

MEMORY ETERNAL:
FRUITFUL DEATH AS THE FORM
OF PERSONAL MEDIATION
(PART I)

ERIK VAN VERSENDAAL

“In the very act of desiring union with her, the lover gives back to the beloved her own beauty and its inner promise, but with a difference—her own beauty is presented to her as a gift received by and a source of delight for another.”



Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!

—William Wordsworth,
“Intimations of Immortality: An Ode”

There is, in that which begins, a spring; roots that never
 return.
 A departure, a childhood that is not recovered, that is never
 again recovered.
 Now, the little girl hope
 Is she who forever begins.

—Charles Péguy,
The Portal of the Mystery of Hope

When his turn comes to offer an encomium on erotic love in the festivities depicted in Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates elects not to speak in his own name, but defers instead to the wisdom of a former teacher, one Diotima of Mantinea. In the dialogue that he recollects, Diotima plays midwife to Socrates. In the midst of helping him bring a new insight to term, she has Socrates confess a principle they agree is beyond justification—namely, that what man desires in everything he desires is nothing else than happiness.¹ And happiness is had, she clarifies, in the possession of that which is genuinely good. Loving desire only comes consummately to rest in union with a worthy beloved who surpasses and so elicits its striving. Having established the desire for happiness as final, Diotima proceeds to move Socrates toward a surprising, even gratuitous conclusion. The true purpose that desire pursues with all its zeal is not, she says, mere union with the beautiful, but “giving birth in beauty.”² This perplexes even Socrates, who replies, at a loss, “It would take divination to figure out what you mean.”³

And the claim might move our perplexity still. Is the will to bear fruit with the beautiful as unquestionably ultimate as the will to happiness, or even one and the same will? In treating it as the true end of desire, Diotima does indeed present such begetting as inseparable from happiness. But does this mean that union does not suffice to make one happy? Or is a union

1. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1989), 50 (205A). For an interpretation of this dialogue that gives due weight to the other-centeredness of love in Plato's thought, see D.C. Schindler, “Plato and the Problem of Love: On the Nature of Eros in the ‘Symposium,’” *Apeiron* 40, no. 3 (2007): 199–220.

2. Plato, *Symposium*, 52 (206B).

3. *Ibid.*, 53 (206C).

not sufficiently one unless it issues into begetting, or at least into the desire thereof? We can be helped greatly in addressing the relationship of this final fruitfulness to the union with the beautiful good in which happiness consists by taking recourse to a theme that, though not obviously invoked by Diotima, is implicitly present throughout her discourse on love: mediation.

Take happiness here in an Aristotelian light as the personal agent fully performing his nature and so appropriating his own wholeness as this is articulated in its enactment. In view of what Diotima says, this perfected self-articulation is realized precisely in the agent's lived relation to and indissoluble union with another, and this supremely in the divine beauty that eternally is "itself by itself with itself."⁴ In this regard, the lover's final wholeness is only caused in him by a beloved who is in itself eternally whole. Though the end that God is for me transcends in its own ontological nobility the purposes set by my will, this excess is not to the will's disparagement, for the grandeur of the will lies precisely in its power to be fulfilled in a good whose wholeness surpasses its own desire. I am perfectly integrated within myself *by virtue of* a perfect ecstasy beyond myself. To be sure, Aristotle differs from Plato in emphasizing, first of all for methodological reasons, that the good we seek is our own perfection rather than that in which we are made perfect.⁵ Nevertheless, he too envisions man's happiness in this life, his homecoming to himself, as taking place both in engaged responsibility for the city's common good and above all in being elevated into the "more than human" act of thinking within God's self-thinking.⁶ Despite their manifest differences, both the active and the contemplative life disclose that freedom is realized in social relations. The position shared by both these masters, then, is that individual happiness is situated within what we would call a happy order. We invoke the idea of mediation here in the service of explicating this order, which includes and holds together the happy lover with the beloved in whom he is made happy.

4. *Ibid.*, 59 (211B).

5. See Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1.8, 2.1.

6. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7.1177b30.

