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Gabriel Marcel and American Philosophy

David W. Rodick

ABSTRACT: Gabriel Marcel's thought is deeply informed by the American philosophical tradition. Marcel's earliest work focused upon the idealism of Josiah Royce. By the time Marcel completed his Royce writings, he had moved beyond idealism and adopted a form of metaphysical realism attributed to William Ernest Hocking. Marcel also developed a longstanding relationship with the American philosopher Henry Bugbee. These important philosophical relationships will be examined through the Marcellian themes of ontological exigence, intersubjective being, and secondary reflection. Marcel's relationships with these philosophers are not serendipitous. They are expressions of Marcel's deep Christian faith.

FEW SCHOLARS HAVE TAKEN sufficient note of the fact that Gabriel Marcel's thought is vitally informed by classical American philosophy. Marcel once remarked "a kind of magnetic field stretches around my life, and one of the poles of the magnetic field was and remains, in spite of everything, America."¹ For example, Marcel's earliest writings consist of incisive commentary concerning the idealism of Josiah Royce. Marcel's involvement with idealism was short lived. He gravitated to a form of metaphysical realism appropriated from William Hocking's *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*. Marcel also developed a longstanding relationship with the American philosopher, Henry Bugbee. Marcel believed that he and Bugbee occupied a shared landscape, "illuminated by a light of its own."²

Each of these relationships will be investigated through a specific lens of Marcel's thought. First, Marcel's essays on Royce offer a window into the soul of Marcel's philosophical development. The early Marcel was an idealist. His idealism stemmed from the omnipresent sense of a "broken world," an experience of laceration within the fabric of existence. The complete ideational fulfillment available through a philosophy of idealism offered a salvific repair to this feeling of fracture. The security derived from idealism soon became too stifling—something akin to a prison of immanence closing out the native air of the real. Marcel's previous involvement with idealism provides a unique vantage point from which to engage Royce because something remarkably similar to what drove Marcel from idealism is discernable in the transition occurring between the middle and late periods of Royce's thought.

¹Gabriel Marcel, *Awakenings* [a translation of Marcel's autobiography *En chemin, vers quell éveil*], trans. Peter Rogers (Milwaukee WI: Marquette Univ. Press, 2002), pp. 211, 213.

²Gabriel Marcel, "Introduction" to *The Inward Morning: A Philosophical Exploration in Journal Form* (State College PA: Bald Eagle Press, 1958), p. 18.

Hocking was correct when he stated that Marcel's essays on Royce constitute "the first and, still in my judgment the most substantial and prescient, discussion of Royce's entire metaphysical outlook."³

Second, Marcel's intuition concerning the primacy of intersubjective experience is a pellucid lens through which to examine Hocking's thought. Within an idealist framework, intersubjective contact is never immediate, for it must be mediated through a third, a *principle* of unity. Descartes's appeal to God as a principle of non-deception in Meditation III is a classic example. At critical junctures during his career Royce's appealed to a third, either in the form of an Absolute system of ideas or as a series of symbols through which the Absolute is disclosed. Hocking had rejected a *mediated* conception of intersubjective encounter before completing graduate studies with Royce. His doctoral dissertation argued for "the need to restore the stinging reality of contact with the human comrade."⁴ Marcel was also skeptical of any account of intersubjectivity that did not give credence to the ways in which human encounter occurs in experience. Hocking's stress upon the experiential givenness of intersubjective encounter offered Marcel a compelling alternative to Royce: "Hocking's provocative insight on intersubjectivity in the name of experience challenged Proust's monadism."⁵

Finally, Marcel's notion of secondary reflection is used to understand his relationship to Henry Bugbee. According to Bugbee, *exigence ontologique* constitutes a "moving center" of Marcel's thought, implicating us in a process of "becoming beyond ourselves." We are, to use a term of Marcel's, *disponibilité*. Marcel and Bugbee explore the contour of experience—the indigenous circuit of associations pertaining to the self as *coesse*. Through a reflexive act Marcel refers to as "ingatheredness," the self undergoes increasing degrees of unification. In order to become vested in perpetuity, the self must undergo "an act of faith made explicit only in a dialectical act of participation."⁶

Marcel's relationship to these American philosophers is not coincidental. It is the philosophical expression of his Christian faith, an attempt to realize a profound consistency between philosophy and life. Marcel's most important legacy is his commitment to unity of Christian philosophizing as a unity derived from both reason and revelation. Its diversity stems from the objective plurality of *what* it pursued as well as the subjective plurality of *those* who pursue it. Christian philosophizing seeks a truth that every Christian believes can never be untrue to itself.

