

Marcel and Augustine on Immortality:

The Nothingness of the Self and the Exteriorization of Love as the Way to Eternity

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Abstract: A significant feature of the love-based immortality in Marcel's philosophy is its ontological and anthropological dimension, or the way that the structure itself of the human being suggests the real possibility of immortality. The task of this article is to explicate these conditions for the possibility of immortality. The first section begins with a reading of an Augustinian lack-based approach to the afterlife where the restlessness of the person orients her outside of herself in love. The second section develops this movement of love through Marcel's characterization of love as gift, culminating in the act of self-sacrifice for the sake of the other in which the person exists not in herself but in the thou. This implies, as discussed in the third and final section, that through being for the other, there might be a shared eternity between self and thou, which together transgress the boundaries of death.¹

Marcel writes in *Being and Having* that the "problem of the immortality of the soul is the pivot of metaphysic."² The question of life beyond death is the fundamental question; since the answer one gives to it will indicate whether life is meaningless, becoming nothing at death so that all seems for naught, or whether there is a meaningful character to life that endures forever, an eternal significance that may be present even now. But despite the importance of the notion of immortality for Marcel, there are crucial tendencies within his account that are not fully worked out.³ Recently, Geoffrey Karabin, in his insightful "Reflections on Gabriel Marcel's Belief in the Afterlife" develops what he calls Marcel's "love-based" approach to immortality,

¹ I would like to thank Geoffrey Karabin for his encouragement and especially for his work that initially provoked the questions under consideration here. I also would like to thank the participants of *The Gabriel Marcel Society* Satellite Session at the 2019 American Catholic Philosophical Association Annual Meeting, for their comments on an earlier draft, and also an anonymous reviewer for *Marcel Studies* who provided a constructive response to the paper.

² Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, translated by Katherine Farrer (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 11.

³ See Joe McCown, *Availability: Gabriel Marcel and the Phenomenology of Human Openness* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), p. 58.

and also makes a key observation that will be important in future discussions of this topic.⁴ Karabin writes that “[t]he lover encounters the beloved as value and Marcel is convinced that this encounter is ontological in nature;” love is “an ontological experience.”⁵ That is, the core of Marcel’s love-based foundation for immortality rests in the ontological character of interpersonal love. There is an ontological characteristic of love, a way in which love is a feature of existence itself. Moreover, love is not merely *a* feature of existence for Marcel, but it is *the* constitutive characteristic of the being of the human person. As such, immortality, the mode of existence beyond death, or in other words, as an ontological affair, can only be properly understood from the perspective of a developed ontology of the human being. If there is such a thing as immortality, the ontological structure of the existence of the person will perhaps imply such immortality. Within human existence, there is an opening to the possibility of the eternal. What might be, then, the ontological conditions for immortality? What must be true of the person for her to even possibly be immortal?

Karabin juxtaposes the love-based approach to immortality with what he calls the “lack-based” approach, which he also describes as a “flight from the world.”⁶ Not infrequently, one of the main formulations of this approach is located in Augustine, though Karabin does not mention him. In the words of Peter Brown, “Augustine lived in an ascetic age, where the sensitive man already felt humiliated by his body” and “sexual intercourse” was seen as “an element of evil encapsulated in every marriage.”⁷ According to this common interpretation, Augustine rejects the world as insufficient, as unable to provide joy. In response to this insufficiency of the world, Vernon Bourke says that for Augustine, “the universal desire for happiness shows that the human soul must not die with the death of the body.”⁸ The celebrated restless heart of the *Confessions*, the restlessness one experiences until one rests in God, is a desire for what is outside of the world. Immortality is suggested on the basis that nothing in this world can satisfy this desire; the person must have satisfaction and consequently an afterlife that would provide such satisfaction. This immortality allows for the overcoming of lack, and as such is a flight from an insufficient world. However, I would like to suggest that precisely out of lack does an individual turn to the other, with whom one is properly and completely joined only through eternal love, which also suggests immortality. Lack makes us open to the other. Yet to be joined to the other means that the self loves the other, to the point that the self desires that the other for the sake of the other continue to exist eternally. This desire that opens the self to the other is the ontological foundation of the possibility of eternal life. What I seek to do in this article is to take this opening to ontological inquiry regarding immortality that has been provided by Karabin and develop it further, through a reading of Augustine and Marcel together on the notion of

⁴ See Geoffrey Karabin, “Reflections on Gabriel Marcel’s Belief in the Afterlife” in Gregory Hoskins and J.C. Berendzen (eds.), *Living Existentialism: Essays in Honor of Thomas W. Busch* (Eugene, OR.: Pickwick Publications, 2017), p. 47. I owe the phrases “love-based,” “flight from the world,” and “lack-based” (the latter two share the same meaning) not only to Karabin’s excellent article but also to his very insightful paper, “Gabriel Marcel’s Personalist Approach to Immortality,” presented at the Conference on *Personalism and its Relation to the Christian Intellectual Tradition*, May, 18th, 2018, held at the Franciscan University of Steubenville.

⁵ Karabin, “Reflections,” p. 49.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁷ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (San Francisco: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 391, 393.

⁸ Vernon Bourke, “Happiness and Immortality” in his *Augustine’s Love of Wisdom* (West Lafayette, IN.: Purdue U.P., 1992), p. 179.

immortality, in which the ontological dimension of the encounter with the other forms the core of an account of a love-based approach to immortality. I will illustrate this account by way of an Augustinian ontology applied to Marcel's notion of love as gift, which can become the basis for the real possibility of immortality.

To support this claim, I will in the first section of this paper explore Augustine's lack-based approach that begins with a treatment of the lack that is constitutive for the person, a lack in response to which the self moves outside of itself in the exteriorization of love. The second section then discusses Marcel's explication of love as gift, which shows that the person most exists when she lives for the other. Then, building upon this understanding of love and the person, I will explain in the final part of the paper how Marcel's love-based approach to immortality—supported by Augustine's lack-based ontology—reveals the ontological conditions for the possibility of immortality.

