CHAPTER 6

Further Twentieth-Century Existential Thought

In this chapter we consider several influential contributions by twentieth-century writers associated with existentialism: Miguel de Unamuno, Gabriel Marcel, Karl Jaspers, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martin Buber, and Paul Tillich. Three of these writers—de Beauvoir, Camus, and Merleau-Ponty—were close friends and colleagues of Sartre. Like Sartre, they develop atheistic existentialist philosophies and are influenced primarily by Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl, and Heidegger. The other five writers—Unamuno, Jaspers, Marcel, Buber, and Tillich—use existentialist ideas in support of different religious views. Each of these five is influenced by Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard. Some of the five influenced the others as well. Of the five, the writer whose work shows the greatest affinity to Kierkegaard's is Unamuno. Unamuno shared Kierkegaard's distaste for Hegelianism and developed an irrationalist defense of faith that owed much to the Danish writer. Marcel was drawn to Hegel at least as much as he was drawn to Kierkegaard and resisted the latter's irrationalism. Buber's work aligns with that of Marcel in important ways. In particular, each suggested that we have access to a personal God. But this idea that God is a person is denied flatly by the last of our writers, Tillich, who offers a suggestion that is very much in the spirit of Hegel: Each person may participate in God who is the ground of all being.

Each of the selections presented here is prefaced by a brief introduction to the author and his work.

MIGUEL DE UNAMUNO (1864–1936)

Don Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo de Larraza was born in the city of Bilbao, a Basque town. He studied philosophy and classics at the University of Madrid, then took a position as Professor of Greek at the University of Salamanca. Unamuno was proud of his Basque heritage and was politically radical to the point of being expelled for attacking totalitarianism. For a few years he served on a government post of the Spanish republic but remained independent-minded and was placed under house arrest in Salamanca in 1936, where he stayed for about a year until he died.

In his book *Tragic Sense of Life* (1913), Unamuno suggests that if death ends our existence, then our lives are valueless. Consequently, he maintains that the whole point of philosophy is to decide whether there is a way to achieve immortality. As for why Unamuno thinks that death undermines the value of life, his answer is found near the beginning of "The Hunger for Immortality": "Nothing is real that is not eternal."[1] In his view, only what is eternal has value; so only an eternal life has value.

Unamuno suggests that what people desire above all else is that they will forever remain in conscious existence with their identities intact. He thinks that this desire is an extension of the preservation instinct that makes us seek to remain alive; hence, he thinks the desire is perfectly healthy. This emphasis on the importance of individual survival leads him to follow Kierkegaard in rejecting the practical (Epicurean, stoical) advice that we accept our mortality and cultivate equanimity in the face of death:

> The manly attitude, they say, is to resign oneself to fate; since we are not immortal, do not let us want to be so; let us submit ourselves to reason. . . . No! I do not submit to reason, and I

[1] Miguel de Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life,* trans. J. E. Crawford Flitch (New York: Dover Publications, 1954), 39.

rebel against it, and I persist in creating by the energy of faith my immortalizing God. . . .[2]

Unamuno's emphasis on *personal* survival also prompts him to reject the sentiments expressed in the *Upanishads,* ancient mystical texts that have a central place in Hindu thought. The *Upanishads* suggest that the self is in some sense one with the world, so that our individuality is illusory. But Unamuno rejected this view.

> No, my longing is not to be submerged in the vast All, . . . or in God; not to be possessed by God, but to possess Him, to become myself God, yet without ceasing to be I myself, I who am now speaking to you. Tricks of monism avail us nothing; we crave the substance and not the shadow of immortality.[3]

Unamuno believed that the only hope for achieving immortality is through the aid of the Christian God. Indeed, the promise of immortality is the essence of all religion, according to Unamuno: "all religion has sprung historically from . . . the cult of immortality."[4] He adds in "The Practical Problem" that it is a "human God" we are dealing with—"that is the only kind of God we are able to conceive"—so no one need worry if he is "unable to believe in Him with his head" for "it is not in his head but in his heart that the wicked man says that there is no God, which is equivalent to saying that he wishes that there may not be a God."[5] Instead, Unamuno says, echoing Kierkegaard, "if the attainment of eternal happiness could be bound up with any particular belief, it would be with the belief in the possibility of its realization."[6] Indeed, according to Unamuno, it is enough that we *desire* eternal happiness.