³William Ernest Hocking, "Preface" to Gabriel Marcel, *Royce's Metaphysics*, trans. Virginia and Gordon Ringer (Chicago IL: Regnery, 1956), p. vi. See also Quentin Lauer, "Royce's Metaphysics" in *Thought* 32 (1957): 450: "[I]t is somewhat paradoxical that Josiah Royce should find his most eloquent interpreter in France's Gabriel Marcel." Both comments were made before the appearance of the large body of Royce scholarship produced by Frank M. Oppenheim, S.J.

⁴W. E. Hocking, "The Elementary Experience of Other Conscious Being in Its Relation to the Elementary Experience of Physical and Reflexive Objects," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cambridge MA: Harvard University, 1904), p. iv.

⁵Gabriel Marcel, *Awakenings*, p. 72.

⁶"Les conditions dialectiques de la philosophie de l'intuition" in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 20 (1912): 652. I am grateful to Dwayne A. Tunstall for allowing me to consult his unpublished translation.

IDEALISM AS SALVATION: A BROKEN WORLD

The first philosophical position that Marcel embraced was Idealism. His idealism resulted from an acute sensitivity to a “broken world.” When Marcel lost his mother at a young age his aunts cloistered around him. Even after his father married Gabriel’s aunt, a sense of loss remained—a condition that he would later identify by the phrase *exigence ontologique*. Marcel maintained that his involvement with idealism was derived from the experiential conditions in which he first found himself. Idealism provided a shelter from the “wounding contacts of everyday life.”⁷ The young Marcel was destined for idealism.

Marcel’s idealist writings are interesting pieces. His later writings exhibit numerous examples of concrete description while his idealist writings are abstract, dialectical treatments of conceptual issues often with uneven clarity. Marcel likened his idealistic writings to “a drilling operation performed by unskilled hands.”⁸ What can Marcel’s critical examination of the philosophy of Royce’s tell us about Marcel?

Royce’s primary objective in the first volume of *The World and the Individual* is to attack the world knot. The “world knot” is a phrase used to depict the relationship between thought and reality. Royce’s task is to find the key to the world knot. The three reigning philosophical conceptions or “ontological predicates”—realism, mysticism, and critical rationalism—cannot provide a continuous, comprehensive account of the manner in which thought and reality are jointly predicated. An appeal to an absolute mind, complete and total, is required in order to provide the systemic connection between thought and reality. The key to unlocking the world knot lies in the recognition that the truth of philosophical thought can be reached only “[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.”⁹ When Royce expresses reverence for the relations of life, he is speaking from the context of a world whose unity has been abridged by metaphysical conceptions that deny the transparent connection between experience and conception. Royce had a penchant for synthesis, believing that dualisms are distinctions within continuous structures. Marcel referred to this characteristic as the “teleological leitmotiv” of Royce’s metaphysics because “finite life is not mere illusion. . . . We are already, even as finite, in touch with Reality.”¹⁰ Royce’s appeal to an absolute system of ideas implied through every finite idea, no matter how fragmentary, was *his* attempt to heal a broken world.

Royce was convinced that any complete account of the ontological predicate must ask “[D]oes our experience, as such, ever compass eternity?”¹¹ We are like Browning’s lover:

⁷Gabriel Marcel, “An Essay in Autobiography” in *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, trans. Many Harari (New York NY: Citadel Press, 1956), p. 104.

⁸Gabriel Marcel, *The Existential Background of Human Dignity* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1963), p. 22.

⁹Josiah Royce, *The World and the Individual*, First Series: *The Four Historical Conceptions of Being* (New York NY: Macmillan Company, 1899), p. 19.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 182.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 252.

[Our] instant is an eternity . . . see[n] in a transient moment. Every one of [our] glimpses of fact is like a flash of moonlight on the water. Yet *what* we see outlasts the ages of ages. . . . But [the] form of [our] experience is precisely that of any other human creature of the instant's flight. . . . The valid, then, even the eternally valid, enters our human consciousness through the narrow portals of the instants of experience. . . . Necessity comes home to us men through the medium of a given fact.¹²

The significance of this passage is not lost upon Marcel. A halo of possibilities exists at the fringe of finite knowing—an opening pointing beyond the focus of experience *hic et nunc*: “The pseudo immediate leads us to the mediated.”¹³ In finite consciousness, ideas exhibit a “kind of fulfillment,” not complete or “whole fulfillment.” The complete fulfillment of an idea is a fully orchestrated conception: “*a completely adequate empirical content, for which no other content need to be substituted or could be substituted.*”¹⁴

Should finite consciousness transcend its functional limitations, an entire expanse of existence would “spread before you as a simple and unique life.”¹⁵ Within the space of *totum simul*, finite existence exhibits integrity of meaning and purpose: *That art thou*. Each episodic moment is ensconced within a higher unity:

[W]e see through a glass darkly. It is not yet revealed what we shall be. . . . We wait, wonder, pass from fact to fact, from fragment to fragment. What a study of the concept of Being reveals to us is precisely that the whole has a meaning and is real only as a Meaning Embodied.¹⁶

Any given object is more than what can be articulated at any one point in time. Once each experiential event is mediated within a larger framework, what stands as “a totally actualized content . . . ideally conceived”?¹⁷ If our focus is shifted to one pervasive aspect, this sense of totality is reduced. For Marcel, the vector character of experience exhibits an extensive trace of associations whose unifying thread is denuded through the excision of abstraction. Adopting the language of the subjective conditional, what would be the case once an object is considered in terms of the infinite extension of its possibilities for conception? For Royce, the question points to a *lux aeterna*. Empiricism, when pursued to its radical limits, leads to idealism: “There is no possible resting place on the road to absolute idealism.”¹⁸ Royce's synoptic idealism is the result of his devout empiricism.

From a Roycean perspective, experience and conception are correlative terms. Royce understood Hegel to hold that if consciousness provides a criterion from within itself, any investigation becomes a comparison of consciousness with itself. What consciousness affirms from within becomes the standard by which to measure

¹²Ibid., pp. 256–57.

¹³Gabriel Marcel, *Royce's Metaphysics*, p. 37.

¹⁴*The World and the Individual* (First Series), pp. 336–37.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 348.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 368.

¹⁷Gabriel Marcel, *Royce's Metaphysics*, p. 29.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 14.

knowledge.¹⁹ Experience and conception are like “two faces of the divine life.”²⁰ Royce’s position is akin to the speculative empiricism of Whitehead, who also advocated a complete extension of experience in holding that 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.”²¹ Reality is an open circuit of experience and conception.

Marcel recognized the genius of Royce’s attempt to understand the world knot: “[F]or speculative thought this dualism is resolved in unity, and that, in the final analysis, all meaning is immanent.”²² Marcel’s concerns, however, are not unlike those of William James and others who argued that a complete and total absolute results in an *identitätsphilosophie* of the worst kind—a “block” universe in which “the world and the all-thinker thus compenetrates and soak each other up without residuum.”²³ The question is whether Royce can maintain “the concrete unity of freedoms in the midst of absolute freedom.”²⁴ A stock-in-trade inventory of idealist principles leads to a “ruinous” dualism or a monism reminiscent of Bradley. According to Marcel, we must “find a fulcrum in the actual [and] start from the real. [T]his act partakes more of faith than of abstract thought. The relation . . . between God and myself is a relation of individual to individual.”²⁵

Royce was deeply aware of this problem. At the time he was composing *The World and the Individual*, his response to questions concerning the possibility of freedom was similar to that expressed by Meister Eckhart: “Were I not, God himself could not be.” The relationship between God and the finite self is one of concordance. On the one hand, the finite self is “ferment”—a unique center of activity. Conversely, “[A]ll finite experience *must be regarded as* a fragment of the whole, whose content is present in the unity of consciousness of one absolute moment.”²⁶ Finite experience is uniquely individual and, at the same time, metaphysically integral to the project of divine fulfillment.

In *The Problem of Christianity* Royce modified his conception of the absolute, using insights derived from Pauline theology and Peircean logic. Royce underwent a “Peircean moment” in 1912.²⁷ Absolute consciousness is conceived semiotically within time as opposed to all-at-once—a perfectly ordered system disclosed seriatim

¹⁹See G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), p. 53. See also p. 10: “[E]verything turns on grasping the True, not only as *Substance* but equally as *Subject*.”

²⁰Gabriel Marcel, *Royce’s Metaphysics*, p. 33.

²¹John Dewey, “Whitehead’s Philosophy” in *Problems of Men* (New York NY: The Philosophical Library, 1946), p. 413.

²²Gabriel Marcel, *Royce’s Metaphysics*, p. 4.

²³William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977), p. 21.

²⁴Gabriel Marcel, *Royce’s Metaphysics*, p. 49.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 73.

²⁶Josiah Royce, *The Conception of God in Critical Responses to Josiah Royce, 1885–1916*, Volume 1, ed. Randall E. Auxier (Sterling VA: Thommes Press, 2003), p. 204.