I. Augustine on Exteriorization as Love

Augustine's views on immortality have been characterized as being grounded in a sort of eternal present, and so involve a flight from the world, or, alternatively, as expressing the view that an afterlife is the consequence of God's mercy and justice, which can be described as a justice-based approach. This is of course understandable since in Books 20–22 of *The City of God* Augustine explicates the end of time in terms of the resurrection and the final judgment. Thus, Dongsun Cho remarks that “Augustine developed his doctrine of hell primarily from the Church tradition and his personal reflection of Christian theology,” with an emphasis on punishment from a theological perspective.⁹ Edward Fudge locates the ground for Augustine's argument for eternal punishment in Scripture.¹⁰ Henri Irenee Marrou says that for Augustine, “[t]he doctrine of the resurrection holds an important place in his presentations of theological syntheses.”¹¹ Gerald O'Collins remarks that “Augustine defines the faith of Christians in terms of the resurrection.”¹² Vernon Bourke agrees, arguing that Augustine understands immortality in terms of the resurrection of the body—a theological concept.¹³ More recently, Hans Boersma maintains that Augustine considers questions of beatitude and seeing God—which imply immortality—in “theological contexts.”¹⁴ Overall, these studies and others give the impression that Augustine's views on immortality are to be characterized in terms of theology and as emerging from divine justice. Certainly, Augustine the theologian has much to say on the resurrection from a strictly Christian and Scriptural perspective, and these authors are correct in

⁹ Dongsun Cho, *St. Augustine's Doctrine of Eternal Punishment: His Biblical and Theological Argument* (Lewiston NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), p. 28.

¹⁰ See Edward William Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2011), p. 297.

¹¹ Henri Irenee Marrou, *The Resurrection and Saint Augustine's Theology of Human Values*, translated by Maria Consolata (Philadelphia: Villanova University Press, 1966), p. 4.

¹² Gerald O'Collins, “Augustine on the Resurrection” in Fannie LeMoine and Christopher Kleinhenz (eds.), *Saint Augustine the Bishop: A Book of Essays* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), p. 65.

¹³ See Vernon Bourke, “The Body-Soul Relationship in the Early Augustine” in by Joseph C. Schnaubelt and Frederick Van Fleteren (eds.), *Collectanea Augustiniana* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), p. 437.

¹⁴ Hans Boersma, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), p. 96.

explicating these tendencies. However, there is more to Augustine's understanding of immortality, and he in fact provides the philosophical outlines of a foundation for immortality, which this section seeks to develop, beginning with the restless heart of the *Confessions* and culminating in the eternity of love from *On Christian Doctrine*.

For Augustine, that "our hearts are restless until they rest in you" is a statement of the anxiety that is at the core of the person.¹⁵ Life necessarily involves this feeling of restlessness or anxiety, since this restlessness is present throughout the being of the whole person, in "my heart, where I am whatever I am" (*Conf.*, 10.3.4). The being of the person for Augustine is constituted in her heart; her heart and her existence are the same. Thus, the restlessness of the heart will permeate her whole existence. It is not merely a part of her that is restless; instead, her whole being is saturated with restlessness. Restlessness is evident in the very structure of daily life, where the continuous movement of the person expresses lack of rest. Persons are always acting, always moving, always aiming at what they do not presently have. The person who finds herself restless is moving, changing, altering, not at home with herself. Her home is elsewhere than herself and she is unsatisfied as long as she does not have what gives her rest, as long as she is in motion, which is to say that, as long as she is alive, she is restless.

The movement of life reveals that the person is seeking something, which is only possible if she does not have what she is seeking, since, as Augustine argues, one cannot attempt to gain what she already possesses. Movement is always movement toward what is not possessed, what is not of the self. It is toward what the self lacks, making this movement directed and aimed at something. Consequently, movement emerges at all because of a not, a nihility, that is at the core of the person. The person is constituted as nothing. The restlessness of the heart discloses an ontological and existential lack that is the ground of the person. For if the person had everything, then she would not seek anything else. She would never change and never move. She would be at rest. The movement resulting from the nihility of the person becomes manifest in simple phenomena, such as hunger, thirst, and the desire for companionship. The person is always seeking, is always restless, for what is not her own. She only lives on the condition that she encounters what is not her own, such as the food she eats and the other she loves. In a way, then, the person might be said to be constituted by a "not."

That Augustine is aware of the nothingness of the person is made clear since immediately before he speaks of the restless heart, he observes that the person "bears about within himself his mortality" (*Conf.*, 1.1.1). The person as restless is intrinsically heading toward death, indicating a nothingness that is the ground of the person; for a being who is to die, is in herself to become nothing. That is, she is not self-sufficient. She does not stand in herself. Her absolute lack of self-sufficiency is seen in her inability to do anything to prevent her death. She is not at all her own ground, her own source of salvation. The nothingness of the person is further glossed by Augustine in *Sermon 13*, where he argues that one should "[r]ejoice in him, not in yourself, in him who is the source of your being what you are, a human being;" further, "if you place [your hope] in yourself, though, you'll be dangerously proud."¹⁶ Apart from any theological or eschatological implications of this passage, Augustine is making clear that humans are not their own foundation, which is why they cannot hope or rejoice in themselves. The person does not

¹⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by John K. Ryan (New York: Image, 2014), 1.1.1. Subsequent citations will be abbreviated as *Conf.*

¹⁶ Augustine, *Sermon 13.2*, in E. M. Atkins and R. J. Dodaro (eds.), *Augustine: Political Writings* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 2001).

make herself exist, does not keep herself in existence, and does not have all that she needs to exist. For instance, if she stopped eating, she would die. Without food, which is not her own, she would not exist. Because of the absence that comprises the person, she must always go toward God for Augustine, or in the most basic terms, to what is other than herself, since God is other. For she is not her own source; she is not a substance, a being that stands in itself, but a being who stands and can only stand outside of itself. This is the movement of exteriorization—the movement toward the other.

Augustine describes exteriorization when he remarks that “consideration welled up in my mind out of the depths of my heart” (*Conf.*, 4.13.20). Further, when his mother Monica died, “a mighty sorrow welled up from the depths of my heart and overflowed into tears” (*Conf.*, 9.12.29). Words “and similar expressions” proceed from the hearts “of those who loved and repaid their comrades’ love” (*Conf.*, 4.8.13). The emotions, thoughts, and feelings of the heart emerge from and are a response to the nothingness of the person. All of these affects manifest the exteriorization of the person. The heart, in its movement away from its native nothingness, exteriorizes itself toward what is not itself through its mind and flesh. Augustine had thoughts that emerged from his heart into his mind on a specific topic. He felt sorrow coming up from the depths of his heart upon his mother’s death. In response to the other who is also a friend, one goes out to the other in communion through speech and gesture. The self moves outward from its own nihility toward the objects of affectivities.