In view of the fact that we depend on God for securing what we most desire (immortality), Unamuno proposes as a principle for our behavior the following:

> If it is nothingness that awaits us, let us make an injustice of it; let us fight against destiny, even though without hope of victory; let us fight against it quixotically. . . . Our greatest endeavor must be to make ourselves irreplaceable; to make the . . . fact that each one of us is unique and irreplaceable, that no one else can fill the gap that will be left when we die, a practical truth.[7]

Thus, the attempt to excel takes on a religious significance for Unamuno.

The Hunger of Immortality
from Tragic Sense of Life

. . . It is impossible for us, in effect, to conceive of ourselves as not existing, and no effort is capable of enabling consciousness to realize absolute unconsciousness, its own annihilation. Try, reader, to imagine to yourself, when you are wide awake, the condition of your soul when you are in a deep sleep; try to fill your consciousness with the representation of no-consciousness, and you will see the impossibility of it. The effort to comprehend it causes the most tormenting dizziness. We cannot conceive ourselves as not existing.

The visible universe, the universe that is created by the instinct of self-preservation, becomes all too narrow for me. It is like a cramped cell, against the bars of which my soul beats its wings in vain. Its lack of air stifles me. More, more, and always more! I want to be myself, and yet without ceasing to be myself to be others as well, to merge myself into the totality of things visible and invisible, to extend myself into the illimitable of space and to prolong myself into the infinite of time. Not to be all and for ever is as if not to be—at least, let me be my whole self, and be so for ever and ever. And to be the whole of myself is to be everybody else. Either all or nothing!

All or nothing! And what other meaning can the Shakespearean "To be or not to be" have, or that passage in *Coriolanus* where it is said of Marcius "He wants nothing of a good but eternity"? Eternity, eternity!—that is the supreme desire! The thirst of eternity is what is called love among men, and whosoever

[2] Ibid., 50.
[3] Ibid., 47.
[4] Ibid., 40.
[5] Ibid., 266.
[6] Ibid., 267.
[7] Ibid., 268–269.

loves another wishes to eternalize himself in him. Nothing is real that is not eternal. . . .

Everything passes! Such is the refrain of those who have drunk, lips to the spring, of the fountain of life, of those who have tasted of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

To be, to be for ever, to be without ending! thirst of being, thirst of being more! hunger of God! thirst of love eternalizing and eternal! to be for ever! to be God!

"Ye shall be as gods!" we are told in Genesis that the serpent said to the first pair of lovers (Gen. iii. 5). "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable," wrote the Apostle (I Cor. xv. 19); and all religion has sprung historically from the cult of the dead—that is to say, from the cult of immortality. . . .

This cult, not of death but of immortality, originates and preserves religions. In the midst of the delirium of destruction, Robespierre induced the Convention to declare the existence of the Supreme Being and "the consolatory principle of the immortality of the soul," the Incorruptible being dismayed at the idea of having himself one day to turn to corruption. . . .

If at the death of the body which sustains me, and which I call mine to distinguish it from the self that is I, my consciousness returns to the absolute unconsciousness from which it sprang, and if a like fate befalls all my brothers in humanity, then is our toil-worn human race nothing but a fatidical procession of phantoms, going from nothingness to nothingness, and humanitarianism the most inhuman thing known.

And the remedy is not that suggested in the quatrain that runs—

Cada vez que considero
que me tengo de morir,
tiendo la capa en el suelo
*y no me harto de dormir.**

No! The remedy is to consider our mortal destiny without flinching, to fasten our gaze upon the gaze of the Sphinx, for it is thus that the malevolence of its spell is discharmed.

If we all die utterly, wherefore does everything exist? Wherefore? It is the Wherefore of the Sphinx; it is the Wherefore that corrodes the marrow of the soul; it is the begetter of that anguish which gives us the love of hope. . . .