²⁷See “Royce’s Acknowledgment of his 1912 ‘Peircean Insight’” in *Josiah Royce’s Late Writings: A Collection of Unpublished and Scattered Works*, ed. Frank M. Oppenheim, S.J. (Sterling VA: Thoemmes Press, 2001), p. 19. Of particular interest is Royce’s acknowledgment of the importance of Peirce in helping Royce make his philosophy of loyalty more concrete.

through a process self-interpretation: “[S]pirit is interpreted, and so interpreted that, the whole world is reconciled to its own purpose.”²⁸ The absolute *is* a function of the infinite number and diversity of loyal initiatives, “the infinitely specified whole of the modes of manifestation allowed by the spirit of loyalty in the universe.”²⁹ This is living reason—a unified and directionally guided activity through which the universe evolves in terms of greater degrees of comprehension. The American philosopher Robert C. Pollock recognized the implications of Royce’s vision:

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.³⁰

Royce’s doctrine of loyalty becomes most crucial at this juncture. Finite selves exercise self-determination through acts of loyal service. Such acts are “free” expressions of personal commitment oriented in perpetuity towards the larger project of disclosing the absolute. Acts of loyal participation are ontological defining in terms of the finite moment *and* the eternal life-plan—the act by which I determine myself is an act through which God *is*. Living beings are united and understood, but not absorbed, by that which transcends them. Through loyal service, “a relation of a special kind is established between an individual and the cause . . . which assumes both free action and self-subordination.”³¹ For Marcel, the direction taken by Royce reflects the most profound lessons of life:

We see clearly here how loyalty is founded for Royce in the nature of 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 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.³²

It may not be unfair to suggest that Royce’s appeal to loyalty, injecting the possibility of freedom into a heretofore block universe, offers a voluntaristic release akin to James’s “will to believe.” Loyalty is a *lived* act of participation between the self and the concrete order. Marcel recognizes the importance of the appeal Royce makes to loyalty as “a sort of reflection on his own system . . . , resulting in the discovery that there are ideal connections between apparently distinct orders of speculation.”³³ From Marcel’s perspective, Royce’s effort to leverage the implications of loyally committed action demonstrates “the preponderant part played by

²⁸Gabriel Marcel, *Royce’s Metaphysics*, p. 144.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 116.

³⁰Robert C. Pollock, “Process and Experience” in *John Dewey: His Thought and Influence* (Bronx NY: Fordham Univ. Press, 1960), p. 165 (emphasis added).

³¹Gabriel Marcel, *Royce’s Metaphysics*, p. 111.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 112.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 109.

the will, by personal activity, in religious certitude, and the role of courage, even of risk, in the building of that certitude.”³⁴ Royce’s appeal to loyalty *enlivens* his thought by proving a more concrete, diachronic conception of human understanding than the synchronic schema initially offered. As Royce would later proclaim in the *Philosophy of Loyalty*, we need “a new heaven and a new earth.”³⁵

By the conclusion of his Royce interpretation, Marcel exhibits an increasing lack of patience concerning Royce’s inability to free himself from the architectonic of absolute idealism—a failure to “substitut[e] the unpredictable richness of spiritual development, for the over-rigid unity of a system.”³⁶ Marcel’s break with idealism left an acute sense of skepticism concerning the transparency of the *Cogito*. A philosophy that begins with the *Cogito* runs the risk of becoming lost in “a sort of dream of itself.”³⁷ Idealism is a philosophy of conception, but reality truly reveals itself precisely at *that* moment it surpasses the forms of representation. Philosophy must, Marcel claims, get “a *hold* on the real at the root of intelligence.”³⁸ We must transcend the ubiquity of consciousness in order to inhabit the anterior space Marcel refers to as a “zone of adhesion.” Here we take leave of ourselves and move “to a center in order to make room for *Celui qui est*—the one who is.”³⁹

REPUDIATING THE GERM OF SOLIPSISM: HOCKING AND MARCEL

Marcel considered Hocking a companion of eternity: “a man who, through the visible world, has never ceased to have a presentiment of what is eternal.”⁴⁰ It may not be an exaggeration to say that Marcel and Hocking came together through Royce. Royce maintained that intersubjective relations are confirmed via a third: either an absolute mind modeled upon a self-representative system or a self-interpreting series of ideas. Hocking understood the primacy of intersubjective experience from his mid-western upbringing. We have *direct* access to others: “Our communication with our neighbors is as direct and immediate as it needs to be.”⁴¹ No appeal to the absolute is required to complete the intersubjective circuit.

Marcel and Hocking are jointly committed to repudiating solipsism. In his contribution to the Hocking Festschrift aptly titled *Overcoming Solipsism*, Marcel recognizes Hocking for having provided the key to unlocking the prison of immanence. A philosophy of immanence reduces reality to the contents of consciousness. Sartre provides a powerful account of this conception:

³⁴Ibid., p. 19.

³⁵Josiah Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (New York NY: Macmillan, 1909), p. 9.

³⁶Ibid., p. 155.

³⁷Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary*, trans. K. Farrer (Gloucester MA: Peter Smith, 1976), p. 30.

³⁸Ibid., p. 47.

³⁹“Les conditions dialectiques de la philosophie de l’intuition,” p. 652.