This is because affects, acts, and thoughts for Augustine are intentional in the sense of being intended or directed at their objects. He points out in *On the Trinity*, “where nothing is being loved there is no love.”¹⁷ That is, love always has an intentional object, in the sense of being directed toward such object. Love is oriented toward something exterior to the self. This is true not only of love for Augustine, but also of all passion and thinking. Consequently, the motion of exteriorization itself culminates in an intentional relation to others and the world, in which the person exists in all of her constitutive feelings, desires, thoughts, and choices insofar as these are aimed at their respective objects. A person loves her spouse, chooses which book to read, desires that her children grow up to become happy, and thinks about the story related to her by her friend. None of these characteristics of the person would exist apart from their orientation to their objects. The person is thus always constituted by what and who is other, by the movement of exteriorization toward the other in affectivity and thinking, which indicates, according to James Wetzel, that for Augustine “emotion [is] genuinely a motion toward something.”¹⁸

Therefore, all affectivity and thinking is at its core the exteriorization of the self through the objective orientation of intentionality. Such exteriorization itself is most fundamentally love for Augustine, who states that “[m]y love is my weight! I am borne about by it, wheresoever I am borne” (*Conf.*, 13.9.10). In a letter, he writes that “we advance not by walking but by loving.”¹⁹ Love is not merely any characteristic of the person for Augustine, but the fundamental aspect of the human being. The movement of life that comes from restlessness culminates in the directionality of love toward that which is other than the self. Love is the proper movement of

¹⁷ Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 9.2.2, translated by Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY.: New City Press, 1991).

¹⁸ James Wetzel, “Augustine” in John Corrigan (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion* (New York: Oxford U.P., 2008), p. 361.

¹⁹ Augustine, *Letter* 155.4.13, in *Letters*, II, translated by Roland Teske (Hyde Park, NY.: New City Press, 2003).

exteriorization, the orientation of the self to what is outside of itself. The person acts at all because of her love. Love directs and guides the person into exteriority, into what is other than the self. Exteriorization is oriented to alterity, the response to the native nihility of the self. As exteriorization, love is the seeking of a ground, the attempt to find a genuine foundation for the person that overcomes nothingness. As I have already noted, since the person is not her own ground, then ground is not of the self, but is other, specifically of the other person. That love is oriented toward the other is shown by Augustine when he states, “we should serve our neighbor with absolutely devoted love.”²⁰ Love is for the other, where the self cares for and dedicates itself to the other. Love, properly, will find its end in the other.

Augustine further argues for the other as the end of love in *The City of God* when he writes that “two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord.”²¹ There are two loves, one of which is a solipsistic return to self; the other is the ontological movement of exteriorization itself. The first is love of self, in which the self is taken as an end, which is to say that this love attempts to maintain that the self is sufficient by and in itself, its own ground. All else becomes secondary to this self that revels in its own glory, imagining that it is the primordial foundation of its being and that its existence culminates in its own exaltation. In opposition, there is love of the other; though here the other is identified as God, at the most primordial level, since God is most other and a person, this love as such is love of the other. The other is the ground, the end, the source of my being. These are not two equal possibilities that can be arbitrarily chosen; as I have suggested earlier in this article, Augustine maintains that the self is inherently nothing and thus is exteriorized. The implication of this exteriorization of the self is that the proper object of love is the other. In love of the other, the self recognizes its insufficiency, its lack of ground. The self sees that it is not primordial, that it is not an end in itself. It knows itself to be nothing, and so it must turn to the other, who it loves. This exteriorization, this love, is always already the primordial orientation of the person.

As the ground of the person, this otherness is to be loved for its own sake as the proper end of love. Augustine maintains that “the love involved in friendship ought to be gratuitous A friend is to be loved freely, for his own sake, not for the sake of something else.”²² The other person for Augustine is to be loved for his own sake, which means that he is the source of real joy. In joy, the person is united with and clings to the other. For in love, one is brought together with the object of love, since one is “pulled out of or beyond oneself.”²³ To be standing outside of oneself is to be in the other. Augustine explains that “[e]ach person is as his love is. Do you love the earth? You will be earth. Do you love God? What shall I say? Will you be God? Listen to Scripture, for I dare not say this on my own: You are gods, and sons and daughters of

²⁰ Augustine, *Letter 95.6*, in E. M. Atkins and R. J. Dodaro (eds.), *Augustine: Political Writings* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 2001).

²¹ Augustine, *City of God*, translated by Marcus Dods (New York: The Modern Library, 1993), 14.28.

²² Augustine, *Sermon 385.4*, in *Sermons*, III, translated by Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY.: New City Press, 1995).

²³ Virginia Burrus, Mark D. Jordan, and Karmen MacKendrick, *Seducing Augustine: Bodies, Desires, Confessions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p. 94.

the Most High.”²⁴ This passage indicates, according to Meconi, that “[a]ll love for Augustine is thus characterized by a unitive power which transforms the lover into the beloved.”²⁵ Love as exteriorization is fully ecstatic. The person is entirely exteriorized, entirely moved out of herself. She cannot at all remain in herself, but finds herself in the other, for whom she lives. In being so exteriorized, she stands outside of herself in the other, who is her ground, satisfying the restlessness of the restless heart. For to love “the neighbor is to find one’s own good through loving the neighbor properly,” writes Baer on Augustinian charity.²⁶ The person exists and locates her end, her good, in loving the other for the sake of the other. In loving the other for her sake, the self is not loving the other so that the self can attain its ground. As ecstatic, the union with ground is for the sake of and in the other. Only a love that forgets the self can permit the reaching of ground. Ecstasy assumes that this arriving at ground is not arriving—because the ground is not my own. This satisfaction, the presence of ground, results in ecstatic pleasure and joy, which can only occur when the person is wholly in ecstasy in the other. This ecstasy occurs when the “soul is perfected in an enjoyment that is a type of self–forgetfulness.”²⁷ The person is aiming precisely at attaining this joy through being united to the other in perfect love, where she is wholly in the other. This means that the person exists as living for the other for the sake of the other, abandoning herself, sacrificing herself, giving herself to the other. In this she feels joy, the indication of her lack being overcome.