We will speak here of mediation in two distinct but interrelated senses.⁷ In one way, a first thing mediates to a second a third thing insofar as the first represents that third thing in its own wholeness, as each creature by being itself finitely images God's perfection to every other creature. So Diotima describes how the many forms in which beauty is finitely expressed offer a stairway by which we can ascend to the experience of divine beauty. Indeed, the many forms of begetting in finite beauty—among which she lists poetry, education, and statecraft, in addition to childbearing—prepare the way for, and in this sense mediate, our desire to beget in divine beauty.

In another way, a first thing mediates to a second the second's own wholeness, both by presenting to the second the second's effect on it and by effecting a change in the second for the second's own good. According to this sense, something mediates insofar as it contributes to the other's self-appropriation in such a way that bears not only on the other's understanding but, through this, on his very being. Such ontological mediation takes its proper form at the level of the person. In a fully realized relationship of persons, mediation is reciprocal, so that each receives himself back from the other in giving the other back to himself.

7. Mediation is a word that carries a host of meanings in the history of philosophical reflection. It can, for instance, signify the logical rapprochement between apparently incongruous ideas that are in truth mutually implicated within a third that holds them together. This understanding of the term seems especially prominent in Hegel's thought, where mediation plays a pivotal role. For Hegel, the philosophical act consists in the speculative integration of aspects of reality, all of which find their place within the seamlessly self-related determinacy of "Absolute Spirit." Mediation, in this view, is the process by which reason comes to recognize how the difference between any two things that seem to exclude one another is more basically a matter of relation than opposition. The truth of any one thing only comes fully to the fore when we grasp it as so related. Hence, as we find in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, finite spirit discovers or becomes conscious of himself above all through the recognition of his fellow man's recognition of him. The present essay can by no means entertain a sustained and direct engagement with Hegel's thought on this theme of mediation, which we should admit he employs differently in different contexts in such a way that exceeds simplistic and univocal characterization. Nevertheless, it is useful to invoke him here, since here we pursue a sense of mediation that has certain (perhaps dangerous) affinities with, but ultimately departs far from, Hegel's own. While it would need to be argued, our contention is that Hegel's mediation precisely lacks room for fruitfulness across unabsolvable difference, which we hold, by contrast, to be the distinctive mark of mediation.

We may be tempted, however, to think of this reciprocity as a closed loop, where each participant in the relationship is merely confirmed in himself by the other. In contending against such a codependent model of mediation, I will take my bearings throughout from two present-day Catholic philosophers, Ferdinand Ulrich (1931–2020) and William Desmond, both of whom adopt the theme of mediation as a clue to follow in exiting Hegel’s dialectical labyrinth. Ulrich speaks of “personal mediation,” by which he means the way in which one person reveals and actualizes another in that other’s distinctive wholeness through communicating himself in love. For his part, Desmond develops the concept of “intermediation,” which refers to a dramatic communal exchange in which persons are empowered to self-determination by one another without the reality of either being exhausted in this exchange and without this exchange itself being reducible to a more encompassing self-determination.⁸

Taking inspiration from and thinking together with Diotima throughout, I argue that the lover, out of his desire for happiness, cannot but seek to be mediated to himself by another, but that such mediation to oneself can only result, and necessarily results, from the rest in a beloved that is desire’s proper end. The lover is made happy in gratuitous affirmation of and preferential attachment to another, and he thus receives himself anew in this “selfless” attachment. In attending to the structure of interpersonal mediation understood on these terms, we seek to show how the union it expresses opens from within beyond itself toward a third that results from it. That is, the inwardly mediated order of happiness is intrinsically fruitful. Developing this, I propose, will serve to justify Diotima’s inspired insight into love’s ultimate end in begetting, and this precisely as exuberant confirmation of the definitiveness of its primary end of union.

