stanford University, Bugbee would return to the east coast as an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Harvard in 1948. While at Harvard, Bugbee would forge life-long friendships, with the likes of W.V. Quine, D.T. Suzuki, and Gabriel Marcel, but his experiential approach to philosophy, like that of Socrates, was more concerned with reflection than writing – philosophical logos, as Plato indicated in the

¹⁰¹ SCB: 283.
¹⁰² I am reminded of Dewey’s quote in Experience and Nature, p. 8: “Experience denotes the planted field, the sowed seeds, the reaped harvests, the changes of night and day, spring and autumn, wet and dry, heat and cold that are observed feared and longed for…. It is “double barreled” in that it recognizes in its primal integrity no division between act and material, subject and object, but contains the both in an unanalyzed totality.”
Phaedrus, is veritably etched in one’s soul. As a result, the young Bugbee was denied tenure. A new venue was needed where his unique voice could be heard. The “big sky” panorama of Montana provided an open space conducive, both naturally and intellectually, to the arduous process of finding one’s own voice. Bugbee joined the faculty at the University of Montana in 1957 and would remain there until his retirement in 1977.

“Finding one’s own voice” is not simply a matter discovering an approach that fits one’s individual preferences – it is being receptive to that which defies categorical predetermination: “Fluency is the stylistic counterpart of the way present experience is invaded with authentic meaning. Basic meanings are not anticipated; they dawn on one.”105 Western philosophy has a long history of pursuing its quest for knowledge within what Heidegger refers to as der bestimmende Vorgriff, or “the determining pre-conception” – a structure which determines what the results of philosophical reflection will be in advance. The imposition of a determining pre-conception results in a rigid separation between pre-philosophical and “philosophical” knowledge – the latter is attainable only after a significant amount of professional propaedeutic. This divisive schism within thinking results in a bifurcation of reality that is destructive – reality most often presents itself in a manner that defies the categorical configurations of technical understanding. As Bugbee says:

104 In 1958, a year after he left Harvard, Bugbee did publish The Inward Morning: A Philosophical Reflection in Journal Form. Although, in principle, an example of scholarly output, the fact of the matter is that the form and the content of the work is contrary to the narrow standards of scholarship then prevalent at Harvard. It is unlikely that it would have satisfied the requirements of his evaluation for tenure. It is important to note, however, that in the “Acknowledgements” for An Inward Morning, Bugbee offers nothing other than praise for the Harvard Philosophy Department as well as its individual members.

105 IM: 34. The similarities between Bugbee’s conception of a “fluent reality” and Wallace Steven’s notion of a “Fluent Mundo” should be noted. For a philosophically inspired treatment of Stevens’ notion of a fluent reality, see J.S. Leonard and C.E. Wharton, The Fluent Mundo: Wallace Stevens and the Structure of Reality (University of Georgia Press, 1988) and Frank Doggett, Stevens’ Poetry of Thought (The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966).
Since [my] earliest days of philosophic study, I have remained concerned with the works of philosophers, not in themselves, but as helps to the understanding of experience. I study the works of philosophers out of an interest which subordinates theory to understanding…. It will be ever important to me to give attention to technical philosophy but I will never be able to take technical philosophy as the ultimate phase of a reflective life.”

One of the hallmarks of technical philosophy is its legion of distinctions – one of its most precious is the distinction between the universal and the particular. This distinction has been reworked many times within the history of philosophy, but in the absence of some large systematic assimilation as in Hegel, we are left for the most part with an isolated particular and a universal nominalistically conceived – a conceptual universal derived through the semantic extension of the name of a particular thing.

Bugbee, taking his bearings from the poetry of William Carlos Williams, is opposed to any intellectual distinctions proffered prior to any appreciation of the “omnirelevant” array of meanings contained within a manifest conception of reality. Bugbee embraces Williams’ assimilation of John Dewey’s pronouncement that “The local is the only universal” because it provides prima facie evidence of the felt unity that exists between a sense of meaning that is concretely instantiated yet capable of resonating well-beyond this place. The fact that Bugbee confirmed this insight while drinking hot cups of coffee in diners is not simply an example of comic relief. It is a testimonial to the power of place and its ability to contextually reveal the surplus capacity that particular things disclose, beckoning us towards a more comprehensive understanding of just what it is

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that surpasses. As Bugbee says, “Such a philosophy will not be set up like the solution of a puzzle, with all the pieces lying there before the eye. It will be more like the clarification of what we know in our bones.”

Once we begin to trace the referential character displayed by particular things, we obtain an initial sense of the “animating base” upon which we act. According to Bugbee, “[I]n so far as we are sensitive to the absoluteness of our situation, we live in a dimension of meaning which is the depth of our experience—we live in eternity.” Eternity is experientially rendered when one realizes the deep dimensionality out of which our acts resonate – the space within which our actions are imbued with a wider purpose. Acts like these may exhibit such simplicity that it is questionable whether or not this aspect of absolute dimensionality is actually known – a parent in the act of caring for a child or a sailor in the act of being alert during a night watch. In each instance, our sense of responsibility – being in the presence of that which we must be responsive to – makes a decisive claim upon us. For Bugbee, “[T]he meaning of reality is realized in true decision…. Cut off from the central nerve of responsible being, the themes of meditation fall dead.”

Once our experience becomes enlivened through being-responsive, our quotidian sense of familiarity is replaced by experiences of wonder and intimacy similar to that connoted in the Greek sense of Θαυμάζειν and Πάσχειν. Reason and wonder are not opposed – according to Benjamin Blood, they “blush face to face.” Our capacity for wonder contributes to a perpetual process of reaching increasing degrees of

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108 IM: 35. See Karsten Harries, “Descartes, Perspective, and the Angelic Eye,” in Yale French Studies, No. 49, 1973: 40: “Reality reveals itself to us as such precisely where it reveals itself to us as surpassing all forms of our representation.”
109 Ibid.: 37.
110 IM: 10.
comprehension due to our ability to progressively reinscribe our vision within a larger space of reasons. As Aristotle noted in Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, our capacity to be rational – when properly stimulated by our capacity for imaginative wonder – makes us more “god-like” by allowing us to participate in an ongoing process of increasing mental capacity: “The mind is not permitted to rest even within the narrowest limits it may circumscribe for itself.” Wonder provides a tributary-like function which facilitates an advent of awareness deeper than that which is traditionally attributed to ratiocination. This awareness is ec-static in the sense of being receptively open to the presence of things that no longer appear under the guise of mere ordinariness – things become transfigured through the intimate connection we share with them. Experience is of a diaphanous tissue of relations, exhibiting interstitial connections not conducive to being expressed in static terms. Bugbee would agree with Heidegger that we are, pre-reflectively speaking, already *Sein-in-der-Welt* – *Zunhandenheit* is a more primordial form of existing than *Vorhandenheit*. Our experiential life fundamentally consists of a process of undergoing – an *erleben*, or a living through, more than *erfahren*, or act of *traveling* by. Our world does not reveal itself as *Gegenstand* – “standing against” us like an object. Experience is the durational process by which we exist intra-worldly – in and through our world: “Experience is permeated with meaning by invasion.”

Bugbee’s conception of experience is radically different from the atomistic conceptions of Locke through Hume – his notion of experience is not that of neutral, episodic sense data registering upon some passive, film-like receptacle. Experience, for

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112 IM: 41. This experience of being invaded must not be conceived in ocular terms. Bugbee tells us it comes “from behind.”
Bugbee, is “a demand for marrow-bone truth.” Experience registers deeply within us through immersion: “Immersion [is] a mode of living in the present with complete absorption … of being comprehended and sustained in a universal situation.” Each of us, if we are fortunate, has some familiarity with an experience of this kind. Bugbee’s point is that this rich dimensionality of experience does not need to restrict itself to the esoteric and exotic – each and every moment, no matter how mundane harbors this potential:

[When] one is himself absorbed in a situation, or by it … the present which is lived in does not seem accurately conceivable as a discrete moment in a series. The present seems to expand itself extensively into temporal and spatial distances. [I]t is as if one’s perception of everything distinct were engaged in alignment with a center from which one moves to greet things knowingly. There is a continuing passage from thing to thing in which a kind of sameness or continuity of meaning deepens, – ever confirmed and ever relevant. It is not by generalization that omnirelevant, universal meaning dawns. [I]nstead of things being fixed points of reference from which and to which attention proceeds in a procession of steps and stops, there is no stopping, precisely because each and every thing is a consummation of fluency.

Once immersed in the continuous world of things-themselves – a realm of being which not filtered through the lens of theoretical raiment – commitment is felt as a matter of necessity. Bugbee is opposed to any abstract, meta-ethical perspective, or any type of “applied” ethics, which is not countenanced by any experience of immersion. This experience of being immersed in the juncture of being, and its ensuing sense of affirmative commitment, is prior to any sense of morality or immorality: “This is not to disqualify the giving of reasons, or the having of reasons for acting; it is only to suggest the comparative ‘lateness,’ and so the relative force of reasons had or given.”

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113 Ibid.: 42.
114 IM: 51-52.
115 IM: 52.
116 Ibid.: 52. See IM: 55: Following Marcel, Bugbee will emphasize the priority of “being” over “having.”
Our capacity for immersion is due to our capacity for reflection. As Plato indicated through his account of recollection, or ανεμνεσις, our capacity for sight is already there; it is a matter of turning the soul in the right direction. To the extent that we follow our unique endowment, philosophical recollection has a way of “overtaking us from behind.”117 Western thought has continually mistaken the context within which reflection occurs with the subsequent act within which reflection is epistemically justified, resulting in the neglect of what Dewey referred to as the “live creature” – the human being immersed in the creation of meaning. As Proust emphasized, human beings have an extensive reach backwards through which we have the potential recall our eternal nature. Using Marcel’s term, we are disponible – available or deeply susceptible to existing in communion with other human beings. For Bugbee, “The unconditionally essential may be reflectively approached by concentration in the experience of communion with other [humans].”118 This experience of communion was initially experienced while rowing crew, but was later intensely solidified during Bugbee’s wartime service and the various ships’ companies in which he served – especially the crew aboard the YMS 319. In the presence of these men, Bugbee learned first hand that Kant was correct – our dignity as a human being places us at a level of being that is of a different dimension than the phenomenal. What Kant failed to see is that this universal dimension of our being occurs only within the context of a concrete specificity: “[S]uch significance dawn[s] upon each one of us out of a life that is [ours] alone…. [E]ach man

117 IM: 55.
118 IM: 61.
is irreplaceable rather than ‘a value of a variable for which any other rational being may be substituted.’\textsuperscript{119}

In order for existence to be justified, each person must have some awareness of the “unconditional basis” upon which she acts. Ethical reflection must be borne out of a genuine “spirit of prayer,” binding us to the unconditional – avoiding any trappings of arbitrariness. Once shed of such artifice, life presents itself as a gift that is not simply at our disposal – we need not have been born at all! The notion of life in its fundamental sense of a gift is not new to philosophy – it extends back at least as far as when Plato in the \textit{Republic} when Socrates spoke of “the good,” \textit{Agathon}, in terms of “the child of the good” and the sun as that which “gives.”\textsuperscript{120} Whitehead was correct when he said that the history of Western philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato, but he could have been just as correct in saying that the history of Western philosophy consists of a series of \textit{mis}readings of Plato. The legacy of “the good” is a case in point. Hypostatizing “the good” as a higher “form” in Platonic heaven fails to do justice to the perpetuating dimension that Plato hoped to convey through this notion: \textit{The good gives}. This brief digression into Plato’s understanding of the good is offered in support of Bugbee’s conviction that our vocation is much less that of a knower and more that of a testifier or witness: “That which enables anything to be is \textit{no thing}, no super-thing, no ghost of a thing, yet it dwells in the necessity of things.”\textsuperscript{121} Through the act of engagement, we are able to bridge the fictitious ontological gap posited between the particular and the

\textsuperscript{119} \textit{IM}: 61-62. See also p. 190: “Chief Hill, like the Boatswain, achieved anonymity in the on-going life of the ship – defining concretely and unself-consciously the meaning of transcending oneself. I meet Saint-Exupéry in such men as these. Quiet, unassuming men.” Despite his respect for Quine, Bugbee would not agree with his former colleague’s claim that “to be is to be bound by a variable.”