But for Augustine, only those beings “are to be enjoyed which we have described as being eternal.”²⁸ The full radicalness of Augustine’s exteriorization here becomes apparent. Exteriorization is not supposed to be a merely temporary relation, but is the constitutive mode of being that belongs to the human person. The movement of exteriorization, love, is striving after an eternal, infinite ecstasy with the other, since only in eternal joy is the restlessness of the heart overcome. Restlessness culminates in infinite and eternal ecstasy. Any temporal joy will fail to satisfy the restlessness of the heart, since the heart will still be restless concerning the coming termination of its temporary joy. What gives eternal joy alone overcomes the restless heart. This opens up the possibility for Augustine of immortality, since “when anyone shall reach the eternal . . . charity will remain more certain and more vigorous.”²⁹ When after death humans are joined with God and with one another, charity will become stronger. Charity, or love, does not cease after death for Augustine; it transgresses the boundaries of death and thereby provides a path to immortality. For love remains in the life after death. There is an aspect of love that implies eternity and so immortality. This is the result of the satisfaction of the soul “whose true and certain rest is eternity; but the eternal is more ardently loved when it is acquired than when it is

²⁴ Augustine, *Tractates on the First Letter of John*, 2.14.5, in *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 112–24; *Tractates on the First Epistle of John. The Fathers of the Church* 92, translated by John. W. Rettig (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995).

²⁵ David Vincent Meconi, “Traveling without Moving: Love as Ecstatic Union in Plotinus, Augustine, and Dante,” *Mediterranean Studies* 18 (2009), p. 8.

²⁶ Helmut David Baer, “The Fruit of Charity: Using the Neighbor in ‘De Doctrina Christiana,’” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 24: No. 1 (1996), p. 63.

²⁷ Michael Sherwin, “Aquinas, Augustine, and the Medieval Scholastic Crisis concerning Charity,” in Michael Dauphinais, Barry David, Matthew Levering (eds.), *Aquinas the Augustinian* (Washington D. C.: Catholic U of America P, 2007), p. 192.

²⁸ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 1.19.21, translated by D. W. Robertson, Jr. (Upper Saddle River, NJ.:Prentice Hall, 1958).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.39.43.

merely desired.”³⁰ Access to immortality is possible through love for Augustine, since it alone remains past death, where the love, the gift, of the self, is joined to the eternal, the ground of the person. Therefore, when the movement of the restless heart is followed to its conclusion, what remains is not flight from the world, but the gift of self to the other in charity—a love-based approach that takes into account the ontological lack at the core of the self. Love, for Augustine, that which allows for the overcoming of nihilism, also suggests the possibility of life beyond death.

II. Marcel on Love as Gift

However, Augustine, though he maintains love as gift, does not develop the details of love’s constitution as gift and how charity leads to eternity. This is where Marcel’s explicit understanding of love as gift allows for a more complete development of both Augustine’s and Marcel’s views of immortality. Before I continue with Marcel’s own account of how the person as a loving being might possibly be immortal, I will briefly review what has been written on Marcel regarding these themes. Except for Karabin’s opening to the ontological as discussed at the beginning of this paper, most literature regarding Marcel on immortality does not ground immortality in an ontology of the person, while works that discuss the structure of the person do not progress to the notion of immortality. In the first category, Thomas Anderson, in both his commentary on *The Mystery of Being* and in his article, “Gabriel Marcel on Personal Immortality,” emphasizes how love of the other person implies an absolute Thou who grounds interpersonal love, and who, as the foundation of this love, will not let it be annulled by death.³¹ Anderson writes of unconditional love that “I feel called to love another unconditionally because I experience her to possess overwhelming value, and to possess such value she must exist beyond death.”³² The source of this infinite value is “an eternal being which is intrinsically of unlimited value,” the absolute Thou.³³ Persons “have intrinsic eternal value because they are gifts from God.”³⁴ Anderson’s approach is well-argued and illuminating; however, he does not emphasize the ontological aspect of immortality, rather focusing on what perhaps could be called the theological dimension of immortality. Thus, though an ontology of the person’s immortality might lead to and support theological implications, such an ontology must first be worked out, which is the task of this article. Thomas Busch has given an outline account, but does not develop in significant detail the basis of Marcel’s defense of immortality.³⁵ Clyde Pax has pointed out that, for Marcel, the death of the other person is central, yet this centrality is not used to provide a foundation for immortality.³⁶ Joe McCown provides a brief discussion of

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.38.42.

³¹ See Thomas Anderson, *A Commentary on Gabriel Marcel’s The Mystery of Being* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette U.P., 2006), pp. 172–174, 188; and Thomas Anderson, “Gabriel Marcel on Personal Immortality,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 80, No. 3 (2006), pp. 402–403, 405.

³² Anderson, “Gabriel Marcel on Personal Immortality,” p. 401.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

³⁴ Anderson, *A Commentary*, p. 172.

³⁵ Thomas W. Busch, “Gabriel Marcel on Existence, Being, and Immortality,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 52 (1978): pp. 77–86.

³⁶ Clyde Pax, “The Time of Death,” in William Cooney (ed.), *Contributions of Gabriel Marcel to Philosophy* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), pp. 114ff.

immortality and love without, however, offering a detailed explication of this relation.³⁷ In his treatment of hope in Marcel, Joseph Godfrey links hope to love, but does not discuss how hope and love might for Marcel imply immortality.³⁸ The other body of research discusses the person or some key aspect of the person, but not how the structure of the person implies immortality. Among these are the papers of Brian Treanor and Leo Gabriel, each of which discuss Marcel's view of the person as relational and as constituted by love without providing an account of how this position might become the basis for an argument for an afterlife.³⁹ John Vigorito writes on Marcel's understanding of time as porous through the availability to the other in love and gift, a porosity that does not lead to, however, a consideration of immortality.⁴⁰ All of these essays give cogent insights into Marcel's thinking within their scope, without suggesting that the ontology of the person is the basis for immortality; however, this link, I would like to suggest, is the key to Marcel's argument for immortality, the crucial connection that gives Marcelian immortality a basis in the evidence from existence itself, an argument that can be supplemented by the explication of Augustinian ontology noted in the previous section. Before all theological or valuative dimensions of Marcel's argument for immortality, there is a necessary ontological dimension.

We now need to discuss Marcel's understanding of love as gift to show how Marcel and Augustine have a similar account of love, though Marcel goes significantly further in developing his account. Marcel states that "it is possible for there to be an unconditional love of creature for creature—a gift which will not be revoked. Whatever may occur, whatever disappointment experiences inflict on our hypotheses, our cherished hopes, this love will remain constant."⁴¹ The primary characteristic of love for both Marcel and Augustine is gift. This gift exists in the creature for creature, or person to person, relationship. That is, love constitutes the concrete relationalities between persons. It exists between persons, where a person loves another person and so gives herself to this other person. Love, then, is not reducible to one solipsistic individual, but exists as the concrete bond between persons who give themselves to one another. This gift is not any gift, not a mere accidental gift of something small, like a sum of money or a cheap present; neither is it the so-called gift that is really given in hopes of gaining a reward, nor is it the gift offered that is to be returned. Rather, the gift to which Marcel is referring is the total gift of self, in which the self forever surrenders itself to the other, for the sake of the other in service to the other. This is indicated by Marcel's employment of the term unconditional, meaning that love is a gift that will not be revoked, and also by his statement from *The Mystery of Being* that the person "most completely is, in the act of giving his life away" in "self-sacrifice," a notion of sacrifice to which I will return later in this section.⁴² A love that is given

³⁷ See Joe McCown, *Availability*, pp. 57–60.