And I must confess, painful though the confession be, that in the days of the simple faith of my childhood, descriptions of the tortures of hell, however terrible, never made me tremble, for I always felt that nothingness was much more terrifying. He who suffers lives, and he who lives suffering, even though over the portal of his abode is written "Abandon all hope!" loves and hopes. It is better to live in pain than to cease to be in peace. The truth is that I could not believe in this atrocity of Hell, of an eternity of punishment, nor did I see any more real hell than nothingness and the prospect of it. And I continue in the belief that if we all believed in our salvation from nothingness we should all be better.

What is this *joie de vivre* that they talk about nowadays? Our hunger for God, our thirst of immortality, of survival, will always stifle in us this pitiful enjoyment of the life that passes and abides not. It is the frenzied love of life, the love that would have life to be unending, that most often urges us to long for death. "If it is true that I am to die utterly," we say to ourselves, "then once I am annihilated the world has ended so far as I am concerned—it is finished. Why, then, should it not end forthwith, so that no new consciousnesses, doomed to suffer the tormenting illusion of a transient and apparential existence, may come into being? If, the illusion of living being shattered, living for the mere sake of living or for the sake of others who are likewise doomed to die, does not satisfy the soul, what is the good of living? Our best remedy is death." And thus it is that we chant the praises of the never-ending rest because of our dread of it, and speak of liberating death.

. . .

The greater part of those who seek death at their own hand are moved thereto by love; it is the supreme longing for life, for more life, the longing to prolong and perpetuate life, that urges them to death, once they are persuaded of the vanity of this longing.

The problem is tragic and eternal, and the more we seek to escape from it, the more it thrusts itself upon us. Four-and-twenty centuries ago, in his dialogue on the immortality of the soul, the serene Plato—but was

* Each time that I consider that it is my lot to die, I spread my cloak upon the ground and am never surfeited with sleeping.

he serene?—spoke of the uncertainty of our dream of being immortal and of the *risk* that the dream might be vain, and from his own soul there escaped this profound cry—Glorious is the risk!—καλὸς γὰρ ὁ κίνδυνος, glorious is the risk that we are able to run of our souls never dying—a sentence that was the germ of Pascal's famous argument of the wager.

Faced with this risk, I am presented with arguments designed to eliminate it, arguments demonstrating the absurdity of the belief in the immortality of the soul; but these arguments fail to make any impression upon me, for they are reasons and nothing more than reasons, and it is not with reasons that the heart is appeased. I do not want to die—no; I neither want to die nor do I want to want to die; I want to live for ever and ever and ever. I want this "I" to live—this poor "I" that I am and that I feel myself to be here and now, and therefore the problem of the duration of my soul, of my own soul, tortures me.

I am the centre of my universe, the centre of the universe, and in my supreme anguish I cry with Michelet, "Mon moi, ils m'arrachent mon moi!" What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? (Matt. xvi. 26). Egoism, you say? There is nothing more universal than the individual, for what is the property of each is the property of all. Each man is worth more than the whole of humanity, nor will it do to sacrifice each to all save in so far as all sacrifice themselves to each. That which we call egoism is the principle of psychic gravity, the necessary postulate. "Love thy neighbour as thyself," we are told, the presupposition being that each man loves himself; and it is not said "Love thyself." And, nevertheless, we do not know how to love ourselves.

Put aside the persistence of your own self and ponder what they tell you. Sacrifice yourself to your children! And sacrifice yourself to them because they are yours, part and prolongation of yourself, and they in their turn will sacrifice themselves to their children, and these children to theirs, and so it will go on without end, a sterile sacrifice by which nobody profits. I came into the world to create my self, and what is to become of all our selves? Live for the True, the Good, the Beautiful! We shall see presently the supreme vanity and the supreme insincerity of this hypocritical attitude.

"That art thou!" they tell me with the Upanishads. And I answer: Yes, I am that, if that is I and all is mine, and mine the totality of things. As mine I love the All, and I love my neighbour because he lives in me and is part of my consciousness, because he is like me, because he is mine.