⁴⁰*Existential Background of Human Dignity*, p. 1.

⁴¹Leroy S. Rouner, “The Surveyor as Hero: Reflections on Ernest Hockings Philosophy of Nature” in *Contemporary Studies in Philosophical Idealism*, ed. John Howie and Thomas O. Buford (Cape Cod MA: Claude Stark, 1975), p. 54. See Royce’s claim in *The World and the Individual*, Second Series: *Nature, Man, and the Moral Order* (New York NY: Macmillan, 1920), p. 89: “Between any two there is a third.”

[T]he spidery mind trapped things in its web, covered them with a white spit and slowly swallowed them, reducing them to its own substance. What is a table, a rock, a house? A certain assemblage of “contents of consciousness,” a class of such contents. . . . Is not my perception the present state of my consciousness? [An] assimilation of things to ideas, of ideas to ideas, of minds by minds. The corpulent structures of the world were picked clean by these diligent diastases: assimilation, unification, identification.⁴²

Marcel was a former proponent of immanence and explained the connection between ideas and the world epistemically. Experiential relations are ideational constructions, the results of cognitive intentions rather than actual modes of intra-relatedness occurring *in media res*. Intersubjective relations become particularly problematic from the perspective of immanence. Royce argued that each self is unique, what he referred to as a “complete life plan.” Each self is an expression of its experiential fulfillment, a denouement occurring at the altar of the absolute. Royce’s favorite example is the conviction that every mother embraces, for *Her* child is like no other!⁴³ Royce’s conception of intersubjectivity led one commentator to suggest that Roycean selves are like windowless monads with “skylights” to the absolute. After reading *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, Marcel was convinced that intersubjective relations “are actually in experience [which, when] grasped at its center, we find the means of transcending that experience, and not at all, as I had believed for so long, in going outside of it and appealing to a set of *a priori* principles.”⁴⁴

Intersubjective experience reflects an embryonic bond; the “other” is present *ab initio*—in “a vein of non-solitude [buried] in the depths of the solitary ego.”⁴⁵ When I experience the other, we meet without barrier. Evidence of this connection can be seen in Descartes’s proclamation concerning the *universality* of the *cogito*; does not Leibniz’s conception of “windowless monads” presuppose a dimension in and from which all monads are windowless? Categorical affirmations of privacy indicate a dimension of *shared* universality. The orientation of intersubjective experience is primarily dative; only in its derivative mode does intersubjective encounter assume an accusative form. Similar to Merleau-Ponty’s claim that phenomenology was a movement long before becoming a doctrine, intersubjective experience, *Begegnensein*, is primordial. The self is sensitive and permeable; capable of extending its presence in a wider radius. For Marcel, “This irrepressible universality joins itself . . . to the inwardness of the *cogito*.”⁴⁶

The primary datum of human experience is a felt relation between self and other. Feeling is a movement towards an objective terminus, providing the *tour de force* of objectivity, a process that Hocking likens to osmosis. Feeling is also cognitively intentional; the self possesses the ability to become ideationally transcendent

⁴²Jean-Paul Sartre, “Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl’s Phenomenology,” trans. Joseph P. Fell in *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* I (1970): 4.

⁴³See Josiah Royce, *The World and the Individual* (First Series), pp. 458–60.

⁴⁴Gabriel Marcel, “Solipsism Surmounted” in *Philosophy, Religion, and the Coming World Civilization: Essays in Honor of William Ernest Hocking*, ed. Leroy S. Rouser (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), p. 23.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴⁶Gabriel Marcel, “I and Thou,” trans. Forrest Williams in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, ed. P. A. Schillp and M. Friedman (Chicago IL: Open Court, 1967), p. 25.

while remaining immanent, “allowing for a *perfect continuity* between prophecy and fulfillment.”⁴⁷ Ideas possess an “uncounted infinity”—an unlimited range of application. The apperceptive potential of the self is a function of its ideational capacity—providing the self with the capability of traversing the experiential field. Combining *reach* of thought with *depth* of feeling, we find ourselves anchored in a world with others while harboring a sense of something more. Hocking emphasizes the “metaphysical density” of experience. The whole is given all-at-once: “We do not learn *to see space little by little*. The child’s space is as great as the man’s, namely, whole space.”⁴⁸ The whole exists both perennially and cumulatively as a “non-impulsive background,” thereby causing Hocking to once remark with humor that *even* the infant is a metaphysician, though, quite happily, not by name or title.