³⁸ See Joseph J. Godfrey, "Appraising Marcel on Hope," in Cooney (ed.), *Contributions of Gabriel Marcel to Philosophy*, p. 154.

³⁹ See Brian Treanor, "Constellations: Gabriel Marcel's Philosophy of Relative Otherness," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 80, No. 3 (2006): pp. 369–392, and Leo Gabriel, "Marcel's Philosophy of the Second Person," in Paul Arthur Schilpp and Lewis Edwin Hahn (eds.), *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel* (Le Salle, IL.: Open Court, 1984), pp. 295–309.

⁴⁰ See John V. Vigorito, "On Time in the Philosophy of Marcel," in Schilpp and Hahn, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, p. 412.

⁴¹ Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, translated by Robert Rosthal (New York: Fordham U.P., 1964), p. 136. Subsequent citations are abbreviated as *CF*.

⁴² Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, Volume I, translated by G. S. Fraser (South Bend: St. Augustine's

selflessly and without reserve would find few other paradigms more apt to describe it than that of sacrifice. The self leaves nothing for itself, but offers itself as a whole to the other, regardless of any reward or the possibility of the gift being returned to the self. In being irrevocable, the gift, once given, can never be returned. For the gift, as unconditioned, is not predicated upon anything else; it exists on its own basis as the originary ontological relation between the self and the other. As gift, love is what forever joins persons together in a manner that exceeds anything merely subjective that can be determined by the isolated individual.

Among the central traits of love as gift for Marcel is hospitality, which “is a gift of what is one’s own, i.e., of oneself” (*CF*, 28). The motion away from oneself of exteriorization as love cannot be understood as being anything different than gift itself. For gift is the one for the other, the radical orientation of oneself toward the other. An exteriorized being is one who is outside of herself and oriented to the other; concretely, she is for the other. She exists precisely in being for the other, as a gift is a giving by someone of something to someone. Marcel suggests that “any gift is in some way a giving of oneself, and that, however difficult it may be to think of a gift of oneself, such a gift cannot on any showing be compared to a transfer.”⁴³ In this gift, moreover, there is “a certain character of unconditionalness” (*MBII*, 118). The gift of self declares that what, or who, is given is the self. This gift is not a transfer, it is not of the order of economy and exchange, done for some reward, based in some pretense of benefit. As unconditional, and as being of the self, then gift itself becomes gifted on the basis of a giving without return. One gives herself wholly, completely going outside of herself for the other, never returning to herself. Love and gift are identical for Marcel, since both are united in their unconditional core. Love offers one’s whole existence for the other. For in love, one says

I belong to you. This means: I am opening an unlimited credit account in your name, you can do what you want with me, I give myself to you . . . I freely put myself in your hands; the best use I can make of my freedom is to place it in your hands; it is as though I freely substituted your freedom for my own; or paradoxically, it is by that very substitution that I realize my freedom (*CF*, 40).

In love, one belongs to the other, which is what it means to be gift. As gift, one is at the disposal of the other, so that the individual makes herself available to the other. She lives for the other, satisfying the other’s needs, desires, and loves. Her life is for the sake of the other; she is fully exteriorized in her presence to the other, where the other’s needs become hers. But the needs of the other do not become hers in the sense of being taken into herself in a movement of assimilation. On the contrary, the needs of the other become hers in that such needs constitute the identity of the one who has gifted herself. She is, as gift, a being for the other. Her needs become nonsensical if she remains in her own self. The self of the individual exists at all precisely insofar as it has surrendered itself to the other so that the other’s needs, what sustains the other, and so the being itself of the other, become the self’s being. Her being is in being for and in the other. Concretely, this indicates that the self, even in, for example, her eating, is not eating for herself. She does not eat to sustain herself, but she eats so that she might live for the other and sustain the other, allowing her to feed the other. All that she does is for the other,

Press, 2001), p. 166. Subsequent citations abbreviated as *MBI*.

⁴³ Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, Volume II, translated by G. S. Fraser (South Bend, IN.: St. Augustine’s Press, 2001), p. 118. Subsequent citations abbreviated as *MBII*.

besides actions characteristically thought of as being for the other, such as giving things to and spending time with the other. Even in her freedom, her own free will only exists as being willed for the other. To be free is to be free for the other. In the words of Leo Gabriel, “Marcel shows how the I receives its accomplishment of existence and freedom from its devotion to the Thou.”⁴⁴

An aspect of belonging to the other includes availability. Marcel states that the “French terms I use are *disponibilité* and *indisponibilité*. Literally, in English one would render these as availability and unavailability, but it might sound more natural if one spoke of handiness and unhandiness, the basic idea being that of having or not having, in a given contingency, one’s resources to and or at hand” (*MBI*, 163).⁴⁵ This availability and unavailability is determined by whether an individual is either oriented to herself or to the other. For,

The self-centered person . . . is unhandy; I mean that he remains incapable of responding to calls made upon him by life [H]e will be incapable of sympathizing with other people, or even of imagining their situation. He remains shut up in himself, in the petty circle of his private experience He is unhandy from his own point of view and unavailable from the point of view of others. It follows from this that it is essential to human life not only . . . to orientate itself toward something other than itself, but also to be inwardly conjoined and adapted . . . to that reality transcending the individual life which gives the individual life its point and, in a certain sense, even its justification (*MBI*, 163–164).