Oh, to prolong this blissful moment, to sleep, to eternalize oneself in it! Here and now, in this discreet and diffused light, in this lake of quietude, the storm of the heart appeased and stilled the echoes of the world! Insatiable desire now sleeps and does not even dream; use and wont, blessed use and wont, are the rule of my eternity; my disillusions have died with my memories, and with my hopes my fears.

And they come seeking to deceive us with a deceit of deceits, telling us that nothing is lost, that everything is transformed, shifts and changes, that not the least particle of matter is annihilated, not the least impulse of energy is lost, and there are some who pretend to console us with this! Futile consolation! It is not my matter or my energy that is the cause of my disquiet, for they are not mine if I myself am not mine—that is, if I am not eternal. No, my longing is not to be submerged in the vast All, in an infinite and eternal Matter or Energy, or in God; not to be possessed by God, but to possess Him, to become myself God, yet without ceasing to be I myself, I who am now speaking to you. Tricks of monism avail us nothing; we crave the substance and not the shadow of immortality.

Materialism, you say? Materialism? Without doubt; but either our spirit is likewise some kind of matter or it is nothing. I dread the idea of having to tear myself away from my flesh; I dread still more the idea of having to tear myself away from everything sensible and material, from all substance. Yes, perhaps this merits the name of materialism; and if I grapple myself to God with all my powers and all my senses, it is that He may carry me in His arms beyond death, looking into these eyes of mine with the light of His heaven when the light of earth is dimming in them for ever. Self-illusion? Talk not to me of illusion—let me live!

They also call this pride—"stinking pride" Leopardi called it—and they ask us who are we, vile earthworms, to pretend to immortality; in virtue of what? wherefore? by what right? "In virtue of what?" you ask; and I reply, In virtue of what do we now live? "Wherefore?"—and wherefore do we now exist? "By what right?"—and by what right are we? To exist is just as gratuitous as to go on existing for ever. Do not let us talk of merit or of right or of the wherefore of our longing, which is an end in itself, or we shall lose our reason in a vortex of absurdities. I do not claim any

right or merit; it is only a necessity; I need it in order to live.

And you, who are you? you ask me; and I reply with Obermann, "For the universe, nothing; for myself, everything!" Pride? Is it pride to want to be immortal? Unhappy men that we are! 'Tis a tragic fate, without a doubt, to have to base the affirmation of immortality upon the insecure and slippery foundation of the desire for immortality; but to condemn this desire on the ground that we believe it to have been proved to be unattainable, without undertaking the proof, is merely supine. I am dreaming . . . ? Let me dream, if this dream is my life. Do not awaken me from it. I believe in the immortal origin of this yearning for immortality, which is the very substance of my soul. But do I really believe in it . . . ? And wherefore do you want to be immortal? you ask me, wherefore? Frankly, I do not understand the question, for it is to ask the reason of the reason, the end of the end, the principle of the principle.

. . .

[S]ensible men, those who do not intend to let themselves be deceived, keep on dinning into our ears the refrain that it is no use giving way to folly and kicking against the pricks, for what cannot be is impossible. The manly attitude, they say, is to resign oneself to fate; since we are not immortal, do not let us want to be so; let us submit ourselves to reason without tormenting ourselves about what is irremediable, and so making life more gloomy and miserable. This obsession, they add, is a disease. Disease, madness, reason . . . the everlasting refrain! Very well then—No! I do not submit to reason, and I rebel against it, and I persist in creating by the energy of faith my immortalizing God, and in forcing by my will the stars out of their courses, for if we had faith as a grain of mustard seed we should say to that mountain, "Remove hence," and it would remove, and nothing would be impossible to us (Matt. xvii. 20).