\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Ibid.}: 103.
universal. Whatever we experience, we experience de facto – but de facto experience exhibits a de jure dimension in which we are impacted by the non-arbitrariness that is expressed via the de facto: “Anything we understand in its simplicity and necessity we therefore understand in its universality.” The act of bearing witness consists of a gesture of respect through which the universal and particular can emerge together as co-dimensions of experience within a locus of action. “[C]ontemplative understanding lives in generosity as the soul of necessary action.”

This approach to philosophy is anything but that of the armchair variety. To practice this type of philosophical reflection one must live in an existentially continuous manner, like Socrates – the same man in public as in private. Bugbee’s philosophy requires the engagement of a person considered as a whole – beliefs and actions are a direct reflection of a mode of comportment with reality – being is refracted through the countenance of the personal. Hence, there is a strong peripatetic dimension to Bugbee’s thought, both literally and figuratively speaking: “[M]y philosophy took shape mainly on foot. It was truly peripatetic, engendered not merely while walking, but through walking that was essentially a meditation of the place.”

This notion of “bearing witness” is essential to Bugbee’s conception of an experiential philosophy. A human being, when living authentically, undergoes an experience of “ingatheredness” – a term borrowed from Marcel. Bugbee views human being in a way quite similar to that of Heidegger as Da-Sein – a finite center of

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122 IM: 104.
123 IM: 220. See also, p. 153: “We can only bear witness to the necessity of what we do and through the action which is necessary.”
124 IM: 139.
125 See Marcel, Mystery of Being…. Cf. the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins notion of “inscape” as the locus of uniquely personal yet universal meaning: “[W]hat I am in the habit of calling ‘inscape’ is what I above all aim at in poetry. Now it is the virtue of … inscape to be distinctive.” (Gerard Manley Hopkins, Poems and Prose [Alfred A. Knopf, 1995], 146.)
disclosedness. Qua *ingathered*, a person acts in the form of a thread, holding together a central strand of meaning whose tensile strength is both deeply personal and at the same time absolute. We are again reminded of Dewey’s comment: “The local is the ultimate universal, and as near an absolute as exists.” This localized juncture of experience extends both retentively and protentively within one seamless texture of experience – much like a closed electrical circuit. Our tendency towards abstract thinking enables us to break the circuit of this rich *Lebenswelt*. Bugbee’s lifework is a personal testimonial to the fact that “To think experientially is to partake in thought of the closed circuit of reality in which we live and move and have our being.”

When one moves within this intimate circuit of meaning, any type of spectatorial stance is overcome by direct contact. The history of Western philosophy is laden with ocular metaphors. The result of this preoccupation with bi-polar, dualistic concepts, e.g. self and world, results in an ontological gap which presents itself in a way that is extremely difficult to overcome – one is never able to step out from behind one’s detached stance and engage the real. According to Bugbee, “From Hume we may learn well enough: Nothing is necessary that is *merely looked at*.” Hence, the importance of engaging in the act of bearing witness. When we experience things within the context of the immediacy of their *direct* impact, we correlatively experience our containment within a wider reality. One important aspect of seeing concretely is to engage things in such a way that allows for the complete presentation of their aesthetic vividness. Failure to do so results in an experience of a thin, abstract character. One is confronted with a name or a

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127 *IM*: 169.

128 Ibid.: 116. See also p. 126: “Necessity can have no meaning … except as we act upon it.”
metric but not something in its own right. Bugbee refers poignantly to his encounter with experiential vividness during his time at war in the Pacific theatre:

Not *such* as this, but *this*. So long as this is taken as *such as …* one has not yet responded to *this*. *This*, indeed only sinks in as we are involved with it at a level or depth appreciative of its mystery. I think of the suicide planes I witnessed; oh! They still call out to me…. 129

The testimonial experience of bearing witness is “ingathered,” or received, in the imperative mood, echoing the necessity of its meaning. For Bugbee, much like Heraclitus, experience contains a deep yet simple *logos* or structural unity – thus allowing our experience to be permeated with traces of deeper meaning. Despite the importance of his academic training in developing this insight, Bugbee’s real learning came as a result of his life aboard ship: “Simplicity in men [and things] presupposes a basic, concrete appreciation of reality in its ultimate meaning; simplicity *is* the incarnation of that meaning.”130 So silent, yet so deep is the *logos*!

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**Ontological Exigence: The Moving Center of Reflexive Receptivity**

In order to articulate this process of the localized disclosure of the universal, Bugbee turns to a discussion of Marcel’s notion of *l’exigence ontologique* – or the exigence of being. The phrase “exigence of being” is not intended in a strictly negative sense of need or lack. Yes, our modern experience, dominated by materialistic and technological modes of thought, appears to be bereft of any experience of being. But at the same time, this vague sense we have of *being bereft of being* is in some sense tied to

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129 IM: 225.
130 IM: 171. (Emphasis added.) While at Stanford, Bugbee was inspired by an essay by classicist Herman Fränkel, “Man’s ‘Emphemeros’ Nature According to Pindar and Others,” in *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 77 (1946), pp. 131-145. See page 141: “A number of tragedies confine the time of action to a single revolution of the sun and make a point of the narrow temporal compass; not so much for technical reasons, I believe, but rather to teach the lesson of man’s ἐφήμερος nature. A mortal is, body and soul, at the mercy of any one day.”
an awareness of ourselves in this bereft mode. Using Heideggerian terms, we are able to speak of a condition of *Seinsvergessenheit* only because we have not yet completely forgotten our forgetfullness. For Bugbee, “*L’exigence ontologique* … involves us essentially in a kind of movement and a kind of becoming ‘beyond ourselves.’”¹³¹ The experience of *l’exigence ontologique* originates out of a deep sense of concern for things: How is it that beings “speak” to us in a decisive manner just as we begin to receive them in a decisively responsive manner?

To answer this question, Bugbee turns to Saint Augustine – someone intimately attuned to the deep resonances echoing within experience:

> But men can ask, so that the invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made…. [I]t speaks to all; but they only understand, who compare its voice received from without, with the truth within.¹³²

This reciprocal dynamic occurring between “without and within” within the reflexive act of *l’exigence ontologique* requires a preliminary understanding of Marcel’s famous distinction between primary and secondary reflection. Primary reflection consists of analytical dissection – explaining things in terms of their basic structures in such a way that is conducive to segmentation, explanation and control. Secondary reflection, on the other hand, is *recueillement* or recuperation – seeking the higher unities associated with over-all structures, organic wholes and intelligible syntheses without which physical being would not be recognizable.

This recuperative extension of the human experience is not accomplished through an ever expansive conceptual dialectic but through consecration. By a return to the rich

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depths of our own experience, we are able to recollect a sense of unity not merely subjective – we are, at the same time, “radically claimed and sustained in being with beings.”133 Much like Saint Augustine who was lead to the notion of a created world through his exposure to beings as dependent creatures, our experience can, in turn, become transfigured through the recognition of our containment within a higher order upon which we are receptively dependent. The presence of things in their “telling significance” provides the key to this experience: “[A] light dawns upon us in the light of which we become enlightened in our relationship with [things], and they dawn on us as given in that light.”134 Through our concern with things in their conditional way of appearing, we become unconditionally claimed through a confirming experience of the radical groundedness of life. Recollection, for Marcel – as surely as for Bugbee – is not an ocular-dependent activity. Spatial metaphors must be transcended: “Recollection is doubtless what is least spectacular in the soul; it does not consist of a looking at something; it is an inward hold, an inward reflection [serving] as the ontological basis of memory – that principle of effective and non-representative unity on which the possibility of remembrance lasts.”135 In this very intramundane sense, spirit constitutes itself through becoming flesh.

Despite this criticism of attempts to map spiritual processes using spatial representations, the diagram below is an attempt to offer a provisional sketch of this process of reflexive recollection.

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135Ontological Mystery: 24. Note the “double meaning” of recollection as remembering and a reconstituting a unity.
The natural world provides a rich source of ongoing stimuli, prompting the human being to participate in an ongoing series of interactive engagements with things. As the sketch reflects, the human being, through its affective encounter with nature, becomes grafted upon the dimension of spirit – a dimension that both contains and exceeds the limits of the natural world. Through its ability to respond reflexively to a world in which it directly partakes, the self is able to exceed its physical dimensions and participate in the wider dimension of spiritual life. We happen within this happening – spirit reveals itself perspectivally through finite acts of self-disclosure. This phenomenon is simultaneously bipolar: “It is at once referential and reflexive, reflexive and referential.” The embodied, finite mind is uniquely suited to emulate spirit through its special endowment of mentality – *Geistigkeit*. As a result, finite human being is able to recollect what

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136 For a detailed phenomenological account of this interactive process, see Samuel Todes, *Body and World* (M.I.T. Press, 2001), pp. 38-39: “Perception is of something encountered in our actual experience in the world. Imagination is of something entertained merely in our imagination, and not in the world…. [B]ut our imagination is free from obstacles. *The only possible obstacle to imaginative productivity is the imagination itself.*”

Leibniz referred to as a “pre-established harmony” existing between finite mind and infinite spirit (*Geist*).\(^{138}\) By turning inward through the avenue of finite mentality, the human being is able exhibit a form of “open concentration” and enter into an expansive reservoir of spiritual being – a dimension not delimited by space and time. The realm of spirit transcends the realm of the material. The Gospel According to Saint John states this diffusive aspect of spirit as, “The wind bloweth where it listeth.”\(^{139}\)

The process whereby the self reconstitutes itself as a unity does not result in a condition of bounded, self-enclosure but a condition of permeability in which we receptively participate in the wider influx of being. Paul’s remark in 1 Corinthians 6:19 is most appropriate in this context: “You are not your own… Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.” The event of presence discloses more than that which is simply refracted through a spatial-temporal locus – nothing can be given merely at an instant. Presence bespeaks an aspect of persistence – a “spissitude,” or spiritual fourth dimension, to use a term coined Henry More, that somehow extends beyond the object. As we reflexively trace the deep contours of experience, we can witness “a progressive ‘interiorization’ to the point where man becomes a cosmic possibility.”\(^{140}\) Human spirituality does not have to mean access to another world – it could very well mean a renewed sense of intimacy with this one! George Harrison captures this rich experience of reflexive recollection from a Taoist perspective in the following:

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\(^{138}\) The use of the German word *Geist* is not intended to provide a Hegelian account of recollection. It is used to show the vital connection between our finite capacity for mentality (*Geistigkeit*) and its potential to lead to an awareness of infinite spirit (*Geist*).

\(^{139}\) John 3:8. For a clever way of expressing this important difference between the spiritual and material, see Frederick J.E. Woodbridge, *The Realm of Mind: An Essay in Metaphysics* (Columbia University Press, 1926), p. 3: “The great ship responds quickly to the rudder’s bidding, and the wind bloweth where it listeth.”

Without going out of your door,
You can know all things on earth
without looking out of your window,
you can know the ways of heaven.

The farther one travels
the less one knows
the less one really knows.

Arrive without traveling,
See all without looking,
Do all without doing.¹⁴¹

§

The De Jure Dimension of Experience: The Moment of Obligation in the Case of Job

A man who has learned to tread, wherever the foot falls, on rock bottom ... uncompromising in his demand to know the truth and to speak the truth. A man like that can make mistakes, but how can he go wrong?¹⁴²

Experience discloses spiritual values. Philosophical reflection should not result in a scheme of ideas but in the establishment of an orientation vis à vis the Absolute. Each one of us, at any given moment, irrevocably instantiates values because the self experiences its presence in the world as a “going concern” – existimo ergo sum is more basic than cogito ergo sum. According to Bugbee, “there is a definite strain of imperativeness in our experience”¹⁴³ This dimension of unconditionality, rendered explicit through praxis, lends a deeply experiential dimension to ethical reflection.

¹⁴² SCB: 181.
¹⁴³ IM: 150. For a compelling account of this presence of imperativeness, see Alphonso Lingis, The Imperative (Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 2: “How many people are there who prize only the no-self and a compassion extended to cosmic dimensions! They do not find imperatives in pressing or remote problems addressed to their minds and in the structure of instruments and organism give over to their care, but hear summons addressed to their sensibility and sensuality in the desert and the ocean, the summer and the winter, the dawn and the night.”
Ethical truth is disclosed experientially through self-defining acts: “Concrete reality dwells in the sinew of decisive action…. We respond upon finality found in things in acting necessarily.”144 This act of personal response exhibits a character which is sui generis and ontologically definitive – an “assumption of responsibility to reality in its plenitude.”145 Bugbee refers to this experiential plenum as the “moment of obligation” in experience.