With this purpose in mind, in “Part I” of this essay I will first of all consider (in section 1) how the desire for one’s own happiness is other-centered through reflection on our eros for God and the kind of begetting in which this culminates. Insofar

8. While Desmond develops the idea of intermediation throughout his oeuvre, the work that is most decisive for the present essay is his *Ethics and the Between* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001). He also offers foundations for thinking this in light of the meaning of eros in his *Desire, Dialectic, and Otherness* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).

as the desire for God brings and keeps together all our lesser loves as the final reason for doing all that we do, we can speak of God as our most concrete end, drawing on the etymology of the Latin *con-crescere*, growing-together. In the second section, I will turn to the finite expression of eros among human persons and speak of the exigencies that belong to our will as it is expressed in our bodily action. This will set the stage for the third section, which will open “Part II,” in which I will argue that, among persons who are naturally embodied, the most concrete term of finite intermediation is another finite person, the child. Letting the child be is the finite end that both moves and is representative of all other actions human persons may perform in the world. Desire for a personal fruit is grounded in and rightly fulfills the desire for union with the personal beloved.

1. OFFSPRING OF WEALTH AND POVERTY

1.1. *The order of happiness*

It is of the very essence of desire to mediate, pervading as it does the interval between an initial and a final state. Desire fills this middle space by being nothing other than the ardent openness of the beginning to the end. This paradoxical in-between character of eros is captured in Diotima’s myth of the god’s parentage in the *Symposium*. Offspring of Penia by Poros, poverty by wealth, Eros, like any child, partakes of the properties of both mother and father and mingles them in himself. He lacks beauty of his own, but has the wherewithal to pursue beauty, and so to know it when he sees it. He is not immortal, but whenever he dies he is spontaneously revived.⁹ Though it might seem that Eros receives everything worth having from his paternal side alone, we should rather say that he took the best features of each parent, so that in him his mother’s poverty enriches his father’s wealth. Desire’s

9. “He is by nature neither immortal nor mortal. But now he springs to life when he gets his way; now he dies—all in the very same day. Because he is his father’s son, however, he keeps coming back to life, but then anything he finds his way to always slips away, and for this reason Love is never completely without resources, nor is he ever rich” (Plato, *Symposium*, 48 [203E]).

need for something it does not possess, while indeed a lack, is not mere deficiency. It represents instead the lover's positive receptivity toward a good, and indeed his zealous seeking after, steadfast waiting for, and ample presence to another. Yet this receptivity is only possible because desire is also rich in itself—rich, it bears marking, with the very good it seeks. “If you don't think you need anything, of course you won't want what you don't think you need.”¹⁰ Were it not the case that his end is already secretly present to the lover, wooing his will most intimately, he could not be aroused to pursue this promising source of happiness, just as he would not be attracted to this beauty were it not truly different from him. Because Eros is already in principle full he can welcome that which exceeds him; because he is empty he strains forward after rest in another to whom he already belongs. It is out of this condition as a middle between fullness and emptiness that eros is directed to goods beyond itself, and only thus can it aspire after happiness, for, as Diotima affirms, “that's what makes happy people happy, isn't it—possessing good things.”¹¹ Accordingly, this first section dwells on how it belongs to the structure of desire for the lover's reception of his happiness to take place only in and through his presence to and rapture into the beloved. Diotima identifies the consummate end of our desire as that beauty that “always *is* and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes.”¹² Our attention here will therefore be on the lover's relation to himself in his relation to God, in the unceasing possession of whom man comes wholly to himself. Inasmuch as to receive one's happiness is to receive oneself, we can say love culminates in the lover's being mediated to himself through union with the beloved, and our task here is thus to inquire into the form such mediation takes in the happy order of the creature's communion with God.