The egoist is fundamentally unavailable; since she is focused wholly upon herself, taking herself to be the ultimate end and oriented solely toward her own exaltation, the other does not appear to her. She refuses to pay attention to the other, focusing on herself, deliberately refusing to heed the call of the other. In failing to give herself, she is closed to the other, and so unavailable. As restricted to herself, this unavailable person will not even be available to herself on account of her rejection of the other, who is her own foundation. She rejects the conditions for her own existence. In contrast to this unavailability, the available person loves. A central aspect of love as gift, as saying that I belong to you, is making oneself available. This availability consists in providing one’s resources, including one’s own being, for the other. What belongs to me, and in particular my whole being, is available and present to the other, who is thereby sustained and aided through my love. In this availability, the person is as a whole aimed at and present to the other. All that the self is, including interior thoughts, choices, and emotions, is directed toward the other. As Treanor writes, availability “requires both openness to(ward) the other and openness to the influx of the presence of (from) the other.”⁴⁶ The self, in being for the other, is open to the other, and thus can receive the other into herself so that she is constituted, in her whole interior life, by the other. The disposition of the self is for the other. In so living for the other, a person truly comes to live. For only then does she transcend her own nothingness when she moves outside of herself. As originally nothing in herself, the available person, through being available, comes to truly be in such availability and gift. Life only gains value and arises from the nothing when it transcends its innate nihility through being for the other. For as Marcel

⁴⁴ Leo Gabriel, “Marcel’s Philosophy,” pp. 304–305.

⁴⁵ Because of the potential Heideggerian connotations of the term “handiness” in English, I will stick to using availability and unavailability as translations of Marcel’s French terms.

⁴⁶ Treanor, “Constellations,” p. 378.

says, only as a gift does life have its point or justification. That is, the worth of life comes precisely from the act of loving, of giving oneself to the other. This point is articulated well by Karabin, who writes that love is that “process whereby the lover is freed from his/her own self so as to recognize the intrinsic goodness constituted by the beloved.”⁴⁷ As intrinsic, the very existence of the other is the foundation for her goodness and worth, which permeate the life of the self so that such life has value. The value of existence arises from the incarnate situation of being in relation to the other, so that the other is the very source of value. This is a value that can only be communicated to the self through its being for the other. Accordingly, love for Marcel is fundamentally a response to the existence and so value of the other, a response that motivates and grants life its worth.

The defining characteristic for Marcel of love as gift, the culmination of availability and presence, is the act of sacrifice, of the renunciation of self for the sake of the other. He states that “the person who is carrying the act out has . . . the feeling that through self-sacrifice he is reaching his fulfillment; given his own situation and that of everything dear to him, he realizes . . . he most completely is, in the act of giving his life away” (*MBI*, 166). Marcel here is speaking of the most extreme case, in which a person willingly, deliberately, sacrifices her life for the life of an other, dying so that the other might yet live. However, these comments from *The Mystery of Being* are hardly meant to only apply to the instance of standing in to prevent the death of the other. Marcel’s fundamental claim is that on the basis of the person existing as love, as gift, then in giving one’s whole being to an other, in the sense of living for the other, the person therefore exists as sacrifice. One most has being or existence precisely through retaining nothing, not even her own being, for herself, but in offering her entire existence for the other without return. That is, the self exists in not existing, in not holding on to its existence. Its existence becomes that of the other, without return, meaning that the self does not act for its own sake but for the sake of the other. The end is the other. The person’s entire life is to be lived for the other—a pure sacrifice and donation. For she eliminates and reforms her own needs, will, and self, so that what she needs is what the other needs. Her life is for the other, her being a sacrifice. That is, she attains her ground in the act of sacrifice, where, since she gives without return, she does not have ground; she is grounded in the lack of ground, in belonging to the other. To combine Augustinian and Marcelian terms, the first and second parts of this article, her native nothingness or restlessness is overcome through the act of gift in availability, presence, and sacrifice—ground through the absence of ground. This combination, however, of Augustinian and Marcelian language is not a foreign imposition; for Marcel concurs with Augustine’s recognition of the nothingness of the self. Before proceeding to the third and final part of this paper that explicates an ontological basis for immortality, I will now briefly show just how close Marcel and Augustine are regarding the nihility that founds the self. This nothingness or lack is precisely the foundation that allows for the originary orientation of the self to the other, since only a being that is not self-sufficient has the possibility of an openness that allows it to turn to the other.

The ontological basis for Marcel’s claim that the self is to give itself to the other rests in the nothingness of the self, which, as constituted by the other, is always already for the other. According to Marcel, humility recognizes that “[b]y myself, I am nothing and I can do nothing” (*MBII*, 85–86). Humans do not have “the power to make ourselves, dependent only

⁴⁷ Karabin, “Reflections,” p. 50.

upon ourselves” (*MBII*, 87). There is a fundamental nothingness at the core of the self. The solipsistic self is an illusion; the person is in herself nothing. She is not her own foundation, and does not confer upon herself her existence. No person exists alone. In Marcel’s words, “[i]t should be obvious at once that a being of this sort (a being in a situation, a being that can say, ‘My situation’) is not an autonomous whole, is not . . . self-contained; on the contrary such a being is open and exposed” (*MBI*, 144–145). Further, “every kind of awareness is essentially awareness of something other than itself; so human living, driven in this way to dedicate itself, seems also essentially the living of something other than itself” (*MBI*, 171). The self is always already with others, with what is not itself. At the most primordial level, the self exists at all because of its constitution by what is not its own. In an immediate sense, this suggests that the meaning of being a human being involves necessarily being related to and comprised by what is other; the very acts of thinking, willing, feeling, and perceiving are always thoughts, choices, emotions, and senses of what is not included in the self—the thought of a tree, the choice of how to spend an afternoon, the feeling of being in love with another, the seeing of the blue sky—all ground the self in what is around it, in what is not the self. The acts, affections, and thoughts that constitute the self only exist in being related to what is other than the self. For “consciousness is above all consciousness of something which is other than itself, what we call self-consciousness being on the contrary a derivative act” (*MBI*, 52). Upon any basic examination of lived experience, what occupies consciousness is not itself—it is what is other than consciousness. Among these relations to what is other, one in particular stands out—the relation to the human other. The fundamental aspect of being a person is to be related to and thus constituted by other persons. For the personal other makes the self what it is, on the basis of the self only existing on the basis of being as a gift, as being exteriorized. Only a being who gives the self a place where the self can truly exist beyond its own self, that is, a human other, can constitute the self. In daily life, besides the initial level of existing only because of one’s parents, the person exists through her relationships to siblings, friends, spouses, children, or acquaintances. Only as a person among other persons does the human being exist, revealing that the person only is in being for and because of the other. Thus, to quote Marcel, “a human life has always its center outside itself” (*MBI*, 82). The person is to live for the other who constitutes her and brings her into being. The act of gift and ultimately sacrifice is both the recognition of and what sustains the person in being for the other. As Vigorito observes, persons are created by “the presence of another in an intersubjective union,” which is “to love.”⁴⁸ Being exists in the act of love, where the self transcends itself through its union with the other. Love in bringing others together gives them their being. Being comes from the other and from being united with the other.