Bugbee’s purpose is to lay bare “the controlling idea of a ground which can endow action with conclusive justification.”146 Holding to his distrust of ocular, spatial metaphors and empirico-deductive models of certainty, Bugbee recognizes that the results of his investigation, however foundational, may be difficult to convey:

This entire [project] is a fabric of words woven together to catch something of ‘the good.’ And the method of inquiry on which we will be depending itself reflects the conviction that the good is essentially implicit, in that thought cannot seize upon the good and hold it before the mind, as it may objects of empirical knowledge.147

A decisive clue to the experience of obligation lies in our potential to exhibit respect – to be respectful. According to Bugbee, it is our capacity for respect, rather than individual acts of showing respect, which is of primary importance. Our capacity for respect demonstrates “deep interest and absorption … from a spirit by which [we are] invaded from within….148 Respect consists of a reflexive realization of our innate propensity for spirit – a realization prompted by an objective referent. Without an

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144 *IM*: 182, 175. See Calvin O. Schrag, “The Structure of Moral Experience: A Phenomenological and Existential Analysis,” in *Ethics*, Vol. 73, No. 4 (1963), p. 258: “If the self is wrested from the intersubjective context of concrete moral action, then it becomes an abstracted and ‘lifeless’ self…. It becomes a formal determinant in a logical or epistemological scheme of things and is divested of its existential reality.”


147 *MO*: 1. See Walter J. Ong, “Personalism in the Wilderness,” in *Kenyon Review*, Vol. 21 (1959), p. 301: “This is the reason for the little narrative inserts, they convey the concerns of Bugbee’s exploration in the non-abstract forms in which these concerns must be conveyed for the good reason that there is no abstract formulation in which to catch them…. They are high developed art forms.”

objective point of reference, our respect risks being misplaced. Authentic acts of respect and reverence cut through any subjective trappings of self-interest that may be harbored by the beholder. This ability to transcend material interest potentially places respect on a level where we can begin to appreciate that which is good in itself. According to Bugbee, “Our interest is rendered disinterested.”

Respect is rooted in the recognition of the dignity of the human being as an absolute value. The “ultimate birthright” of a human being is one’s capacity to partake in the life of spirit. The moment of obligation in experience occurs when “a person is empowered to act with all [one’s] energy and resources by a spirit which can command our profoundest respect….”150 The fact that we often find the strength to face adversity with a sense of courage that far outstrips our physical capabilities is largely due to the fact that we harbor some awareness of “a basis in [our]selves deeper than anything we can muster and confer upon us by decree … that moment in which we may find immediate incentive and confirmation from within….”

Bugbee is highly critical of a “prospective” ethical stance in which one can stipulate in advance the conditions which would need to be fulfilled in order to act ethically. Ethical knowledge must be rendered experientially concrete through action – any genuine ethics cannot be derived deductively. The ethical subject must step out of the secure closure of quotidian familiarity. When obligation is felt in a deep, experiential sense, one becomes informed by a state of humility, acting “from a fund of meaning pressing upon us from within, which [we] alone can advance to the point of creative

149 Ibid.: 3. See also p. 4: “[D]isinterestedness is only possible for a person whose interest is profound; the very opposite of superficial, or causal, or optional.”
150 MO:5.
151 MO: 6-7.
resolution in action.”152 The agent provides experiential justification for her action – not through any form of wishful thinking – but due to the fact that the agent, when seized through a process of formative influx, simply cannot escape this responsibility and act otherwise. Humility is not a state of self-deprecation but a response that must be followed: Become who thou art! Through recognizing their capacity to participate in the life of spirit, human beings are able to facilitate a rich process of spiritual disclosure: “Finitude becomes illuminated and is brought to clarity by a radiance that finite perceptiveness and intelligence cannot cast upon the human condition.”153 From his years spent at sea, Bugbee realized the importance of teamwork and craftsmanship as two important ways in which spirit may be brought to life. However, spirit is spirit and, as spirit, resists being conceived solely in material terms. Oftentimes the personages who embody spirit the most display the least self-consciousness as to its presence. Spirit, like energy, is both potential and kinetic.

Bugbee’s reconstruction of the story of Job illustrates the manner in which an absolute message or “moment of obligation” can be deciphered within the course of everyday things and events. Oftentimes our manner of living day to day leaves us deaf and mute – unable to hear and to speak about the world in which we symbiotically co-exist. In the context of this impoverished state, Bugbee offers the following reflection:

Yet—perhaps even when so situated, some things need to be said, await being discovered in a way of saying them…. Perhaps some things need to be said; and it might even be as well to set out from a sustained reticence to speak…. [R]eticence also seems attuned to the quiet of heaven-and-earth, the unprejudiced silence of things…. [I]t is a measure that makes for reflection, and finding out what we make of things, in the course of having to do with them. In a mortal life.154

153 Ibid.: 12.
Bugbee’s point here is to emphasize the importance of what Heidegger intended by the term *Gelassenheit* – a process of letting things speak from themselves in the sense of φάινεσθαι – as they fundamentally appear. Instead of trying to subject nature to the rack of explanation in a Baconian sense, we should instead try to engage in a kind of “mutual address” with things. To the extent that one struggles with nature – trying to bring it within the purview of a determining fore-conception – one will never achieve the Thoreuvian objective of hearing things speak “without metaphor.” It is interesting to note that certain Native American languages have specific conditions at which time it is necessary to refrain from speaking – those situations in which participants perceive their situation to be governed by relationships which are ambiguous and unpredictable. When a thing is allowed to speak without metaphor, it resonates at at several layers of intonation. According to Gerard Manly Hopkins, one “knows the beauty of our Lord by it. Its inscape is mixed of strength and grace.”\(^{155}\)

The story of Job has become in many ways a commonplace. Job’s mettle is tested in order to prove his faith. The scales of justice seem to be tipped without reason. The significance of Job’s response is that despite the complete absence of any material evidence to the contrary, he remains open to an understanding of cosmic justice as mysterious and resistant to the coordinates of an anthropocentric moral compass – “No man knows the way to it; it is not found in the land of living men.”\(^{156}\) Job must make sense of his condition of being God-forsaken in a most personal way: “It is through their

\(^{155}\) Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems and Prose*, ed. W.H. Gardner (Penguin books, 1979): 120. See also, infra., p. 21: “This busy working of nature wholly independent of the earth and seeming to go on in a strain of time not reckoned by our reckoning of days and years but simpler … was like a new witness to God…."

\(^{156}\) Job 28:13.
interpretation, and only through the bearing they thus implicitly or explicitly exert upon significance, that they acquire the force of affliction.”157

Job’s problem – the problem of the universal experience of undeserved ill-fortune – is a perennial question that spurs philosophical reflection at a deeply personal level. Josiah Royce stated the matter this way: “Quite other speech is due to men and women when they are wakened to the higher reason of Job by the fierce anguish of our mortal life’s ultimate facts. They deserve either our simple silence, or, if we are ready to speak, the speech of people who are ready to speak, the speech of people who inquired as Job inquired.”158

The turning point in Job’s life occurs at the moment of his encounter with the presence of God reflected through the tempest, or whirlwind. Job experiences a revelation in the form of a vision. The space of readiness for this revelation has been prepared not through any sense of abject downtroddenness, hateful resentment, or loss of faith. Job is open to revelation through his capacity to engage in a fundamental mode of mutual address:

Simply it is the vision of things: the things of heaven-and-earth, dramatized in their emergent majesty, wonder, and inviolable reserve. But seen in the mode of this, their being. And seen as if, for the first time, yet as belonging to a domain, in which dominion (not domination) reigns, forever and ever; the dominion of being itself. 159

The lesson to be learned from the story of Job is the need to transcend rational explanation and embrace the realization of an absolute source of things. The openness embraced by Job – a mode of comportment that we too can choose to embrace – is the key to achieving a kind of grace which has a cleansing effect, recalling us to our senses:

157 *A Way of Reading the Book of Job.*
159 *A Way of Reading the Book of Job.*
“Thinking dedicated to essential truth seems consummated only as it is graced … [by] an unanticipated precipitation of meaning.”¹⁶⁰ Job is able to effectively achieve some type of stasis within the life of spirit by reinscribing the sheer immediacy of the present – an immediacy expressing what was there all along in advance of explicit interpretation – within the context higher of the unity of secondary reflection. As Job realized at the end of his ordeal: “I have spoken about great things which I have not understood…. I knew of thee only by report, but now I see with my own eyes. Therefore I melt away….¹⁶¹ Thought is a foreign medium here. What is perceived at first per speculum et in aenigmate is later seen “face to face” – what begins as a partial view is destined to seek a glimpse of the whole. T.S. Eliot in his poem, The Dry Salvages, intimates this rich dimension of experience through which one becomes graced by responding to the call of a “non-contingent destiny” which is ours to fulfill:

We had the experience but missed the meaning,  
And approach to the meaning restores the experience  
In a different form, beyond any meaning  
We can assign to happiness. I have said before  
That the past experience revived in the meaning  
Is not the experience of one life only  
But of many generations—not forgetting  
Something that is probably quite ineffable….¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ IM: 170. Cf. Martin Heidegger, “Der Spiegel Interview” in Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker, ed. Thomas J. Sheehan (Precedent Publishing, 1981), p. 57: “[P]hilosophy will be unable to effect any immediate change in the current state of the world. This is true not only of philosophy but of all purely human reflection and endeavor. Only a god can save us. The only possibility available to us is that … we prepare a readiness for the appearance of a god…."
¹⁶¹ Job, 42:3-6.
§

Recollection and Homecoming: Wilderness as Sublime

There is an incessant influx of novelty into the world, and yet we tolerate incredible dullness…. We do not believe that a tide rises and falls behind every man which can float the British Empire like a chip if he should ever harbor it in his mind.

The life in us is like the water in a river. It may rise this year higher than any man has known it, and flood the parched uplands…. It was not always dry land where we dwell.163

The story of Job underscores the importance of the sublime – a category of major ontological significance. The sublime has a rich history. According to Longinus, "Sublimity is … the image of greatness of soul. [M]an’s mind often overleaps the very bounds of space…. [T]he Sublime lifts [us] near to the great spirit of the Deity."164 For Bugbee, the sublime is noumenally constitutive of phenomenal existence – giving our life a sense of eternal sameness and unity amidst renewed experiences of discovery. As in the case of Job, the sublime abruptly obtrudes into our experience of everydayness from time to time. What may at first appear as a catastrophic disruption harbors the potential to become "the very acquiescence of spirit."165 As Kant indicated, the sublime is present in those instances in which our experience conveys a sense of the infinite. To understand how the sublime is experientially rendered, it is necessary to briefly revisit Bugbee’s appropriation of ontological exigence in which ontological truth is reached infra-experientially – one must in a sense lose oneself in order to enter into the more complete reality of the self. This idea of pulling back from everyday things in the pursuit of the eternal is the meaning behind Socrates comment in the *Phaedo* that philosophy is a preparation for death. For Bugbee, the experience of the sublime provides a source of orientation resulting in a “wittingness of ourselves and things – together – in the mode of

165 *The Philosophical Significance of the Sublime*: 56.
This experience of finality resists articulation and must be approached obliquely through concrete instances of testimony and witness. Yet, despite the oracular, mysterious nature of what is disclosed, an experience of “karmic lawfulness” is somehow conveyed. Take the case of Job. When Job cries out for understanding, he does not receive any type of rational explanation *per se*. Job is addressed at length in terms of *the things of this world* and their nature as beings *created* by God. If Job is enlightened in any way, it is not by reason of having been informed of anything specific. There exists a compelling silence as to the question of justice anthropomorphically conceived. It is this very silence which creates the space for a deeper reconciliation – Job’s sense of justice is cosmically transfigured in the light of faith:

> And the story seems something like this: as we take things, so we have them; and if we take them in faith, we have them in earnest; if wishfully — then fantastically; if willfully, then stubbornly; if merely objectively, with the trimmings of subjectivity — then emptily; and if in faith, though it be in suffering, yet we have them in earnest, and it is really them that we have.\(^{167}\)

This sense of being “co-articulated” with everything *in earnest* is our alpha and omega – both our birthright and our destiny. I feel a vague yet compelling sense of a need to reconnect with something, to become the person I am somehow meant to be. For this reason, the achievement of one’s destiny is much like a homecoming of sorts. Although the dimension of futurity is crucial here, the future can only be arrived at through a past wherein our mutuality with things is underwritten. Homecoming is fundamentally a future oriented process in which one re-arrives at our autochthonous past. For Bugbee, homecoming is the path through which our primordial sense of the sublime is experientially reenacted through a concrete relational sense he calls *wilderness*:

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\(^{166}\) *Ibid.*: 57.