We cannot do more than take for granted the axiom that the will wills its own happiness in whatever it wills, but we can endeavor to define what this happiness consists in and what kind of end it presents to the lover. What is it that I desire when I

10. Ibid., 49 (204A).

11. Ibid., 50 (205A).

12. Ibid., 58 (211A).

desire my own perfection? I long not only to remain myself, but to become wholly myself, and for my being to be preserved in its utmost integrity. Indeed, I desire this preservation to the point of immortality, for without the assurance that the blessed life will never cease or even abate in the least degree I cannot be so happy that my innermost longing would be sufficiently at peace. “In a word, love is wanting to possess the good *forever*.”¹³ With this pronouncement, Diotima already gives us to see that desire’s openness to a hiddenly familiar beloved does not cease when desire is fulfilled in possession. Indeed, the desire not to lose this good perdures throughout possession. Again, the immortal happiness I seek for myself is wholly referential to that in and by which I am made happy. I long to be forever for the sake of being with and before the beautiful. Before pursuing this point further, we should consider that inescapable problem that menaces the human person’s longing to dwell in everlasting possession of an all-sufficing good—namely, that he is bound to die.

If the desire for an enduring happiness, the *vita beata*, underlies our every decision to act, the anticipation of death looms over each of these deeds, casting doubt on their purpose. Not only does death stand before us as the eventual and inevitable conclusion to action in the world, but mortality’s bitterness is tasted throughout our earthly life in the very mutability of our existence in the flesh.

Even while each living thing is said to be alive and to be the same—as a person is said to be the same from childhood till he turns into an old man—even then he never consists of the same things, though he is called the same, but he is always being renewed and in other respects passing away, in his hair and flesh and bones and blood and his entire body. And it’s not just in his body, but in his soul too, for none of his manners, customs, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, or fears ever remains the same, but some are coming to be in him while others are passing away.¹⁴

Merely because I exist in a condition of becoming, I seem never to be wholly myself but instead perpetually depart from who I

13. *Ibid.*, 52 (206A) (emphasis mine).

14. *Ibid.*, 54 (207D).

once was. At the same time, this persistent threat of parting can make it so that even the person I hope still to be seems to recede ever forward out of my reach. I am forever beset with innumerable obstructions not only to my superficial desires, but even to my most profound desire to be myself, and each minor frustration comes upon me as a reminder of my precarious finitude, whose seal is my death, and hence of the futility of my self-seeking. Were I myself through and through, at last self-same without variance, I could be happy, but until then I am violently estranged from the person I thought I was in the death that every current moment inflicts. Each new event lays bare my own restrictions, which prevent the consummation of my selfhood, so that the urgency of my desire comes all the more to the fore in its being frustrated. Is this natural aspiration toward wholeness all in vain? We can fear that we have been fundamentally deprived, so our desire to be complete takes expression in the effort to claim or wrest what is rightfully our own.

This line of reflection suggests that desire as a fundamental experience is bound up with our temporality: the poverty of our present state turns us, whether anxiously or eagerly, toward the possibility of an abundance to come, a future condition. Or rather it is the elicitation of that future that makes clear to us our current neediness, as indeed the blessing that a final self-equality would be. Notice, if I might come to be wholly myself in that future, this might mean ceasing to be the person I am right now. When I come fully into my own, must I not end up as someone else, at least since I will no longer be this vacillating and fragmentary self? This question might not always strike us as frightening—the prospect of becoming different, of being another than we are, can sound like an emancipation from present misery, a breakthrough beyond the confines of the present. So Kierkegaard treats the lust to become Caesar as a desire not only to advance one's state, but to become a different person altogether. This will to be another is an expression, he writes, of the "despair to will to be oneself," or, even more sharply, of the ambitious man's despairing will to "get rid of himself."¹⁵ Such

15. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 14, 20.

despair seems only to be encouraged by the Platonic view that our perfection is had in union with another. Might this be our end because it is only through the other that I pass over and thus relativize or even forget my own limitations? Because I need to be alienated from myself in encountering the strange other so as to come to my true self in a higher integration with the good I lack? Kierkegaard gives further expression to this temptation in his example of an infatuated girl who laments the loss of her beloved because she longed to free herself of herself in clinging to and being possessed by him. “This self of hers, which she would have been rid of or would have lost in the most blissful manner had it become ‘his’ beloved, this self becomes a torment to her if it has to be a self without ‘him.’”¹⁶ Love of another promises a “new me” by means of killing off my partial self. Death on this view is no longer a threat, but the essential means to life. In overcoming the difference of others to myself, or in recuperating this into my own self-relation, I seem to fulfill at last my own will to wholeness. While we should want to ward off the specter of Hegel’s *Geist* that hovers in these musings, we can perhaps best do so by daring to ask: is there a true sense in which I become wholly myself by “becoming other” through another? Asking this, we can further specify the sense in which the immortality I cannot but desire must be mediated to me by another.