There you have that "thief of energies," as he* so obtusely called Christ who sought to wed nihilism with the struggle for existence, and he talks to you about courage. His heart craved the eternal All while his head convinced him of nothingness, and, desperate and mad to defend himself from himself, he cursed that which he most loved. Because he could not be Christ, he blasphemed against Christ. Bursting with his own self, he wished himself unending and dreamed his theory of eternal recurrence, a sorry counterfeit of immortality, and, full of pity for himself, he abominated all pity. And there are some who say that his is the philosophy of strong men! No, it is not. My health and my strength urge me to perpetuate myself. His is the doctrine of weaklings who aspire to be strong, but not of the strong who are strong. Only the feeble resign themselves to final death and substitute some other desire for the longing for personal immortality. In the strong the zeal for perpetuity overrides the doubt of realizing it, and their superabundance of life overflows upon the other side of death.

. . .

Unhappy, I know well, are these confessions; but from the depth of unhappiness springs new life, and only by draining the lees of spiritual sorrow can we at last taste the honey that lies at the bottom of the cup of life. Anguish leads us to consolation.

. . .

The Practical Problem
from Tragic Sense of Life

. . .

What is our heart's truth, anti-rational though it be? The immortality of the human soul, the truth of the persistence of our consciousness without any termination whatsoever, the truth of the human finality of the Universe. And what is its moral proof? We may formulate it thus: Act so that in your own judgement and in the judgement of others you may merit eternity, act so that you may become irreplaceable, act so that you may not merit death. Or perhaps thus: Act as if you were to die to-morrow, but to die in order to survive and be eternalized. The end of morality is to give personal, human finality to the Universe; to discover the finality that belongs to it—if indeed it has any finality—and to discover it by acting.

More than a century ago, in 1804, in Letter XC of that series that constitutes the immense monody of his *Obermann,* Sénancour wrote the words which I have put at the head of this chapter—and of all the spiri-

*Nietzsche.

tual descendants of the patriarchal Rousseau, Sénancour was the most profound and the most intense; of all the men of heart and feeling that France has produced, not excluding Pascal, he was the most tragic. "Man is perishable. That may be; but let us perish resisting, and if it is nothingness that awaits us, do not let us so act that it shall be a just fate." Change this sentence from its negative to the positive form—"And if it is nothingness that awaits us, let us so act that it shall be an unjust fate"—and you get the firmest basis of action for the man who cannot or will not be a dogmatist.

That which is irreligious and demoniacal, that which incapacitates us for action and leaves us without any ideal defence against our evil tendencies, is the pessimism that Goethe puts into the mouth of Mephistopheles when he makes him say, "All that has achieved existence deserves to be destroyed" (*denn alles was ensteht ist wert dass es zugrunde geht*). This is the pessimism which we men call evil, and not that other pessimism that consists in lamenting what it fears to be true and struggling against this fear—namely, that everything is doomed to annihilation in the end. Mephistopheles asserts that everything that exists deserves to be destroyed, annihilated, but not that everything will be destroyed or annihilated; and we assert that everything that exists deserves to be exalted and eternalized, even though no such fate is in store for it. The moral attitude is the reverse of this.

Yes, everything deserves to be eternalized, absolutely everything, even evil itself, for that which we call evil would lose its evilness in being eternalized, because it would lose its temporal nature. For the essence of evil consists in its temporal nature, in its not applying itself to any ultimate and permanent end.

. . .

It must be admitted that there exists in truth no more solid foundation for morality than the foundation of the Catholic ethic. The end of man is eternal happiness, which consists in the vision and enjoyment of God *in sæcula sæculorum*. Where it errs, however, is in the choice of the means conducive to this end; for to make the attainment of eternal happiness dependent upon believing or not believing in the Procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son and not from the Father alone, or in the Divinity of Jesus, or in the theory of the Hypostatic Union, or even in the existence of God, is, as a moment's reflection will show, nothing less than monstrous. A human God—and that is the only kind of God we are able to conceive—would never reject him who was unable to believe in Him with his head, and it is not in his head but in his heart that the wicked man says that there is no God, which is equivalent to saying that he wishes that there may not be a God. If any belief could be bound up with the attainment of eternal happiness it would be the belief in this happiness itself and in the possibility of it.