\(^{167}\) *The Philosophical Significance of the Sublime*: 59.
“Philosophy is not a making of a home for a mind out of reality. It is more like learning to leave things be: restoration in the wilderness, here and now.”

Wilderness has become an active topic of philosophical discussion. Current discussions of wilderness continue to make the mistake of viewing wilderness in terms of its *separateness* from culture and civilization – needing to be preserved for recreational, aesthetic or ecological value. The notion of the human being *as* wilderness, however, has a rich, if understated, history. The relation between exterior wilderness and its interior correlative in human consciousness is noted by Perry Miller in his famous book *Errand into the Wilderness*: “They looked in vain in history [and theology] for an explanation of themselves…. Thereupon, these citizens found that they had no other place to search but within themselves … fill[ing] it with meaning by themselves and out of themselves.”

Unfortunately, the space of meaning of both nature and human being has been determined largely through a Baconian-Cartesian pre-conception of externally related matter in motion. The importance of wilderness, for Bugbee, lies in responding to a call that comes from within as well as without – holding the key to shaping our destiny as a people. Spatial metaphors that depict any form of “simple-location” are inappropriate here. We must resist the tendency, using a phrase of Whitehead, to divide “the seamless coat” of experience. The reconnective integration with our wider reality provides the key to our homecoming:

This, so far as I can tell, is the theme which unifies my own life. It enfolds and simplifies, comprehends and completes. Whenever I awaken, I awaken into it. It carries with it the

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gift of life. And it lives in the authenticity of every authentic gift, every true blessing confirms it deeper; it is always with me when I come to myself.\textsuperscript{170}

Bugbee’s approach to wilderness is best revealed through the Thoreauvian insight that “in Wildness is the preservation of the world.”\textsuperscript{171} We must step back from the single vision of what Heidegger referred to as \textit{Bestand} – the exclusive subsumption of nature to human enterprise. Reality, for Bugbee, is a “depthless mystery” and, qua wild, ultimately resists conceptualization. As Nietzsche noted with regard to the Dionysian, we project an artificial, illusory superstructure over the surface of the tumult, and through habituation and consensus, this illusion quixotically becomes fixed. This explains Bugbee’s propensity towards the sea as one of the primary manifestations of wilderness – the dynamism of the ocean provides a compelling example of the underlying fluency of reality itself.

In short, we must let nature speak as it has spoken before. If wilderness is given the chance to speak, “it may lie closer to the whence of speaking than to the thematization of a speaking about.”\textsuperscript{172} The whence from which Wilderness speaks is the realm of eternal “foreverness” – the voice of our eternal past which spoke to Job. Given the commodified relationship to the natural world that currently holds sway, how can such an experience of wilderness on its own terms be recollected? According to Bugbee, “[Perhaps] the wilderness left to us is itself our vestigial hope of being instructed in such

\textsuperscript{170} \textit{IM}: 128. See also, p. 146: “At the heart of our ‘metaphysics’ must lie the clear strain of responding to a call.” For a remarkable account of Heidegger’s notion of homecoming, see Robert Mugerauer, \textit{Heidegger and Homecoming: The Leitmotif in the Later Writings} (University of Toronto Press, 2008). Like Bugbee, Heidegger views originary homecoming as an arrival at “the giving that gives … stepping out of metaphysics to the origin (p. 334.)”


How so?—By pointing to the “hidden bulk” of the wild that is implicated in our very being. Unfortunately, no metaphysical sleight of hand can successfully avert the most obvious fact:

[W]e are there as on the spot with respect to the meaning of what we behold…. One is brought to realize one is held within the embrace of what is proffered in its being proffered. No behind or beyond the things themselves…. The givens of life are laid down. The foundations of the world are laid. Things are in place and stand firm. Beings stand forth on their own. They do not ask our leave. They invite mutuality.174

The mutual partnership that Bugbee envisions with wilderness is not that of managerial oversight – it consists of a process wherein “the perceived and the perceiver enter into the working of the world: things in their meaning as responded to, taking shape.”175 The referential and the reflexive are achieved in unison. Referentially speaking, nature is primordially given. Reflexively speaking, the perceiver is “sponsored from within a depth underlying our own ability to respond.”176 This ability to respond from a greater source serves as our foundation for a non-egoistical version of “self-respect” in which we are “ordained in responsible relationship with beings being given into our keeping in the very presencing of the world.”177

As implied through Plato’s doctrine of recollection or ἀναμνήσις, we are co-implicated with other beings. Wilderness does not reside at a distance from us either spatially or conceptually. Through the process of experiential immersion we have the

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173 Ibid.: 617.
174 Wilderness in America: 619.
175 Wilderness in America: 619. For a case study of “land management” issues from a Bugbean perspective, see Scott Friskics, “Dialogue, Responsibility, and Oil and Gas Leasing on Montana’s Rocky Mountain Front,” in Ethics & the Environment, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2003: 8-30. “In a society driven by self-interest, greed, and fanatical obsession with growth and progress for their own sake … nothing requires more work than the ongoing struggle to respect things by leaving them be and letting them speak for themselves (p. 28).”
176 Wilderness in America: 620.
177 Ibid.: 620. Our relationship with nature is key to our relation ship with other human beings: “What can stand to the mutuality of man and nature can be affirmed in the relations between men….. And without respect for nature man cannot stand, not even in the mutual regard for men.”
potential to recognize “nature [as] with us more surely than we know….“\textsuperscript{178} Beings are bound through an act of ontological creation – the meaning of \textit{religio} as a “binding together” should not be lost sight of: “The truly creative deed of man seems to be that of which he becomes lucid to himself as the creature of creation…. [C]reation is inexpugnably mysterious, and can only be understood through participation in it.”\textsuperscript{179} Nietzsche understood the reflexive nature of creativity not as an ideal to be approximated but as an activity through which we are self-constituted. Once this profound insight is embraced through witness and testimonial, we have the potential to become relationally transfigured. This form of transfiguration must be “understood” dynamically – in spiritual as opposed to physical terms: “It appears as that which dawns and is in dawning.”\textsuperscript{180} Through a kindred relationship with things, human beings and animating things co-emerge because things possess a depth through the indefinite ways they tie together a world and the manifold ways in which they elicit engagement: “The mystery of each thing is the mystery of all things; and this – not generalization or the broadening of our scope of attention to wider and wider complexes of things, is the foundation of the idea of universe: the omnirelevance of the experience of something as sacred.”\textsuperscript{181}

Each concrete event of experience is pervaded by some indeterminate sense of partaking of a wider indeterminate reality – a Jamesian \textit{fringe}. If one traverses both the vertical horizontal axes of experience – from a “this” to a “more than this” – one


\textsuperscript{180} \textit{Thoughts On Creation}: 134.

approximates some sense of total inclusiveness. Wilderness, in the Bugbean sense, “serve[s] as the mystical unifying core of a spiritual tradition … [a] nameless unifying principle and unquenchable source of mystery and wonder.”

Through the hegemony of commodification, this dense world of associations surrounding things has largely been lost – what Heidegger referred to as the relational context of “things-ready-to-hand” has been eclipsed by “things-present-at-hand.” Our world is populated with antiques, mementos, and commodities. The deep connection between things and consciousness must be recollected referentially and reflexively. The task of philosophy is to begin with the momentous act of engaging in radical reflection upon pre-conceptual experience in its depth and breadth and then – using a phrase of Husserl – transparently “self-activate again:”

Experience must continue underground for some time before it can emerge as springwater, clear, pure, understood. And reflection is a trying to remember, a digging which is pointless if it is not digging down directly beneath where one stands, so that the waters of [one’s] life may re-invade the present moment and define the meaning of both.

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183 IM: 140. See Edmund Husserl, Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology trans. W. R Boyce-Gibson (Collier Books, 1962): 20. See also Henry G. Bugbee, “Loneliness, Solicitude, and the Twofold Way in which Concern Seems to be Claimed,” in Humanitas, Nov. 1774: “Remembrance is a work of solitude … a heeding of what comes to us that engages with our present on terms more sure and firm than terms we might assign or comprehend.”
Conclusion

The Religious Dimension of Experience: Fertile Ground in the Recent American Landscape

“[L.]et a man fall into his divine circuits, and he is enlarged. Obedience to his genius is the only liberating influence.”

Emerson

Nicholas Rescher, in a recent study of the state of professional philosophy in North America, makes some rather bleak observations:

The prominence of specialization gives a more professional and technical caste to contemporary American philosophizing…. Its increasing specialization has impelled it toward the ivory tower. Turning to society at large, it must be said emphatically that American philosophers do not exert influence. The fact is that the condition of the American philosophy professoriate is still very much a matter of live white males teaching about dead ones.¹

The accuracy of Rescher’s indictment is obvious to anyone inhabiting the landscape of 21st American Century philosophy. Despite the proliferation of abstractness and technique in philosophy today, there is a small cadre of American philosophers – albeit marginalized in varying degrees – that deserve to be recognized for their efforts to engage in a sustained investigation of experience in depth. The philosophers are John E. Smith, Robert O. Johann, Carl G. Vaught, John M. Anderson, and Robert C. Pollock. This list could have been populated differently, but this select group of five American philosophers – all “contemporaries” of Henry Bugbee – are particularly useful in terms of

¹ Nicholas Rescher, “American Philosophy Today,” in Review of Metaphysics, Vol. 46, No. 4 (1993): 732, 733, 731, 718. See the “Preface,” to Essays in Philosophy (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1962) for a compelling reaction against this current tendency: “Since philosophy has always included the exploration of man’s spirit, the present dissatisfaction with those views which reject the spirit expresses not a theological need, but rather a deep sense that philosophy itself has been mutilated by the analytical and empirical movements of the recent past.” The preface was the work of John M. Anderson, Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., and Stanley H. Rosen.
their ability to collectively illuminate the major themes surrounding the religious
dimension of experience.²

**John E. Smith: A Return to Experience in Its Religious Dimensionality**

[T]he divine self can be present in experience at two points—at the point where the self believes
it has experienced the ultimate purpose of its life … and secondly, where the self experiences its
total reaction to life describable both by the self and others as intensive quality.³

No American philosopher has championed the need for “a return to experience”
more than John E. Smith: “The major intellectual task of the present is the recovery of
experience from the distortions to which it has been subjected, and the development of a
theory of experience that will express adequately its nature and proper place in the total
scheme of things.”⁴ An adequate account of experience is required in order to express its
religious nature. Although Smith’s scholarly output has been nothing less than
prodigious, his focus upon the religious dimension of experience serves as the mainstay
of his research. Like the periodic table of elements which comprise all that physically
exists, the religious dimension of experience “forms a continuous and pervasive
background for all we think and do.”⁵

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² Regretfully, in the interest of space, I must omit the popular writer Sam Keen. Prior to embarking on a
career in journalism, Keen was a professor of Philosophy and Theology who specialized in Marcel. His
writings on Marcel represent some of the finest examples of Marcellian scholarship produced in America.
Marcel's Thought” In *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, eds. P. Schilpp and L. Hahn (Open Court
also replete with Marcelian themes, especially the reflexive interiorization of experience and the primacy of
intersubjective being. See Inward Bound: Exploring the Geography of Your Emotions (Bantam Books,
1980) and Hymns to an Unknown God: Awakening the Spirit in Everyday Life (Bantam Books, 1994).
³ John E. Smith, “The Experiential Foundations of Religion,” in *Reason and God: Encounters of
Philosophy with Religion* (Yale University Press, 1961), 183.
1, no. 1 (1980), p. 16. For a comprehensive listing of Smith’s publications, see *Reason, Experience, and
From Smith’s perspective, the theory of experience bodied forth by classical empiricism cannot allow for the manifestation of experience in its religious dimensionality. Classical empiricism formulates its “theory” of experience within a determining pre-conception – what experience must be in order to qualify as experience. Instead of focusing upon the continuous nature of experience as lived, traditional empiricism developed a theory of experience based upon, to use a phrase of Dewey, “reflected products” – criteria imposed from within the determining pre-conception and not from experience itself. The restriction of experience to sensation leads to the banishment of much of what we actually encounter. Had the classical empiricists paid sufficient attention to experience in its pre-reflective continuity, more emphasis would have been placed upon transitive relations. As James clearly recognized, the traditional penchant for contriving analytic distinctions within experience leads to a focus upon external relations – with an emphasis upon atomic fragments at the expense of the connective relationships existing between such “fragments.”