One of Hocking’s favorite examples is the phrase “Here we are.” The phrase bespeaks a relational expanse in which I exist, we exist, as well as a *third*, for the *field* in which the *here* lies and that binds us into a *we*. Within this “meeting ground” or “zone of adhesion,” we breathe intersubjective, native air: “In all of these situations the encounter does not take place in each of the participants, or in a neutral unity encompassing them, but *between* them in a most exact sense, in a dimension accessible to them alone.”⁴⁹ This dimension must be approached dynamically in order to prevent *mésalliance* into an objective category; an opening is required if adhesion is to be experienced. This process consists of a gradual unfolding of prior unity. Marcel is famous for his examples of person-to-person encounter that demonstrate how concrete acts of experiential intercourse occur *de profundis*: “We become simply us.”⁵⁰ As Hocking was fond of saying, “I can imagine no contact more real and more thrilling than this.”⁵¹

Intersubjective experience is felt through the body. The body acts as an intramundane medium—a “grip” predicating self and world. The body is subject to space, time, and causality; but the self’s apperceptive potential gives it the ability to be “*space-free* [and] *time free*, as the body is not.”⁵² The body acts as a conduit, or sluice, through which experience is transmuted into thought. The self is not a completely autonomous being closed in upon itself. We are beings open to being. The reflective self exhibits the potential to achieve divine-like (*theómorphos*) status while traversing the far reaches of the experiential continuum. As the self becomes increasingly open to the universe, it approaches the realization of personhood. Self-realization and intersubjectivity are co-dimensions of human being. Hocking’s emphasis upon the experiential givenness of intersubjective encounter served as

⁴⁷William E. Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience* (New Haven CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1912), p. 95.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁴⁹Gabriel Marcel, “I and Thou,” p. 43.

⁵⁰Gabriel Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, trans. B. Wahl (Chicago IL: Regnery, 1952), p. 146.

⁵¹Hocking, *Meaning of God in Human Experience*, p. 266. See also William E. Hocking, “Marcel and the Ground Issue of Metaphysics” in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 14 (1954): 458. “Intersubjectivity is either everywhere or nowhere.”

⁵²William E. Hocking, *The Self, Its Body and Freedom* (New Haven CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1928), pp. 31, 35.

“an advance in the direction of that metaphysical realism toward which [Marcel] resolutely tended.”⁵³

SECONDARY REFLECTION AS REFLEXIVE: GABRIEL MARCEL AND HENRY BUGBEE

The unity of Henry Bugbee’s life and thought appears strange when judged by contemporary standards. Calvin O. Schrag regrettably characterized Bugbee as one of the more marginalized philosophers of the twentieth century. Willard van Orman Quine described him as the ultimate exemplar of the examined life. Bugbee’s major work, *The Inward Morning: A Philosophical Exploration in Journal Form*, is a series of journal entries. Already aware of the limitations of formal philosophical writing as an undergraduate, he acknowledges: “Certainly anyone who throws his entire personality into his work must to some extent adopt an aesthetic attitude and medium.”⁵⁴

Bugbee began reading Marcel’s *The Mystery of Being* while teaching at Harvard. Bugbee and Marcel became kindred spirits. In 1955 they attended Heidegger’s lectures in France. Their emphasis upon concreteness and place, the peripatetic nature of reflection, and their testimony given to the ethical, aesthetic, and religious dimensions of experience caused Bugbee to remark: “Marcel’s writings spoke to my condition. Marcel helped me to find my own voice.”⁵⁵

Bugbee believed that the empirical self is spiritual—a unity of multiplicity writ small:

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.⁵⁶

When a self is experientially impacted, a *mental* response occurs in the form of an image, sensation, idea, or thought. Qua mental (*Geistigkeit*), these affective responses potentially elevate the subject into the realm of spirit (*Geist*), thereby revealing an ontological perspective that exceeds the material. Similar to what Hocking referred to as our “apperceptive mass,” the human capacity for increasing the scope of reflection constitutes the cognitive side of mystical experience—a grafting of the flesh onto 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.”⁵⁷ For Bugbee,

⁵³Gabriel Marcel, “Author’s Forward to the English Edition” in *Royce’s Metaphysics*, p. x.

⁵⁴Henry G. Bugbee Jr., *In Demonstration of the Spirit* (Princeton University Undergraduate Thesis, 1936), p. 83. For a detailed discussion of Bugbee’s life and thought see David W. Rodick, “Finding One’s Own Voice: The Philosophical Development of Henry G. Bugbee Jr.” in *The Pluralist* 6 (2011): 18–34.

⁵⁵Henry G. Bugbee Jr., *The Inward Morning: A Philosophical Exploration in Journal Form* (State College PA: Bald Eagle Press, 1958), p. 13.

⁵⁶Henry G. Bugbee Jr., *In Demonstration of the Spirit*, p. 14.

⁵⁷Ralph Waldo Emerson, “New England Reformers” in *Essays*, Second Series (Boston MA: Houghton, 1876), p. 284.

the reflexive realization of Spirit constitutes an “inward morning”—an awakening through personal illumination.