And what shall we say of that other proposition of the king of pedants, to the effect that we have not come into the world to be happy but to fulfil our duty (*Wir sind nicht auf der Welt, um glücklich zu sein, sondern um unsere Schuldigkeit zu tun*)? If we are in the world *for* something (*um etwas*), whence can this *for* be derived but from the very essence of our own will, which asks for happiness and not duty as the ultimate end? And if it is sought to attribute some other value to this *for*, an objective value, as some Sadducean pedant would say, then it must be recognized that the objective reality, that which would remain even though humanity should disappear, is as indifferent to our duty as to our happiness, is as little concerned with our morality as with our felicity. I am not aware that Jupiter, Uranus, or Sirius would allow their course to be affected by the fact that we are or are not fulfilling our duty any more than by the fact that we are or are not happy.

Such considerations must appear to these pedants to be characterized by a ridiculous vulgarity and a dilettante superficiality. (The intellectual world is divided into two classes—dilettanti on the one hand, and pedants on the other.) What choice, then, have we? The modern man is he who resigns himself to the truth and is content to be ignorant of the synthesis of culture—witness what Windelband says on this head in his study of the fate of Hölderlin (*Praeludien*, i.). Yes, these men of culture are resigned, but there remain a few poor savages like ourselves for whom resignation is impossible. We do not resign ourselves to the idea of having one day to disappear, and the criticism of the great Pedant does not console us.

The quintessence of common sense was expressed by Galileo Galilei when he said: "Some perhaps will say that the bitterest pain is the loss of life, but I say that there are others more bitter; for whosoever is deprived of life is deprived at the same time of the power to lament, not only this, but any other loss whatsoever."

Whether Galileo was conscious or not of the humour of this sentence I do not know, but it is a tragic hümour.

But, to turn back, I repeat that if the attainment of eternal happiness could be bound up with any particular belief, it would be with the belief in the possibility of its realization. And yet, strictly speaking, not even with this. The reasonable man says in his head, "There is no other life after this," but only the wicked says it in his heart. But since the wicked man is possibly only a man who has been driven to despair, will a human God condemn him because of his despair? His despair alone is misfortune enough.

But in any event let us adopt the Calderónian formula in *La Vida es Sueño:*

> *Que estoy soñando y que quiero*
> *obrar hacer bien, pues no se pierde*
> *el hacer bien aun en sueños**

But are good deeds really not lost? Did Calderón know? And he added:

> *Acudamos a lo eterno*
> *que es la fama vividora*
> *donde ni duermen las dichas*
> *no las grandezas reposan.*†

Is it really so? Did Calderón know?

Calderón had faith, robust Catholic faith; but for him who lacks faith, for him who cannot believe in what Don Pedro Calderón de la Barca believed, there always remains the attitude of *Obermann.*

If it is nothingness that awaits us, let us make an injustice of it; let us fight against destiny, even though without hope of victory; let us fight against it quixotically.

And not only do we fight against destiny in longing for what is irrational, but in acting in such a way that we make ourselves irreplaceable, in impressing our seal and mark upon others, in acting upon our neighbours in order to dominate them, in giving ourselves to them in order that we may eternalize ourselves so far as we can.

Our greatest endeavour must be to make ourselves irreplaceable, to make the theoretical fact—if this expression does not involve a contradiction in terms—the fact that each one of us is unique and irreplaceable, that no one else can fill the gap that will be left when we die, a practical truth.

For in fact each man is unique and irreplaceable; there cannot be any other I; each one of us—our soul, that is, not our life—is worth the whole Universe. I say the spirit and not the life, for the ridiculously exaggerated value which those attach to human life who, not really believing in the spirit—that is to say, in their personal immortality—tirade against war and the death penalty, for example, is a value which they attach to it precisely because they do not really believe in the spirit of which life is the servant. For life is of use only in so far as it serves its lord and master, spirit, and if the master perishes with the servant, neither the one nor the other is of any great value.

And to act in such a way as to make our annihilation an injustice, in such a way as to make our brothers, our sons, and our brothers' sons, and their sons' sons, feel that we ought not to have died, is something that is within the reach of all.