In order to recover dimensions of experience truncated by the classic conception, a reconception of experience is required. The most decisive piece of this reconception is the denial that experience consists of a “tissue of subjectivity” – immediate to the subject and existing in contrast to the “external world.” This “immediacy” attributed to experience was an attempt to terminate the “quest for certainty” by providing the foundation needed in order to establish a bed rock of epistemic truth. The unfortunate consequences of this misguided quest are solipsism or skepticism – the subject is forced back to the “subjective” side of the ontological gap.
As Smith is quick to point out – there is no passive spectator who occupies a view from nowhere. All experience is mediated in some degree through the human dependence upon signs. As Royce made clear in *The Problem of Christianity*, interpretation serves as a necessary link between sensation and conception – experience contains meanings that are the result of varying degrees of determination supplied by the subject. This break from the confines of the traditional theory of experience has powerful implications:

Once the intuitive certainty of the internal is abandoned, the way is prepared for understanding experience as the medium for the disclosure of a reality which enjoys a tenure beyond the experiencing subject. A long standing bias is reversed; instead of the world “taking place” in “experience,” experience takes place in the world and is, correspondingly, of that world which is a major factor in bringing it about.  

Smith focuses upon the pervasive quality of an experience. Experience is not registered *überhaupt* – experience is felt *hic et nunc*. As we experience events in the world as sublime or sacred, *that* experience is “shot through” with a defining quality and is disclosive of an emergent reality existing in its own right. The religious dimension of experience is present within the context of those situations “in which man experiences both the concern for, and question about, the ground and goal of his being and all being.” The experience of God is not revealed *ab extra* through a transcendent act of sheer self disclosure. God appears *in medias res* – any experience of God is at the same time an experience of something else. Experience in its qualitative pervasiveness provides the “experiential roots” which must be traced, eventually leading us to an experience of God.

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7 *Ibid.*: 201. See also John E. Smith, *Religion and Empiricism* (Marquette University Press, 1967), p. 60: “The religious dimension comes into view when we encounter in our own selves a peculiar question and concern, the question and concern for the quality of our life and our world *taken as a whole.*”
Experience presents a myriad of things within varying defining contexts. The religious dimension of experience provides the lure which causes us to seek the most comprehensive context within which to integrate and unify the totality of what we experience: both our personal being and the world within which we live as a whole. As Smith says: “The problem of the self-integrating power is the problem of God cast in experiential form.”8 Human reason, as Kant indicated at the beginning of the first Critique, is characterized by the fact that it is perennially faced with problems which it cannot ignore but which transcend its ability to answer. Smith articulates the religiosity that is inherent in this condition in the following way:

We betray our own incompleteness by our drive toward a final purpose. The religious question … is not initially posed in the face of special occasions or revelatory events; it is rather a precondition of the quest for these occasions. Every fulfillment stands related to an expectation, and to speak as though a given fulfillment could generate its own expectation is either to confuse us or to put the cart before the horse…. The religion of special occasions is always dependent upon interpretation through experience and knowledge of general occasions.9

A successful reconstruction of experience is necessary for achieving a degree of stasis or integrity within the human being. As long as the traditional conception of experience holds sway, epistemic constraints dictate the disclosure of actuality. These constraints place a heavy strain upon experience by filtering out of experiential dimensions which cannot be disclosed through that pre-conception. Human being becomes fragmented as a result of its inability to realize the full dimensionality of being. Smith emphasizes the importance of the Roycean notion of the self as exhibiting comprehensive life plan according to which he or she “means to be” – a unique person in a community of persons linked to the divine. A self, confronting the world, seeks some

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8 Religion and Empiricism: 61.
form of self-realization. Experience is “a great mass of contents resulting from the interplay between the self and the world in which it lives … the great matrix out of which all distinctions arise….” Experience is also a “double-barreled,” reciprocal affair – an interactive encounter between the experiencing self and that which exists. An appeal to experience capable of penetrating a total life pattern is an essential ingredient in the reinstatement of human being to its full experiential potential. This is a “living” conception of reason. As the self engages in the process of tracing greater degrees of comprehensive unity, the self is at the same time somehow reflexively “carried along” in this very same process of unifying development. Following Dewey, Smith identifies this project as the “recovery of philosophy.”

Smith made an impassioned appeal for recovery in Philadelphia during his famous 1981 Presidential Address to the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association entitled “The New Need for a Recovery of Philosophy.” A recovery of experience involves an appeal to experience in its full dimensionality. His appeal for a recovery was made out of respect for both philosophy and persons. Due to its fixation upon establishing itself as a Fach – or citadel of expertise and specialization – philosophy no longer has a relevant voice for the things that matter most – namely, the place of human being in the cosmic order. Philosophy’s recent emphasis upon the need for the inculcation of a specialized technique has resulted in its alienation from the laity – the man on the street – those who are as much implicated in the philosophical endeavor as the professional caste! This preponderance of “Philosophy for philosophers” confirms

Dewey’s caricature of philosophy as the act of chewing a cud long since reduced to a woody fiber. Smith expresses the dangers of such elitism in the following:

[W]e do not see with geometry…. [W]e do not communicate with a theory of communication, and we do not know with epistemology. Whatever be the role and place of such theories, they must not be allowed to come first as constituting the entrance requirements for philosophical thinking, for, if they do, the charade of postponement will be reenacted…. Critical thinking must be about results, not roots.\textsuperscript{12}

According to Smith, the project of philosophical recovery consists of three basic pillars. First, philosophy must once again become rooted in what Dewey referred to as “problems of men” – the various forms of activity that constitute the life of a people. Second, philosophy must lose its identity as a conceptual prerequisite – no longer establishing \textit{in advance} what it is that alone constitutes grist for the philosophic mill. Third, philosophy – as well as all reflective endeavors – must proceed dialectically on a larger scale, not tethered to the exclusive interest of any one dominant research program. Philosophy must be underway and at work, both engaging and seeking engagement.

Like any program, a “new” recovery of philosophy requires both effort and time in order to realize itself. Smith is attempting to reinvigorate a discipline that has in a large measure lost its way in a maze of specialization. An emphasis upon technical acumen within a restricted domain of inquiry has led to large stretches of barren landscape in contemporary philosophy. According to one of his former students, Smith stands before us much like Jeremiah, a sign proclaiming the importance of “establishing the basic context for people functioning together with a common world…. Smith’s main approach to American philosophy is to employ it religiously to bind together (again?) our disparate,
fragmented, and alienated situation.”\footnote{Robert C. Neville, “John E. Smith as Jeremiah,” in \textit{Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society}, 22:3 (1986: Summer): 267. According to Neville, “Smith’s students themselves represented the culture betrayed by philosophy…. (p. 261.)} To use a phrase often employed by Smith himself, John E. Smith will always be remembered for the important role he played while “breaking a small lance” in the ongoing effort to reinstate experience to its proper place in our mental life.

Robert O. Johann (1924 - 2009): The Primacy of Intersubjective Being

Ensconced in the stage of objectification, the self will be strong on means but weak on ends, proficient in science but at a loss about the sense of it all.\footnote{Robert O. Johann, S.J., “The Return to Experience,” in \textit{Review of Metaphysics}, 17:63 (March, 1964): 335-336.}

Like Smith, Robert O. Johann also champions a return to experience:

If the process of objectification, which is essential to the constitution of experience, has actually involved a distortion of it, this will be able to be remedied—if remedied it can be—not by attempting to get back to a stage previous to that process itself, but in a sense by going beyond it. The “return” must somehow be a “reconstruction” … an effort to elaborate something anew. It will really be an effort to reshape experience, to give it a new mold, a new direction.\footnote{Ibid.: 332. Johann adds in a footnote that “This effort can be called a ‘return’ because, in making it, the self will try to model its life on the exigencies inherent in that life itself, rather than on the dictates of its thought about life.”}

Johann’s focus will be to identify the presence of intersubjective being within experience. The subject who undergoes an experience is not primarily a detached intellect or an “angelic eye.” The subject is \textit{a person who} experiences. Each experience is qualified by some dominant quality due to the manner in which it makes an impress within the context of our individual life. According to Johann, the primary means by which a person achieves self-determination is through the act of participating in concrete dialogue. Persons are not disclosed merely through the abstract generality of thought – they are experientially constituted \textit{in actu exercito} through the process of engaging in direct commerce with the world. We harbor an implicit experiential awareness which is
anterior to dualisms of any kind: “This is a pre-reflective kind of knowledge, implicit in all our actions, and in terms of which the world is present to us, not precisely as known, but as lived in and dealt with.” Experience becomes, reflexively speaking, an all inclusive whole in which the subject and object are mutually implicated in each other’s development. The “giveness” of matter may condition our life – it does not define it. The “other” is an ingredient feature within the experiential field. The self becomes activated through an experiential interaction with an other – the life of the self must be seen as including not only the self but also “the whole range of the other with which it deals as well as the whole range and variety of its dealings…. [B]y a sort of circuminceession, each includes and is included by the other.”

Taking his bearings from Marcel, Johann emphasizes the need for the self to overcome the reifying effects of abstract reflection and regain its lost sense of unity within the “intra-personal” dimension of experience. Through a process of “indirect conceptualization,” a strata of intra-personal being can be revealed albeit in a rather oblique way:

Ineffable in itself, “existence” can thus be described according to the way in which it is known. Such description does not make existence an essence. What is “objectised” is not existence in itself, but the context in which it is revealed … its relationship to essence.

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16 Ibid.: 323.
17 The Return to Experience: 325, 327. See also Building the Human (Herder and Herder, 1968) where Johann develops the notion of what he refers to as a “reflective pragmatism” in which “the ideas and principles in which life to be shaped have their origin and final test in the experiential process itself…. We come to the truth only in and through the very process of living (p. 22.)”
18 Robert O. Johann S.J., “Subjectivity,” in Review of Metaphysics, 12 (1958/1959): 214. See also Robert O. Johann S.J., “Creativity and Unbelief,” in The Presence and Absence of God, ed. C.F. Mooney S.J. (Fordham University Press, 1969), pp. 13-14: “But suppose the objectivizations of God are not confused with the divine itself … their importance not in themselves but in what they present to us. As determinate patters and structures, these mediations are simply relativities. Only what they look to is absolute and that, as absolute, is indeterminate.”
Johann refers to this process of indirect conceptualization as *reflective ratification* – a reflection upon reflection. Human experience is necessarily *shared* experience. The relationship between self and other takes place within the seamless web of experience. Reflective ratification is the act of “re-cognizing on the level of reflection what is already cognized, but only implicitly on the level of direct awareness.”¹⁹ What is implicitly revealed within the context of direct awareness is the prior reality of the “we” – an unanalyzed totality out of which we are able to lay claim to a common world. However, a series of relationship between oneself and another person is not sufficient for disclosing the breadth of the “infra-personal” field. The personal order within which I am implicated risks breaking down into an indefinite multitude unless it is held together by a wholeness that is attributable to universal fellowship: “Only the achievement of such a community can make our lives fully whole.”²⁰

A university community is not simply an imaginary ideal – it is the extension of something to which we currently have access – our sense of being fragmented and compartmentalized takes place in the midst of a nascent awareness of “something” larger. We must thematically extend the range of that which we are pre-thematically aware. The sense of unrestricted relationality required for a genuine universal community requires a “source” or an aim to which all are responsively linked – a unifying focus of the entire interpersonal order. A source of this kind requires a degree of transcendence in order to effectively achieve any sense of integrated unity. Johann refers to the “transcendent ground and universal focus of the whole interpersonal order” as God.²¹

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²¹ *Ibid.*: 53.
The act of love provides the ultimate expression the human potential for intersubjective being. The beloved is not present to the lover as a detached object – the beloved is present as a mutual subject. The ontological source for the deep connection existing between lover and beloved is to be found within the interiority of consciousness:

Since being is the absolute, unconditional value, totally enveloping everything that exists, it can be approached adequately only from the inside. If being is to be grasped in its absoluteness, it can only be by a sort of active, inner identity with itself, a sort of interior presence to itself. But the only experience we have in which being is interiorly present to itself is that of the inwardness of human consciousness; it is the incommunicable presence of the self to the self. The interiority of consciousness first reveals to us what it truly means to exist.