Marcel referred to the recuperative process of seeking greater comprehensive unity as secondary reflection. Secondary reflection is a process of *inward reflexion*.⁵⁸ Much like the subject of a reflexive verb, the self is implicated in its mental activity, aware of its role in a recursive process of shaping and being-shaped. At the reflexive level, thinking is capable of giving birth to something more than itself. Reflexion explores the *ontological circuitry* in which beings are implicated. The disclosure of more comprehensive unities reveals a dimension of experience that is not explainable in strictly material terms. Knowledge exhibits a vast mnemonic dimension.

To exist, for Marcel, is to become actualized in perpetuity by re-inscribing oneself in the eternal. The self has access to a sempiternal dimension, thereby indicating “evidence of fixed stars in the heaven of the soul.”⁵⁹ This dimension is not given a priori according to some kind of pre-existing structure, for it is creatively achieved. The provisional, transitory aspects of human being seek something more permanent—a condition not reducible to the transitory nature of becoming. My being is reached or “there” only as I achieve it: “Everything seems to go on as if I found myself acting on an intuition which I possess already without knowing myself to possess it—an intuition which cannot be, strictly speaking, self-conscious and which can grasp itself only through the modes of experience in which its image is reflected, and which it lights up by being thus reflected in them.”⁶⁰ The self that is creatively achieved is spiritual, a self that cannot be objectified.

The transformative dimension of reflexion must be recovered lest it become lost through a myopic concern with the self as an epistemologically defined center of activity. The ontological index of Marcel’s thought is *exigence ontologique*. The phrase “exigence of being” is not offered in the strictly negative sense of need or lack. Modern experience, dominated by materialistic conceptions, appears to be bereft of any experience of being. At the same time, this vague sense of *being bereft* is tied to an awareness of something present, a case of metaphysical disquiet. As Heidegger has pointed out, one is able to speak of a condition of *Seinsvergessenheit* only by virtue of not having completely forgotten one’s forgottenness. For Bugbee, *exigence ontologique* constitutes the “moving center” of Marcel’s thought, thus implicating us in “a kind of becoming beyond ourselves.”⁶¹

Being makes a claim upon us: “The being of beings in time is somehow bestowed upon them.”⁶² We are *disponibilité*. According to Bugbee, our ability “to be radically

⁵⁸For the transformative potential of reflexion, see Romans 12:2, “Do not be confirmed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”

⁵⁹Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: An Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*, trans. E. Craufurd (New York NY: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 9.

⁶⁰Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, p. 118.

⁶¹Henry G. Bugbee Jr., “L’Exigence Ontologique” in *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, ed. Paul E. Schillp and L. E. Hahn (LaSalle IL: Open Court, 1984), p. 81.

⁶²Henry G. Bugbee Jr., “Thoughts on Creation” in *Essays in Philosophy* (State College PA: The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1962), p. 134.

claimed and sustained in being with beings . . . [comes] from a grounding most intimately inward yet infinitely distant from us.”⁶³ Like Bugbee, Marcel explores the contour of experience in order to illuminate the experiential trajectory occurring as the self *recollects* its extant comprehensiveness at the same time that the self *abandons* itself to a sense of mystery exceeding its grasp. An experience of this kind is an act of “reciprocal implication”—a bi-directional, interactive unity. Failure to recognize the reflexivity of the experience results in a limited understanding of self and world.

Bugbee emphasizes the role that each of us plays in the realization of being. In order “to be as the creatures we really are . . . means that we are able to be in the image of being, which is no *thing* at all.”⁶⁴ Human being *exists* only in so far as it is reflexively animated through the disclosure of beings: Being “appears as that which dawns and is in the dawning.”⁶⁵ Things now resonate with a trace of origination that exceeds the space of their immediate disclosure. Marcel put it this way: “[T]his region where the *now* and *then* tend to merge . . . could be nothing other than Eternity.”⁶⁶

Bugbee offers the story of Job as testimonial to the “absolute” in experience. Job’s situation discloses the most urgent ethical question: Where is God? The turning point in Job’s life occurs at the moment of his encounter with the presence of God as reflected through the whirling tempest. Job’s revelation assumes the shape of a vision. The space of revelation has been prepared; but not through any sense of downtroddenness, resentment, or lack of faith. Job is *open* to revelation through his capacity to engage in a form 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.⁶⁷

The story of Job demonstrates the need to step outside quotidian understanding and remain open to what Bugbee refers to as “unconditional affirmation.” The openness exhibited by Job—a comportment that we too may embrace—leads to a sense of grace, *recalling us to our senses!* By re-inscribing the immediacy of the present, *which was there all along* within the higher unity of “secondary reflection,” a condition of sempiternal realization is made possible. As Job realized at the end of his ordeal (42:3–6): “I have spoken about great things which I have not understood but now I see with my own eyes. Therefore I melt away.” Ratiocination is a foreign medium here. What was perceived *per speculum et in aenigmate* is now seen “face to face.”