So far in this article, relatively little has been said about immortality; nearly all that has been said refers not directly to immortality, but to the ontological foundations of the person in her movement away from her native nothingness, per Augustine, toward the other for the sake of the other, per Marcel. However, within this ontology of the person is the key to the real possibility of immortality. The task of the final part of the paper is to elucidate this possibility by appeal to Marcel’s explicit discussion of immortality.

⁴⁸ Vigorito, “On Time,” p. 404.

III. Gift as the Way to Eternity

As we have noted, love as gift culminates in sacrifice—sacrifice at the level of completely giving one’s life for the sake of the other, which indicates that love somehow involves the question of death. If love calls upon the self to live entirely for the other, then love also calls upon the self to die for the other. Yet in directing the self to the other, then the question of the other’s death emerges. In love, one lives for a being who is going to die. Death and love are thus intertwined. Marcel speaks to this link when he observes that love “truly exists only when it defies absence, when it triumphs over absence, and in particular, over that absence which we hold to be—mistakenly no doubt—absolute, and which we call death” (*CF*, 152). Death, as the destruction and so loss of presence of the other, is not absolute, meaning that it can be resisted. One cannot accept “the death of the being he loves” (*MBII*, 151). Marcel is challenging the supposition that death is absolute, suggesting that death itself must be rethought. At the initial experiential register, this rethinking of death means that the person refuses the death of her beloved, which should not be dismissed as trivial wishful thinking. Something much more fundamental is at stake in the rejection of death. This can only be understood in the light of the ontology of love, previously discussed. Love is the act of gift of self to the thou, where the I is—insofar as its whole life is—an act for the sake of the thou. That is, “the more my existence takes on the character of including others, the narrower becomes the gap which separates it from being; the more, in other words, I am” (*MBII*, 33). In being with, in, and for the thou, the self possesses genuine existence. When I am bound to the other in love, I am. To be is to be for the other. What this manner of being suggests is that if the person has genuine existence when she loves the other, then perhaps death as my own death can be transgressed. Death is only a threat to me if I am isolated. Marcel states that “[i]f I were really satisfied with the naturalistic affirmation that *I am my body*, that *I am my life*, if I could abide by these affirmations, it would no doubt be necessary to recognize that the judgment [that death has the last word] was true” (*CF*, 173). For a being that exists alone, death looms large, as a calamity. The individual who has no space for others and considers herself her own ground and purpose has everything to fear from death, for death is her own extinction. She has nothing to hold onto besides herself, a being who is careening toward death. But, we are not merely ourselves, our own lives and bodies. We are so much more because we are in loving communion with the thou. There is another side to death—one that is accessible through living for the other.

This other side of death indicates, then, that the question of immortality is not a question of individual salvation, of how I might somehow save myself, save the other by my powers, or attain for my sake the afterlife, but the question is that of the death and salvation of the other. Marcel notes this change of register in *Homo Viator*, where he writes that the negation of death is concerned with “the death of those we love,” where I meditate “about the destiny of my brother.”⁴⁹ The focus of the question of immortality is not on me myself—rather it is about the other, the thou. Though Marcel does speak of how the self exists by including others, he does not properly speaking turn this into an argument for immortality, and understandably so, on account of immortality being focused entirely on the other without return to the self. Immortality has pull precisely because it extends radically beyond myself. What happens to those I love?

⁴⁹ Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*, translated by Emma Craufurd (Gloucester, MA.: Peter Smith, 1978), pp. 147, 152.

What happens to the thou? This is the question of the fate of the thou herself; immortality as conceived by Marcel is fundamentally second–personal. Without the other, the question of eternal life becomes meaningless. Marcel states that “[i]t is plain that the more each one of us takes himself for a center, considering others only in relation to himself, the more the idea of the beyond will be emptied of all meaning, for the world beyond will then appear as a senseless prolongation.”⁵⁰ As discussed in the previous section, life receives its justification from the thou; similarly, any eternal life will also receive its worth from the other. What is of central concern is the thou and her trespassing the horizon of death. Only if she has some access to immortality is my own immortality important, meaning that by emphasizing the thou in his reflections on immortality, Marcel is further developing the emphasis on the thou in this life. To care for the afterlife of the thou, which is to say for her own sake as the continuance of her own life and existence, is the core of the mystery of the immortal.

This conception of immortality is predicated on Marcel’s view that personal existence is through love. Existence is not my own solipsistic existence, but is existence through a loving relation with the other, the thou. For “presence itself” is “a function of the thou” (*CF*, 149). Being, presence, existence is constituted by the thou. The thou is the person’s existence. This relation to the thou by which the person lives is that of love, the love that binds the I and thou together in intersubjective communion. Because I am through this love, my being itself is through the other, showing that love directs me toward and binds me with the thou. In the bonds of love then “I cease to belong to myself, it is not literally true to say that you belong to me; we transcend one another in the very heart of our love” (*CF*, 99). Love assumes a transcendence that goes beyond the self and the other, a communion between the two that makes their separation impossible. This transcendence that is constituted by the dual relationality between I and thou is the core of how death might be transgressed. The emphasis on the challenge to death, as Karabin observes, is “found *in the relationship* in which that value [of the other] becomes manifest.”⁵¹ The self and the other are more than themselves in the communion of love. Only through the thou may death be overcome. Marcel writes,

it is clear that the dead person whom we have known and loved remains a being for us; he is not reducible to a simple “idea” we may have; he remains attached to our own personal reality; he continues in any event to live in us, although it is impossible, given the rudimentary state of our psychology and metaphysics, to clearly describe the meaning of this symbiosis (*CF*, 149).

Now that we have developed the metaphysic or ontology of the person, perhaps it is possible to begin, but only to begin, a description of the symbiosis of the dead and living. The key word here is symbiosis, with all of its connotations of living with and through the other. The implications here are twofold.

First, death must be rethought as something besides annihilation; it is what can “tear us from ourselves in order to better establish us in being” and what “will open the door to all we have lived on earth” (*CF*, 173). Death eliminates the orientation to self since it shows the radical dependence of the self on the other. The person as innately nothing before the face of death must

⁵⁰ Gabriel Marcel, *The Existential Background of Human Dignity* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard U.P., 1963), p. 141.