The love exhibited between the lover and the beloved is a human manifestation of the inward presence of being to itself – a “face to faceness” within being which is reflective of the absolute value of being itself. The lover’s soul is moved by the sensuous beauty of the beloved – causing the former to recollect, albeit faintly, the more genuine beauty of the eternal. The beloved is lifted out of the conditional reality of space and time and reestablished within the extensive field of being. In the words of Victor Hugo, “sacred being throbs within the beloved.” Johann captures the ontological structure of love in the following: “To be loved is to encounter Being itself, eternity in time, God’s face among the faces of men…. Blessed is the man who recognizes it … for only he can know what it means to be.”

Johann’s emphasis upon the ontological structure of human love, paves the way for an understanding of God as the ontological ground of creativity. Qua human, we have

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23 *Building the Human*: 75-76.
the unique capacity to transcend the determinately actual through envisioning things in
the light of their possibilities. Our ability to conceive of “an openness beyond
determinate structures is inconceivable … if it is not at the same time an openness to
what is beyond the determinate.”24 Human being is defined by its ordination to being –
creativity is the intelligent responsiveness to being itself:

The world is a happening. Its sense is not something antecedent and original. It issues
from the interplay of and endless variety of factors and forces, one of which is human
intelligence. It is an emergent sense in whose shaping both intellect and initiative can
have a part.25

The world we encounter today is a functional and fragmented world. Our focus is
solely upon the task at hand. A myopic concern with efficient causality has effectively
eliminated any trace of final causality from the fabric of life. Yet there remains a
dimension of life that simply resists reduction to the level of efficient causality – a level
of the self which transcends all of its particular preoccupations. As the ground of all
purposeful action, our conception of God cannot stand in need of further grounding.
According to Johann, we must recognize God as the transcendent source of the
comprehensive integration that is reflective of a meaningful life:

Plural encounters can coalesce into a meaningful life, without the loss or suppression of
their distinctive qualities, only if each is also a phase in a single continuing encounter—
only if there is One whom a person encounters in all his encounters and answers in all his
actions. Only in the context of transcendence can the bits and pieces of man’s life be
simply and wonderfully what they are and still add up.26

Johann’s conception of God emphasizes the intrinsic presence of God within
human being. God provides the “transcendental ground” of our humanity that is

S.J. (Fordham University Press, 1969): 9-10. See Johann’s treatment of “creative interaction” in The
Pragmatic Meaning of God, pp. 4, 6: “Man’s fulfillment, therefore, is to be sought in the in the quality of
the interactive process itself…. [H]e exists in a true sense beyond limits….”
25 Building the Human: 32.
26 Building the Human: 33-34.
implicated in all that we do. The world does not reveal itself experientially as already complete. Experience is the process through which we approach completeness. To be human is to be in some sense already holy – our divine nature provides us with a glimpse of the infinite. The human project consists of creatively integrating the welter of experiential data in such a way that it is turned towards unity. This unity must be conceived in personal terms: “[I]t is to experience ourselves as being involved with an initiative which transcends our own, a determining source which addresses us and expects an answer.” From a Johannian perspective, God bequeaths to us the ability to shape our world and to achieve self-realization in very the process of our doing so.

Without any sense of a unifying vision around which to orient one’s life, our creative energy can become easily misguided, resulting in a Sartrean subjectivism of the worst kind – answerable only to itself. When God is eliminated as the overarching horizon of meaning, we are left without a ground for intelligent action – questions of value and the prioritization of values force themselves upon us. According to Johann: “[O]nly a thematization, in practice as well as theory, of the responsive and responsible openness of intellect to the Transcendent Other as its own ground can save the idea of creativity from falling into [this] trap.” A comprehensive ideal of human action is required. God provides the sense of “maximum coherence” – a source of unification within which to integrate the diverse multiplicity of perspective. The present “eclipse of God” that plagues contemporary life is not necessarily an indication that God is no longer

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27 See The Pragmatic Meaning of God, p. 23: “A person’s life, therefore, is in a sense, the whole of reality. Not everything, to be sure, is contained there mente … but everything is involved facto.”
29 Creativity and Unbelief: 16.
relevant to the question of our being human – it is simply an indication of an inadequate
conception of God. The “God” many have proclaimed to be dead is simply not God.

**Carl G. Vaught (1939 – 2005): The Quest for Wholeness**

[W]e must not be occupied with merely theoretical problems, but must focus instead upon the
world as a whole and upon the most pressing questions that confront the human spirit.30

The philosophy of Carl G. Vaught consists of a sustained attempt to reunify the
fragmentation brought about by a broken world. Abstract reflection, although well suited
for grasping the generic structures of existence, simply cannot articulate the concrete
dimension involved when wholeness is disclosed within experience. Vaught circumvents
the potentially dangerous consequences of becoming permanently enmeshed in abstract
thinking by adopting a method that combines “the concreteness of story-telling with the
clarity of reflective discourse.”31

Human being requires ongoing effort. We simply do not become human by
belonging to the species *homo sapiens*. The “essence” of human being is something that
must be achieved – we need to somehow reach beyond ourselves in order to lay claim to
ourselves. In the absence of achieving any abiding sense of self-unity, we are besieged by
a nagging feeling of fragmentation. This sense of *being* fragmented is not simply the
reflection of a dichotomy between the self and that which is externally other. The
fragmentation we experience is an interior phenomenon consisting of “an internal
modification of our own nature.”32

Qua finite, the sense of wholeness we are capable of achieving is necessarily
perspectival and not complete. Wholeness is not to be equated with a Hegelian sense of

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31 Ibid.: xi.
32 Ibid.: 1. This claim is in no way intended to lessen the importance of community for overcoming our
sense of fragmentation.
comprehensive completeness. The very best to which we can aspire is the achievement of a kind of “midpoint” position – a concrete situation wherein an image of eternity gradually unfolds within the context of a human drama. Vaught describes the three dimensional space in which our sense of wholeness is configured in bi-directional terms: “The quest for wholeness moves in two directions, pointing to the Ground from which we come and to the Whole toward which we develop; and within the human space in which it unfolds, it attempts to find the center of life in between these two dimensions.”

The experiential nature of this quest is depicted in Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. In order to combat the “damp, drizzly November in my soul,” Ishmael – the main character – strikes out on a vast, oceanic journey in search of the great white whale. The structural aspects of Ishmael’s quest for wholeness are crucial:

[I]t is important to notice that the quest can begin anywhere; that it must begin somewhere in particular; and that it always begins nowhere…. The fact that the quest can begin anywhere makes participation possible; that it must begin somewhere makes it relevant to our particular condition; and because it always begins nowhere, we are given an initial access to eternity.

The journey to self-discovery – like the search for the whale – proves to be elusive. Unlike Captain Ahab’s myopic fixation with the destruction of Moby Dick, Ishmael’s attempts to plumb the depths of mystery through the power of logos – he becomes “an image of narrative intelligibility … bind[ing] Melville’s story together in a way that gives us access to the mystery and power of the journey…” Ishmael’s logos is rendered from the surface of an empty coffin upon which he is kept afloat while adrift at

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34 *Quest for Wholeness*: 23, 24. See also page 28: “[T]he water is not a place to live but a medium through which he is required to move.”
35 *Ibid.*: 44. It is hardly coincidental that Ishmael is a teacher by training.
sea. The salvation provided by the buoying effect of the coffin – an obvious symbol of
death – is indicative of the fact that the journey toward wholeness often requires losing
oneself in order to save oneself. Like the act of reflection, the quest for wholeness
contains a reflexive axis. As one insightful critic comments: “Melville’s deep diving is
into self with the goal of discovering at the center a hidden but powerful sublime
identity.” As Ishmael plunges into the oceanic depths of mystery, he is able to re-
collect himself by virtue of a logos that is concrete – rendered from a place that bespeaks
the unique particularity of his salvation: “Why then here does any one step forth?—
Because one did survive the wreck.” Ishmael’s salvation, physically speaking, results
from his rescue by the crew of the Rachel – a whaling vessel bearing the name of one of
his biblical ancestors. Philosophically speaking, the conditions of Ishmael’s salvation
remain somewhat ambiguous. The reader is left with the question of whether Ishmael’s
salvation is merely a function of being absorbed into a new world in the form of a new
ship and crew – “another orphan” as the text states – or is it a function of a dissolution
into much deeper origins? Ishamel’s words in the Epilogue seem to indicate the latter:
“[G]aining that vital centre … I floated on a soft and dirge-like main.”

Rich experiential insights like these gleaned from works of epic literature must be
leveraged further with the help of philosophical reflection. Here, Plato’s treatment of
piety in the Euthyphro is especially helpful. Whereas Euthyphro maintains that a proper
understanding of piety requires a retrospective insight into divine origins, Socrates is
convinced that piety involves an outward quest for unity. For Vaught, the key advance

38 Ibid.: 536. The casket provides an [en]lightening bouncy from which to offer a culminating logos.
which the form of Platonic dialogue is able to achieve is “not merely existential but theoretical, for in discussing the nature of piety they become engaged in a reflective inquiry about the meaning of wholeness itself.”

Such is the reason why Socrates proposes the question of the meaning of piety in itself. We must move beyond the concrete depiction of meaning offered up in *Moby Dick* to the univocal perspective derivable from philosophical reflection. If piety is indeed capable of univocal definition, then knowledge of that definition bespeaks a wholeness of sorts on the part of the soul that is able to arrive at an approximate knowledge thereof. Through Socratic investigation, we will be given access to the univocal *structure* of piety itself.

Euthyphro stumbles repeatedly in his attempt to formulate an adequate conception. With the help of Socrates, he begins to develop a definition of piety which is no longer couched solely in the framework of divine characteristics. At this important juncture, the dialogue moves to a discussion of piety as part of a larger whole – as a part of justice. A wider context is needed in order to synthesize discordant, equivocal aspects within a greater whole.

However, the dialogic nature of reflection yields a conception of wholeness in the making rather than made. At the end of the dialogue, we are left in a condition of *aporia*. Euthyphro is determined to reach back to a sacred past of familial ties and divine intent in order to overcome a state of civic “pollution,” while Socrates’ *noesis* is forward looking – intent upon harmonizing the cosmos by overcoming equivocation through *episteme*. This condition of Platonic state of *aporia* need not be viewed destructively. For Vaught,

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39 *Quest for Wholeness*: 95-96.
Socrates’ suggestion to “return to the beginning” of the dialogue is crucial – leaving the reader with a sense of open-ended closure that is so indicative of a Plato:

To ask, “What is piety?” and to ask the corresponding question “What is the meaning of wholeness?” is to face a problem that must be confronted on countless occasions…. [T]he unity of the dialogue is to be found in the analogies that draw the characters of the dialogue together. Socrates and Euthyphro are mirror images of one another…. This identity-in-difference is the analogical ground of unity that pervades the dialogue at the structural level and that constitutes the philosophical structure of the aesthetic unity to be found within the discussion.41

Hegel attempts to dissolve the appearance of disunity represented by this condition of identity-in-difference by systematically uniting all instances of opposition or “externality” within the concrete unity of experience. The aporia of Platonic dialogue is aufgehoben through analogy in the form of the all-inclusive, intelligible unity of consciousness. Experience, for Hegel, has a dynamic aspect – it moves. Objects become revealed in greater degrees of truth within consciousness: “[W]hat it previously took to be the in-itself … is only in-itself for consciousness.”42 Taking a gloss from T.S. Eliot, Hegel’s goal is to arrive at the point where we started – at an understanding of consciousness itself – and to know the place for the first time.