⁶³Henry G. Bugbee Jr., “L’Exigence Ontologique,” p. 83.

⁶⁴Henry G. Bugbee Jr., “Thoughts on Creation,” pp. 138–39.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁶⁶Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being: Reflection and Mystery*, Volume I, trans. G. S. Fraser (New York NY: Gateway Editions, 1950), p. 194.

⁶⁷Henry G. Bugbee Jr. *A Way of Reading the Book of Job* (unpublished).

CHRISTIAN IMPLICATIONS

Is Marcel's relationship to American Philosophy simply contingent and gratuitous, or an indication of something more important? While preparing to formally embrace the Christian faith at age 41, the question as to which denomination he would adhere had yet to be decided. His religious upbringing was agnostic. Marcel chose the Catholic Church for Marcellian reasons. Catholicism was synonymous with the universal, whereas the multiple sects within Protestantism undermined the deep sense of unity Marcel sought: "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."⁶⁸ In a journal entry dated 23 March 1929, Marcel disclosed the following: "I was baptized this morning. My inward state was more than I had dared to hope for: no transports, but peaceful, balanced, and full of hope and faith."⁶⁹ Marcel's reference to "no transports," suggests the experiential impact of conversion is not to be characterized as some spectacular event such as a bolt of lightning. Nonetheless, the ontological impact of conversion was deeply felt. Marcel's conversion was a: "Return to the *here* and *now*, which recover an unparalleled dignity and worth."⁷⁰

Marcel recognized aspects of Catholicism contrary to his sensibility. When asked about these matters Marcel responded: "When we say: we other Catholics, we are outside Catholicism. *Catholicity*, in my view, that is what matters."⁷¹ The fundamental truths of Christianity are coeval with the integral structure of the human being: "the more one penetrates into human nature, the more one finds oneself situated on the axes of the great truths of Christianity."⁷² While irresistibly drawn into the domain of Christian beliefs, Marcel never abandoned his commitment to reaching a level of understanding sufficiently universal to be appreciated by non-Catholics and even by non-Christians, so long as there is a commitment to what is essential. Marcel referred to this universal dimension as "peri-Christian." Marcel's most important legacy is his sustained commitment to unity of Christian philosophizing. Christian philosophizing requires an appeal to a multitude of sources, but an authentic expression of Christian faith requires the transcendence of limited meaning spheres. No single philosophical system exhibits the deposit of faith. A priori dictates concerning methodological orientation risk "set[ting] oneself outside of the very conditions of philosophical activity."⁷³ Limiting conceptions leave an experiential residue, something like "a still small voice [that] is not heard in them."⁷⁴ Instead of *a* Christian philosophy, it

⁶⁸Gabriel Marcel, "An Essay in Autobiography," p. 29.

⁶⁹Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, p. 24.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁷¹Gabriel Marcel, *Awakenings*, p. 181.

⁷²Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, trans. Robert Rostal (New York NY: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1964), p. 79.

⁷³Gabriel Marcel, "Regarding *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* by Mr. Etienne Gilson" in *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation: The 1930 Christian Philosophy Debates in France*, ed. and trans. Gregory B. Sadler (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2011), p. 174.

⁷⁴Josiah Royce, *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* (New York NY: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 237. Royce believed that limiting conceptions are unable to satisfy the demands of spiritual life. Marcel's clearly

may be more appropriate to speak of the *unity* of Christian philosophizing. Marcel would often speak of a “spiritual convergence” or a sense of co-belonging (*co-appartenance* à) between himself and his interlocutors—a condition traditional philosophy is not willing to recognize. The task of Christian philosophizing must be to seek truth wherever it may lie—searching for insights wherever authentic intellectual experience can be found. Marcel, Royce, Hocking, and Bugbee serve as profound examples of Christian philosophizing. Their thinking bespeaks a reflexive unity stemming from the truth sought as well as the kaleidoscopic, kerymatic, and kairoic gifts exhibited during the seeking. As in the case with all committed truth seekers, Christian philosophers “will that which grows out of [them]; and in that to which the sequent thinking arrives, [they] remain companion, helper, and friend.”⁷⁵ Christian philosophizing seeks a truth that every Christian believes can never be untrue to itself. The aim of Christian philosophizing is to *be* that of which it speaks.

recognized the Catholic character of Royce’s philosophy: “The truth is that 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 (*Royce’s Metaphysics*, xvi).”

⁷⁵William E. Hocking, “Preface” to Marcel, *Royce’s Metaphysics*, p. viii.