1.2. *A time of fulfillment*

We seek to interpret this desire for happiness in another, in accord with what Diotima espouses, as better than a desperate act of clutching at self through use of another that seems to rid oneself of oneself. To this end, we need a clearer sense of what it means to become, and in particular of how self-becoming is always situated within relation to others, and first to God. This comes to light when we see how our desire’s lack of what it seeks is itself a good rooted already in our creaturehood. The effort to justify this and so stave off the temptation to despair can be helped by having recourse to the Thomistic metaphysics of Ferdinand Ulrich, who at every turn of his philosophy reflects on

16. *Ibid.*, 20.

the paradoxical interplay between wealth and poverty, first of all in the very structure of being itself.¹⁷ Ulrich takes seriously St. Thomas's statement that "esse signifies something complete and simple but not subsistent"¹⁸—that is, that being is "the actuality of all acts, and therefore the perfection of all perfections,"¹⁹ that is not itself a substance. In this sense, being is the self-same as nothing, meaning for Ulrich that it is a plenitude that is entirely emptied out in favor of all existing things. On his reading, it is for this very reason that Aquinas also speaks of being as the "likeness of divine goodness,"²⁰ for by virtue of its paradoxical structure being radiates divine generosity, inasmuch as it is always already received by the finite singular it actualizes in its streaming forth. Being, as God's "proper effect,"²¹ is nothing other than its actualization of the creature and all creatures at once, and this ontological communication is the flawlessly lucid expression of God's creative act of letting the world be. God's pure "yes" to the world is manifested, then, in the creature's secure possession of being all at once from the beginning of its existence and for as long as it perdures. The self-sameness of wealth and poverty characterizes being as utter gift utterly received, so that each substance is whole simply by existing, as it comes into being already possessing in itself every principle it needs to be itself.²²

Even as being is so given that each creature wholly is itself from its beginning, the ontological paradox of wealth and poverty is inflected in the creature's own constitution. On the basis of its actual possession of its complete nature, the

17. While Ulrich seldom reflects thematically either on desire or beauty, he offers resources that allow us to enter deeply into these matters. The present essay hopes in part to show in a small way the fecundity of Ulrich's thought for these questions. For one instance in which he does touch on eros as a paradox of wealth and poverty, see the section "Der Tod des philosophierenden Menschen und die Einheit von Leben und Tod in der Hoffnung," in Ferdinand Ulrich, *Leben in der Einheit von Leben und Tod* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 1999), 50–54.

18. Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia Dei* 1.1.

19. *Ibid.*, 7.2.9.

20. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* 22.2.2.

21. Aquinas, *De potentia Dei* 3.16.4.

22. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 45, a. 4 ad 2.

corporeal creature is given to ripen toward its own perfected goodness through its self-articulating action. The temporal interval we experience between beginning and end is rooted first in this ontological distinction between the fullness of the creature's actually existing (first actuality) and the fullness of its enacted existence (second actuality), a between that is spanned by the creature's desire to be to the utmost. This interval of becoming arises, then, out of the flawless generosity that places the creature in itself so that it can take responsibility for perfecting itself in the dramatic movement of actively unfolding what it is. So it is that the creature's eros as a middle between wealth and poverty is born from the union between *poros* and *penia* in being itself.

Acknowledging this helps us see the first reason why we long to remain in being forever: it is a gift to be, and we want this good beginning to come abundantly to fruition. More deeply still, the truth that being is pristine gift means that our origin is happy that we exist, that he finds in us a cause for joy. The love of our own being expressed in our desire for happiness is, on this view, first and always a response to being extravagantly loved. The person is made to answer the giving by which he is at all through becoming answerable for his own being. With this perspective we find ourselves far from Plato in the domain of Christian metaphysics, where God, in keeping with the biblical testimony, is a personal giver who wants the world to be and takes delight in its existence (Gn 1). But here Plato's sense of ascending desire finds its support and grounding.