Despite Hegel’s appreciation of the ability of religious experience – especially Christianity – to transcend the moment of externality, religious experience is still inferior in form to philosophical experience. According to Vaught: “Th[e] transformation of religion into philosophy is the final conquest of radical externality, for it transposes the external stages of the Christian mediation into the internal moments of the process of philosophical reflection.”43

41 Quest for Wholeness: 149.
43 Quest for Wholeness: 169.
The Hegelian sublation of religion into philosophy comes at a price – a price that Vaught is not willing to pay. The dimensions of openness, otherness, and mystery must be preserved and not swept up within the clarity of Hegelian synthesis – absorbed within the systematic totality. Unlike Plato’s aporetic identity-in-difference in which irreducible difference is preserved, Hegel attempts to undifferentiate difference through its reconstructive assimilation within a higher unity. In short, mystery is de-mystified qua its assimilation within consciousness. For Vaught, Hegel’s propensity to assimilate otherness within the rational order stems from his inability to appreciate the power of metaphor. Despite his aversion to externality in all its various forms, Hegel held a dualistic view of language. Neither the ontological unity of the “speculative sentence” nor the external string of pictorial representations characteristic of common speech can provide an adequate space for wholeness. An appeal to metaphor is required – an appeal which is implicit in Hegel’s philosophy itself:

For example, Hegel claims that the *Phenomenology* is both a pathway to Science and a highway of despair. And he compares the stages of the philosophical journey to the stations of the cross, where we encounter the metaphors of the inverted word, the master-servant relationship and the unhappy consciousness… In this way, art and the aesthetic dimension remerge as crucial elements of his system, and Hegel gives us poetic access to the meaning of his thought….⁴⁴

In fact, Hegel’s notion of *Aufhebung* is rooted in a metaphoric conception of language. In order for the “tripartite” movement of consciousness to occur, a rigid opposition between two terms must be made fluid, allowing for their incorporation within a higher unity. This is exactly what happens in metaphoric discourse – “the ordinary concept of a meaning is taken up, conjoined with a different, sometimes even

⁴⁴ *Quest for Wholeness*: 176.
contradictory meaning and held in tension with it to comprise a larger metaphorical unity.™

The whole need not consist of simply an intelligible unity – it can “explode from within.” An adequate conception of the whole must allow for dynamism as well as intelligibility. Vaught refers to this new sense of ground as the “Place of places.” Space provides the region in which an irreducible, concrete instantiation may occur – the taking of a stand in and through which the religious dimension of experience reveals itself. Much like the case of the identity-in-difference characteristic of Socrates and Euythphro, the stand that is associated with a particular place may exist in contrast to another, but the infinity of possible standpoints implies a unity that is not susceptible to conceptual inclusion. Place provides an “ontological nexus” – a region in which unity and otherness are preserved at the same time.

[T]he emergence of the concept of space as a primordial conception suggests that the philosophical demand for intelligibility can be satisfied without needing to transform the quest for wholeness into a quest for complete comprehension…. The metaphorical openness of the stages of experience allows them to open out toward one another, while the analogical otherness of these same elements allows them to be connected without being included in an overarching unity.

This notion of a “Place of places” provides the pervading theme of Vaught’s later research. Contrary to the direction taken by Heideggerian phenomenology in which space is subsumed under the ecstasis of time, place must be given its ontological due. According to one astute observer, “Place itself is concrete and at one with action and

thought.” The “Place of places” is the locus where space, time and eternity come together – the point at which “I can locate and orient myself to whatever else there is.” Place also bespeaks a dimension of eternity by providing a source of origination from which all synthetic acts arise. For Vaught, the Place of places preserves the creative dynamism of the whole in which identity and difference are preserved. Much like Hegel referred to as black cows in the dark of night, this purview provides “not only a way of understanding the being of beings but as a way of glimpsing the Being of Being as well.” As the place that makes truth possible, the Place of places is no ordinary place.

**John M. Anderson (1914 - 1999): The Recovery of the Experiential Infinite**

If philosophy has a future, its future is to make man unendingly aware that what he seeks through his contributing to works is richness with integrity. The integrity of the work of philosophy itself reflects the richness of the ultimate.

John M. Anderson was a brilliant, unconventional philosopher who established Pennsylvania State University as a vital center for the study of continental philosophy in the 1950’s and beyond – opposing the dominant trends of analysis and positivism that dominated the American landscape. This was a remarkable achievement for a public, land grant university. Anderson received a Ph.D. from Berkley in 1939 – having written a thesis entitled *Structure and Purpose.* Anderson’s initial training was in mathematics – his earliest work consists of essays in industrial management and quality control. Anderson’s corpus in many ways defies categorization. He was a founding editor of the legendary journal *Man and World,* he edited a collection of documents by John C.

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50 Ibid.: 13.


52 At Berkeley, Anderson would befriend a fellow graduate student named Henry Bugbee.
Calhoun, translated and introduced a series of texts by Heidegger, and co-authored a text on the axiomatic structure of natural deduction – but he is known most for his books entitled *The Individual and the New World* and *The Realm of Art*. Providing an overview of a thinker of such broad persuasion is a challenge. The theme that is perhaps best able to illuminate the entire constellation of Anderson’s thought is his treatment of the human capacity to realize the infinite.

Anderson’s conception of a “positive” infinity stands in contrast to what Hegel calls the “bad infinite” – the recurring, endless repetition of the same. To understand Anderson’s conception, we must return to a fragment of Anaximander: *archē ton onton to apeiron* – the originating principle of things is infinity. Infinity, in its originating sense, is the *limitless* (*in-finis*) depth out of which things appear as limited (*finis*). It is our aversion to the boundlessness of the originating infinite that causes us to take refuge in a series of metaphysical schemes – we seek a surrogate in the form of “a distinct and final grasp of things.” According to Anderson, we must reclaim within a contemporary context the original experience indicated by Anaximander – an experience eclipsed by the ongoing effects of experiential sedimentation. Fortunately, the *Ur-gefühl* indicated by Anaximander is realizable through various forms of human activity. Anderson’s writings

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point to the various domains of praxis which exhibit the potential to yield “the free becoming of the actual infinite.”

Human beings possess a unique *gnosis* for participating in the infinite. An oblique type of peripheral vision is required in order to perceive the hidden background that animates all things as they become meaningful within a worldly context. Anderson’s early philosophical work focuses upon the various ways infinity became realized within the context of the early American pioneer experience. The array of concrete activities that characterized westward expansion in 19th century America share in common the fact they reflect the articulation of a “New World” out of an infinite matrix: “[T]hat man, too, was infinite, that no aspiration or power was too great for him to conceive and dare to set in motion…. The Life which accepted this responsibility related the confidence engendered by the infinite in man to a natural locus.”

The Shaker religion provides a powerful example of the phenomenon that human nature is derived from an infinite source. The Shaker notion that “every force has a form” reflects the deep conviction that the union of earth and spirit is obtained through “hand-mindedness” – an intuition of divine presence locally instantiated through a creative example of simplicity. The overall importance of the movement of Western expansion lies in the way in which “primal human energies” are released – resulting in meanings that are generated rather than discovered in the process of choice and action:

[I]f one appealed to experience looking for a definite and particular character of man, one appealed in vein…. Any person appealing to experience for information about man

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56 *Why Categories?* 165.
would see this universal aspect of himself, and however he turned and whatever path he took, experience would reflect his core as a star without parallax.”

The human capacity to realize the infinite is further revealed through works of art. To borrow a phrase of Heidegger, the “work-being” of a work of art bespeaks a burgeoning resistance to form. Through the existence of what Anderson refers to as “horizontal form,” the formal modalities of the work of art are momentarily overcome—allowing for the open disclosure of a content which reveals the ultimate:

An aesthetic occasion is an emergence, a disclosing of content evoked from an opaque given through a forming process within which man, as participant, happens to find himself…. In this moment human questions are silenced and human questing stilled. Here there is a fugitive disclosure which is perfection. The absoluteness which beauty evidences attests the ultimate bounding movement of creation itself.

Twentieth century abstract expressionism provides a compelling example of a genre in which works of art disclose “the revelation of content in and through form…. As expressionist artists simply paint, art is able to emerge on its own terms. Ordinary experience, qua intellectualized, is truncated – linearized through an overemphasis upon formal constraints. Straight lines and geometrical surfaces simply do not allow for the sense of depth required in order to inspire a sense of kinesthetic immediacy on the part of the beholder. Within expressionist experience, the creative use of strokes, curves, and sweeps result in an intensity of content not achievable in form-governed works. Form now becomes intrinsic to content through a dynamic balance in which “the content revealed by form is potentially more than its presence … emerg[ing] as something giving,

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59 The Individual and the New World: 88. See p. 173: “Man’s nature is not attained once and for all, but again and again, hauntingly maintained in an eternal present.”

60 John M. Anderson, The Realm of Art (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967): 183, 169. See also Why Categories?, p. 171: “[P]hilosophy should stand as the name for that art which defines the special way in which the infinite richness may be articulated with integrity.”

rather than as something given." Expressionistic art thus provides a compelling example of the experiential realization of the infinite. The dynamic movement back and forth between form and content lends a sense of life to the texture of the artwork that is "completable but not completed."  

The human potential to realize infinity becomes most acute in the realm of politics where the collective association of human being occurs. From Anderson’s perspective, each realization of political structure contains an implicit principle which must be creatively overcome in order to realize infinity anew. The principle of dialogue is a key ingredient of this process of realization. Dialogue reflects a dimension of linguistic openness unattainable through canonical, non-dialogic approaches to language. The sense of closure generated through canonical speech creates an internal pressure that must be overcome in order to realize the infinite. According to Anderson, “It is my wish to fix the point at which language is absolutely essential to politics … not in its day to day functioning but in expressing the significance of collective action…. [O]ur language is necessary to present the truth of freedom.”

The infinite consists of such richness that no finite distinction is final and any distinction made is free. Through mutually recognizing and dialogically participating within the public sphere, we achieve “a free becoming of difference in the ultimate, and

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62 Art or History?: 411. See also “Sketch for a Phenomenology of the American Experience,” in Phenomenology in a Pluralistic Context, eds. W. McBride and C. Schrag (SUNY Press, 1983), p. 181: “[T]he artist is as intent upon yielding to the unknown in his action as upon forming it…. In yielding, the artist comes to trust the unknown emerging as given to him … in his projection of the artwork as an unending open receptacle for the free moments of beauty that successively culminate the joint enterprise in which he and the unknown participate.”

63 Ibid.: 411.

64 John M. Anderson, The Truth of Freedom: An Essay on Mankind (University Park, PA: The Dialogue Press, 1979): vii. See Anderson’s, “…Since the Time We are a Dialogue and Able to Hear from One Another” in Man and World, 10:2 (1977): p. 117, where he develops Heidegger’s notion that “each language used breaks up under the strain of its use….”
thus an articulation of the ultimate.”65 The articulation of the ultimate requires a horizon within which a process of creative unfolding can occur without repetition and without limit. This can only be accomplished through a quasi-Platonic type of dialogic encounter with revolutionary consequences:

The articulation of the ultimate proceeds by building a net of public acts in which, in principle, each successive articulation disregards the net already built by focusing upon the ultimate emerging within the net, that is, remaining in the open region central region, and articulating this in a way which does not form or continue any pattern of the net so far produced…. The truth of freedom becom[es] in the activity of building this patternless path. The expression of this truth is the work of revolution.66

Nowhere is the revolutionary style of Anderson’s thought more poignantly expressed than in his last published work “Bespeaking the Origin of the Dialogue We Are.”67 Anderson’s project of reclaiming infinity required a continuous revamping of his mode of expression. Philosophy must abandon the Cartesian quest for clarity, distinctness, and systematic understanding. Philosophy must aspire à la Nietzsche to the creation of alternative world interpretations which allow for the unrestricted realization of possibility as opposed to the accurate representation of an objective Ding-an-sich.