⁵¹ Karabin, “Reflections,” p. 53 (emphasis in the original).

let go of herself and seek only to live for the other. As that which reveals to the self its native nothingness, death also allows for the self to transcend its own finitude by living for the other. Only a being who is going to die can leave itself behind for the other. Death, then, is the condition of immortality. Death establishes the person more in being because death is what allows for the self to fully leave itself, to be pulled outside of itself in pure love. The self cannot return to itself in the face of death, being powerless before death. All it can do is lovingly commune with and relate to the other, in which the plenitude of existence becomes manifest. Before death, all that the person can do is turn to the other. To make this more clear, Marcel states:

we find that those whom we have never ceased to love with all that is best in us, become a sort of throbbing vault: it is invisible, but yet we can just feel its presence, it almost touches us; as we move forward under it we have to bend ourselves lower and lower; we become more and more drawn out of our own selves until the moment when everything has been swallowed up in love (*MBII*, 186).

The negative character of death is for Marcel the call to turn toward the other and to let go of oneself, which is the positive character of death. Positively, death is that which binds me and compels me to turn toward the thou, the condition for my union with the other, which assumes that I can open myself to her, to let go of myself. I can only commune with the other if I am going to die, for death impels me to love. I must love, since I will die—without love, death remains wholly negative. But death is something positive insofar as through death, through abandoning myself, I can be fully turned to the other. Death can be thought of as that which allows me to fully leave myself for the sake of the thou. Love breaches the limits of death through its movement from oneself to the other that is not subject to the negative character of death, a death that should be thought of as that which finally carries the self beyond its own narrow concerns into the fullness of the thou.

Second, and following from the first, the fullness of the thou is indicated by the love that binds the self to the other. For the love that the self feels for the thou is the response of the self to the value of the thou. Love indicates that the thou is the foundation for the self, suggesting that there is an aspect of the thou that eludes annihilation. The thou could not be a ground were she simply subject to destruction in death. There is no ground in what simply falls into the nothing. The thou must not die; the love that loves the thou would thus be false. But “we must assert as forcibly as possible that human love itself is nothing, it lies to itself, if it is not charged with infinite possibilities” (*MBII*, 156–157). If there are to be infinite possibilities in love, then love must be directed toward what does not collapse into the void. A love that is without end or limit mandates the presence of the object of love that satisfies such love. Love is the affect that reveals the ontological status of the beloved other as being able to transgress death.

This suggests that there is in the thou an aspect of or tendency toward eternity. Anything less than eternity, anything that remains in time, implies that the other will die and that therefore there is no ground, for her or for me. All will amount to nothing. But Marcel maintains that death “cannot nullify the promise of eternity which is enclosed in our love, in our mutual pledge” (*MBII*, 155). For the love that binds me to the other is not merely my love, but our love; not merely my pledge, but our mutual pledge. The eternity that the self might have from the thou emerges as a shared eternity in which the thou too participates. Given that love is shared, that it

is between both the self and the thou, eternity applies not only to the self but also to the thou. The self and the thou together return to ground, to eternity, through their common love. The thou has an openness to the eternal, an openness through which she gives me my being and allows me to move toward immortality. The very relationality with the other contained in love indicates a radical openness to eternity not only for the self but also for the other. Love then points toward “the destiny of the intersubjective unity which is formed by beings who love one another and who live in and by one another. What is really important, in fact, is the destiny of that living link, and not that of an entity which is isolated and closed in on itself. That is what we more or less explicitly mean when we assert our faith in personal immortality” (*MBII*, 155). As the being who “must somehow make room for the other in myself,” through which intersubjective unity may emerge, the self gives herself to the thou (*CF*, 88). This act of giving oneself to the thou assumes precisely that the thou, the other person, is the being who is receptive to the gift of the self. To be a person at all means to be the sort of being who is open and exposed, which suggests that the thou and self, both persons, are the sort of beings who can go outside of themselves so that they can receive what is not their own. The thou as a person is fundamentally exposed and directed outside of herself; she is exteriorized. The thou does not exist in herself but rather exists outside of herself. The other person, in existing exterior to herself, gives place to the self while being open to transcending her own being. As existing beyond herself, she is open, and so open to ground. She exists in ground, as exposed to ground. As long as she is in her ground, she has access to eternity. Love moves the self toward the being who exists in ground, who as existing in ground may trespass the boundary of death. The ground that the self finds in the other is accessible to the self precisely by the openness of the thou to the self and to ground. The other exists outside of herself, meaning that the self can be directed toward its ground by the thou. The other, as an exposed being who is receptive to the call of love, allows ground to flow through her to the self. The self exists and reaches eternity through the other, as disclosed by the love that orients the self to the other. Love is directed toward the thou as the consequence of the thou existing as the kind of being who herself has access to eternity, and who can thus share such eternity with the self. This is perhaps why for Marcel the core of love for an other is saying “thou, thou shalt not die” (*MBII*, 153). The other will not die, which is revealed by love itself. The other cannot be simply swallowed up by the nothing when she, as the being who exists beyond herself, can continue to exist outside of herself in ground, and so can exist eternally.

Love as revelatory is directed toward the thou precisely on account of the thou as the source of ground. Since the thou gives ground to the self, the self loves the thou. Only a thou, only a being who herself might surpass death could allow the self also to go beyond the horizon of death. Love manifests to the self that the other person can be the ground of the self since the thou is exteriorized into ground. The thou is open to what is other than herself. The other to the thou, the other of the thou, is her ground that founds her, suggesting that the love of the thou and the self for one another culminates in a recourse to the absolute Thou, who will not let the love of creature for creature amount to nothing. The love of one for an other is open to the absolute Thou. As Thomas Anderson observes, for Marcel in loving “I experience, at least implicitly, that person as participating in an eternal loving God who is an absolute Person, or, more descriptively, an absolute Thou.”⁵²

⁵² Anderson, “Gabriel Marcel on Personal Immortality,” p. 402.

The love of person for person only occurs in a loving being, who is an exteriorized being, a being who goes out from her native nothingness as seen with Augustine. But this means that only an exteriorized being can be open to the possibility of immortality; only a being who leaves herself behind for the other can be immortal. The possibility of immortality assumes a being who exists in such a manner that she can find a foundation apart from herself. Only a person, a thou, an exteriorized being, can possibly attain such a foundation and ground. There is a certain ontological structure of the person that serves as the basis for the possibility of immortality. Only a being open to the thou, who is herself exteriorized, is open to the absolute Thou, the one who gives immortality. Only a being who emerges from the nothing in love for the other may come to realize eternity.