The essence of the doctrine of the Christian redemption is in the fact that he who suffered agony and death was the unique man—that is, Man, the Son of Man, or the Son of God; that he, because he was sinless, did not deserve to have died; and that this propitiatory divine victim died in order that he might rise again and that he might raise us up from the dead, in order that he might deliver us from death by applying his merits to us and showing us the way of life. And the Christ who gave himself for his brothers in humanity with an absolute self-abnegation is the pattern for our action to shape itself on.

All of us, each one of us, can and ought to determine to give as much of himself as he possibly can—nay, to give more than he can, to exceed himself, to go beyond himself, to make himself irreplaceable, to give himself to others in order that he may receive himself back again from them. And each one in his own civil calling or office. The word office, *officium,* means obligation, debt, but in the concrete, and that is what it always ought to mean in practice. We ought not so much to try to seek that particular calling which we think most fitting and suitable for ourselves, as to

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*Act II., Scene 4: "I am dreaming and I wish to act rightly, for good deeds are not lost, though they be wrought in dreams."

†Act III., Scene 10: "Let us aim at the eternal, the glory that does not wane, where bliss slumbers not and where greatness does not repose."

make a calling of that employment in which chance, Providence, or our own will has placed us.

. . .

GABRIEL MARCEL (1889–1973)

Gabriel Marcel was born in Paris. During the Second World War he worked for the Red Cross locating missing persons. Marcel was a playwright as well as a Catholic philosopher. His main works were *Metaphysical Journal* (1927) and *Being and Having* (1935).

Marcel draws attention to elusive ways in which our possessions affect our identity. On the one hand, we seem to assume that we are distinct from something when we speak of possessing it. We confront the possession as something that is not us. On the other hand, when we truly possess something, we seem to assimilate it into our identities. In some cases we might even be tempted to say that a possession displaces our identity. Of nothing does this fact seem truer than our own bodies. As Marcel says, "I seem . . . to be annihilating myself in this attachment, by sinking myself in this body to which I cling. It seems that my body literally devours me, and it is the same with all the other possessions which are somehow attached or hung upon my body." Alluding to Hegel's dialectic of the master and the slave, Marcel describes in *Being and Having* how possessing can turn into being possessed: "Having as such seems to have a tendency to destroy and lose itself in the very thing it began by possessing, but which now absorbs the master who thought he controlled it."[8]

Our situation becomes even more mysterious when we attempt to grasp reality as a whole by describing it for ourselves. In characterizing reality, we attempt to possess it, and face the tension between being assimilated by it and assimilating it. On the one hand:

> Characterisation implies a certain setting of myself in front of the other, and . . . a sort of radical banishment or cutting-off of me from it. I bring about this banishment, by myself implicitly coming to a halt, separating myself, and treating myself . . . as a thing bounded by its outlines.[9]

Yet on the other hand:

> . . . as we raise ourselves towards Reality, . . . we find that it cannot be compared with an object placed before us on which we can take bearings: and we find, too, that we are ourselves actually changed in the process.[10]

Marcel finally speaks of something he calls *Absolute Being* that is completely beyond understanding. To put ourselves in touch with Being, is to enter "a sphere which transcends all possible possession," which is reached in worship.

*Outlines of a Phenomenology of Having**
from Being and Having

The first point I want to make this evening is that the ideas which I am about to put before you are in my opinion nuclear ideas. They contain the germ of a whole philosophy. I will confine myself to the mere adumbration of a great part of it; for if it is sound, others will probably be in a position to elaborate its various branches in forms which I cannot imagine in detail. It is also possible that some of these tracks, whose general direction I hope to indicate, may turn out to lead nowhere.

I think I should tell you, first of all, how it was that I came to ask myself questions about Having. The general consideration was grafted, as it were, on to inquiries which were more particular and concrete, and I think it is essential to begin by referring to them. I apologise for having to quote from myself, but it will be the simplest way of sharing with you the interests which occasioned these researches, otherwise they must seem to you hopelessly abstract.

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[8] Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having,* trans. Katharine Farrer (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1949), 164.

[9] Ibid., 168.

[10] Ibid., 169.

*Paper delivered to the Lyons Philosophical Society in November, 1933.