Anderson’s vision of a polity constituted by continuous acts of unending creativity may appear naïve according to current the quotidian standards – a strange mixture of romanticism and bohemianism. We must not forget, however, that Anderson was no stranger to scientific rigor. His philosophy serves as a testimonial to the limitations of analytic thinking when it comes to articulating the infinite – “that realm in which the myriads of nets spun from man’s ultimate nature glow in the invisible light of

65 Ibid.: 61.
67 See Being in the Ultimate: pp. 293-334.
what he is not.”68 To appreciate Anderson’s vision is to begin to realize the possibility of a “New World” – what Anaximander referred to as *athanaton kai anoletron* – “the radiant being of divinity.”69


The philosopher must be sensitive to the need for experience, and while recognizing no ‘fatal chasms’ in experience, he should never forget that knowing cannot be taken as primary without cutting the cords that binds experience and nature together.70

The philosophy of Robert C. Pollock resembles a crucible – a rich metallurgic melding of medieval and classical American influences. The medieval axis was derived from his work with Étienne Gilson at The Pontifical Institute in Toronto – the headquarters of North American Thomism. His interest in American philosophy stems from his training under Alfred North Whitehead at Harvard University. During his 30 year career at Fordham University, he attained legendary status as a lecturer. 71 It may not be an exaggeration to claim that the catholicity of Pollock’s erudition may have equaled that of Royce. Pollock’s synthetic intellect is duly noted by John J. McDermott, one of his former students:

[The]theme of experience, especially the American experience, then the focus of the Fordham University philosophy department was generated for the most part if not totally, by decades of extraordinary teaching on the part of Robert C. Pollock. . . . Over against a good deal of hostility and widespread institutional disinterest, Robert Pollock waged a valiant struggle to upend the narrow parochialism, both speculative and academic which pervaded Catholic institutions before our time. [H]e taught Medieval philosophy with a fashion of imagination and scholarship nowhere matched in the field.72

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69 See Aristotle, *Physics* 203b12 where he cites Anaximander. I am grateful to Heim’s essay for this insight.
71 See John J. McDermott, “Robert C. Pollock 1901 – 1978” in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 52, no. 1, 1978, p. 18: “It is as a teacher of philosophy that Pollock will be most remembered. [H]e was without peer as a classroom lecturer.” See also McDermott’s comment in his “Acknowledgement” to *The Writings of William James* (University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. xvii: “Robert Pollock stands out in our time as one who embodies the majestic vision of William James.”
72 Cited in Thomas W. Casey, “The Audiotapes of Robert C. Pollock,” in Pollockosmos.com (a website dedicated to the work of Robert Pollock.) Although his formal scholarly production is limited to less than a
Pollock views the history of Western thought as consisting of a rich panorama of influences. Christian mysticism, Renaissance science, and American pragmatism each share in the quest for a cosmological outlook that is theophantic in nature—an “all embracing drama” in which divinity is revealed *intra rebus naturae*.

Through the application of human understanding, greater degrees of unity are engendered upon the world. The world comes into greater proximity as we experientially embrace it. Through a fusion of self and world, consciousness makes present to itself an ever-increasing, vast *experiendum*. Dynamic and processive, human being exists in-the-making. We are unprecedented and not bound by any antecedent state of affairs—a star without parallax. The self exists as a mode of infinity, always underway in search of a larger “totality of presences”—a finite attempt to concretely realize the infinite. The human project is best viewed as an attempt to become more God-like, or *universum*, by collectively (*colligere*) bringing polarity into unity through the gathering power of *lógos*. The desire for incessant growth, complete integration, and total consciousness are correlative activities.

We live in the midst of an incomplete universe in which “the temporal dimension has come into its own, and with it, the reality of growth and development.” This conception of human experience has the potential to lead to an awareness of the cosmic dimension of consciousness—transporting us from a closed world to an infinite universe. A burgeoning historical consciousness plays a decisive role:

dozen excellent journal articles, an extensive collection of cassette recordings of his lectures are currently housed in the library at Marist College. To date there are over 230 recorded lectures averaging approximately 80 minutes in length.

Men now look upon history as a great flowing reality, a gigantic river of life fed by many tributaries, and continually gathering force and increasing in turbulence…. History is a real and meaningful continuum … manifesting its fluidity and plasticity, and diversifying itself in innumerable ways while striving after unification. In situating ourselves within a vast process of history ultimately embracing all mankind, we are achieving a new and startling transcendence over our circumscribed and limited lives in the present, through which we shall finally sweep away the last vestiges of individualism.\(^74\)

The key to human self-realization lies in the recognition that human being is an increasingly emerging experiential organism. Any prior notion of the self qua \textit{solus ispe} must be surpassed in order to recognize the cosmic potentiality of experience. In and through our finite condition, human being exists underway in the expansive pursuit of that which surpasses us. We are summoned by “gigantic forces … journeying to a goal of perfection, achieving … greater fullness of life for each individual person, accumulating experiences and building up reserves of power through the ever expanding … living organ of the individual’s action and realization.”\(^75\)

It is important to note that Pollock is not advocating anything resembling a kind of historical relativism. Once history is viewed in its full ramifications, it is apparent that history includes a process of development that is \textit{spiritual} in nature – “a progression in the polarization of man to transcendent truth and value.”\(^76\) A \textit{vertical} conception of history is required in order to understand human being as a dynamic process seeking greater degrees of comprehension and integration: “The complete man is man with the universe. He cannot therefore be satisfied with merely logical coherence, for he is driven relentlessly beyond himself toward a concrete universality.”\(^77\)

\(^{75}\) \textit{Ibid.}: 209.  
\(^{76}\) \textit{Ibid.}: 211.  
\(^{77}\) \textit{Ibid.}: 212.
The human striving for concrete universality serves as the basis of human freedom.\textsuperscript{78} A vertical understanding of historical development yields a conception of human being that, albeit finite, is opened to an infinite reality to which it is dynamically related. This open, vivifying relation between the finite and the infinite allows for a richness and fecundity unavailable within any conception of a “closed universe.”

Historical experience occurs \textit{sub specie aeternitatis}. Pollock’s discourse resounds with a Hegelian-like resonance:

The Absolute penetrates man’s mind with an inner necessity and as an exigency which rules his thought. When we view man as, in a sense, the climax of the whole cosmic process … we can see in man’s awareness of the Absolute as the law of its thought a universal intimacy which has reached a new pitch of intensity in becoming conscious of itself. In short, man’s awareness of a totality which surrounds him, and its struggle toward concrete wholeness are vitally bound up with his sense of the Absolute which is truly encompassing in its very transcendence and within which he lives and moves and has its being.\textsuperscript{79}

Pollock’s intent is to create a “significant synthesis” – combining an appeal to the concrete \textit{á la} pragmatism with an appreciation of the absolute depths of metaphysical speculation. In this sense, Pollock’s philosophy is both catholic and Catholic.\textsuperscript{80} As consciousness develops historically – both vertically and horizontally – human being is in the position of becoming increasingly aware that the historic route of conscious development is not arbitrary. History “is not closed in on itself, but is always in a vivifying relation to the divine…. [O]ur history is not merely the search for an all inclusive order, but is rather the very process of its achievement…”\textsuperscript{81}


\textsuperscript{79} \textit{History as a Matrix}: 217.

\textsuperscript{80} It should be noted that Pollock converted from Judaism to Catholicism while at Harvard. For an account of how Catholic philosophy can effectively meld with American pragmatism, see Pollock, “Catholic Philosophy and American Culture,” in \textit{Thought}, Vol. 17, No. 1, September 1942: 445-463.

In order to appreciate the cosmic potential of consciousness, it is necessary to jettison the notion of consciousness as bicameral – possessing distinct inner and outer dimensions. In fact, the “inward” and “outward” dimensions of consciousness are complementary and organically linked. Consciousness is increased, or deepened, as it engages in a “movement into the objective order … [into] more interrelationships and more far-reaching unities.” Nowhere is the bicameral dualism of consciousness transcended more than in the Patristic tradition where we witness the ability of human being to exist on two planes of consciousness simultaneously. Every contact with the material environment involves us in a mysterious contact with a higher world. The philosophy of Saint Augustine serves as a paradigmatic example in which human being is depicted as possessing both a deep reflexive interiority which, at the same time, provides an external, objective access to the immediacy of God: “Augustinian interiorism thus implies a remarkably organic conception of personal life; it is obviously a liberating objectivity … since it gives man an irresistible élan toward the fullness of reality, and the capacity to open himself completely to it….”

Unfortunately, this pervading sense of the unity of consciousness so powerfully depicted by Augustine is languishing in the contemporary world – annulled by an emphasis upon the Cartesian conception of a detached Cogito with its distinction between primary and secondary qualities. One of the many benefits of reading Pollock is his creative reading of the early modern philosophical tradition, paying close attention its

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82 The Basis of a Philosophical Anthropology: 202.
83 Ibid.: 205. See Pollock’s similar characterization of Emerson in “Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 – 1882): The Single Vision,” in American Classics Reconsidered: A Christian Appraisal, ed. H.C. Gardner (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), p. 37: “Emerson’s affirmation of the vertical or spiritual as against the temporal or horizontal axis of history served a practical purpose…. Men had to be brought to a realization that a divine force is operative here and now….”
theophantic intentions. Still, the Cartesian notion of substance as “requiring nothing but itself in order to exist” has been effectively applied to the human self. The effect has been to disregard the fact that human being is situated in ever-more inclusive unities without which human being cannot lay legitimate claim to being human. The concrete connection between human being and God, according to Pollock, must be made luminous. Human being is an intellectual and spiritual being who exhibits a “likeness” to God. Our *capax Dei* is due to the ontological proximity we share with God as well as our decisive role in recollecting Divine unity by virtue of “the exigency of the absolute that rules our thought.”

Despite the many functional demands placed upon us today, there exists ample evidence to support Pollock’s claim that human beings are most eager to break out of pre-determined roles and confining situations, hoping to become integrated in a wider context of meaning. This sense of an exigence of being, to return to a phrase of Marcel, bespeaks a pre-reflective awareness on the part of consciousness of a sense of spiritual completion. Typically, this sense of completion is experienced nascently as a dark night of the soul. Once this nascent awareness becomes realized in greater degrees of fulfillment, what a cosmos stretches out before our eyes!

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**The Future of Philosophy: A Brief Prospective**

As to the future of philosophy in America, we cannot overlook the fact that philosophy becomes a historical force only when it succeeds in making contact with what is of universal and of enduring value in the historical life of a people. If it should show itself incapable of participating in that process, it can have no future worth talking about, nor will it be able to tap the vast potential of energy that has been built up…. Whatever future remains to a nonhistorical philosophy will be confined to hollow classroom exercises, a purely academic philosophy which remains powerless to expand consciousness and contribute towards the enrichment of experience.

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84 *The Basis of a Philosophical Anthropology* 216.
85 See *The Basis of a Philosophical Anthropology* 205.
Unfortunately, all of the philosophers treated in this section are deceased or have retired from academic life. Very few up and coming philosophers have accepted the important mantle bequeathed by these thinkers. Despite the appearance of pluralism that is currently projected from within the American academy, our philosophy still wields a formidable abstractness. The representative work is often verbose and otiose – its lack of originality shrouded by an over use of jargon and footnotes. When contrasted with the current standard of philosophical writing, the efforts of this select group stands out by reason of the accessible manner in which it is written, the wealth of experiential dimensions to which it appeals, and the absence of any invasive formalism. In order for philosophy to have even the slightest chance of resonating outside of the academy, it must at the very least exhibit qualities of accessibility and relevance. As Barnaby C. Kenney – a former president of Brown University – once remarked “The scholar does not lose dignity by being intelligible.” Failure to heed this fact will result in a largely unacknowledged transition from the “ivory tower” to something akin to the Tower of London – a place suited to storing the Crown Jewels but hardly a place worthy of housing that which should be the intellectual property of humankind. As William James intimated in his satirical essay *The Ph.D. Octopus*, a certain baldheaded-bespectacledness has come to dominate philosophy. One astute American philosopher summed it up as: “[T]hose who need the most possess the least. Sheltered within the academic world, philosophers lack access to human diversity.”

My hope is that our fate would not become that which Nietzsche predicted for Western humanity – a state of archival blindness stemming from a myopic preoccupation with dust from books and printers’ errors. E.M. Adams – a

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recent American philosopher acutely aware of this very problem – states the matter powerfully:

We have what I have called a saber-toothed tiger civilization. In the evolutionary process, the saber-toothed tiger developed great tusks as effective weapons in combat, but perished because they obstructed its eating. We have developed a culture that is highly successful in advancing science and technology and producing wealth and power, but in doing so we have undermined and subjectivized the sectors of the culture that underwrite our identity…. But unlike the saber-toothed tiger, we can discover our error and correct our course. 88

Our dream must be to reverse this course and recover those dimensions of experience that have become lost so as to awaken from the current nightmare. With dreams come responsibilities.

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