This sketch of the metaphysics of creation already suggests, then, that our search for self is other-elicited and so other-centered. We can advance further in this by considering how personal becoming is not only pervaded by desire but shows forth desire's proper structure. This structure, which stands behind our experience of time in our enfolded development, features dimensions that can be thought of in temporal terms: memory, hope, fulfillment. What we could call "erotic temporality," we will see, illuminates the manner in which the lover is mediated to himself in the enjoyment of the ultimate good, and how one's ultimate relation to another arises from within one's proximate

relation to oneself.²³ On this foundation we can arrive at an interpretation of the person's self-differentiation across time as the ecstatic development of, rather than the fragmenting departure from, oneself.

Bestowed sufficiently, because superfluously, being-as-given is an unsurpassable resource that continually supplies the movement of self-development from within, perduring throughout the person's maturation without suffering the least diminishment. My own being is an original "embarrassment of riches," as its actuality opens up for me all my potential for perfecting this gift in the course of my lifetime. Indeed, if this primary endowment remains inexhaustible through every change, we can characterize personal transformation as the renewed gathering up of the same first blessing—which, it bears remarking, is one with the person himself. Striving toward perfection here appears as a passage from an original to an ultimate wholeness, which at every stage expresses the surging up of the always new plenitude of first actuality. Becoming is, as such, a gratuitous unfolding or *overabounding* of the replete embarrassment of being, as appropriated by the finite actor through his responsible deeds.²⁴ Because this immanent grounding fullness abides securely as generously emptied out into the creature from God above, the person can bound forth into action without needing to grasp at himself. For he finds that this definitively bestowed depth is a permanent point of rest that offers more—ever-more!—to be taken up and embraced as he undergoes and pursues becoming. Whatever he will become is already wholly granted with first actuality, so that we can say this gift is experienced as "rich with promise." If what

23. This idea of erotic temporality, and everything we will say about it here, is wholly inspired by, though not simply coincident with, Ferdinand Ulrich's notion of "ontological spatiotemporality," by which he means the gift-structure of being that stands behind the order of physical space-time. This concept is ubiquitous in his writings. He first introduces it in *Homo Abyssus: The Drama of the Question of Being*, trans. D.C. Schindler (Washington, DC: Humanum Academic Press, 2018), 162ff. A more extensive exposition of the principle in the life of man can be found in *Gegenwart der Freiheit* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1974).

24. Consider how the Spanish language refers to being pregnant with the word *embarazada*—not that pregnancy is first a source of shame, but that the gift of the child opens the parent into humble acceptance of this endowment. One is made poor by and for the richness of the gift.

we are calling the embarrassment of being is an abiding beginning that is recapitulated in every moment of personal development, it stands as a kind of immanent past to personal existence: the whole person I am in my creation. This past-dimension is not left behind in each new excursion in the labor of becoming, but is rather newly appropriated and re-presented therein. Since this is the original wholeness from which one always begins, one thus refers back to this given depth as an inner other in every act of “selving.” Motion is a mode of self-relation, as one is faced in oneself with a complete person one must “live up to.” So the self-perfecting whereby I follow out the promise given in my being is a recollective adherence to a bounty already perfectly received, or to the person I have always been. Only in actively recognizing the sufficiency of this beginning can the person be freed of the temptation to rid himself of himself in becoming another, or, in other words, of the fear that he is not yet himself.

Of course, the past-dimension is not enough for an adequate understanding of becoming, since it does not fully account for the fact that desire seeks what it does *not* have. My perfection is not only a repetition of what I have been from the beginning. For the final wholeness (personal goodness-as-such) in which my first wholeness (personal-being-as-such) abounds to the utmost not only overflows from within but also pours down upon me as if from beyond, as a future to be awaited. Accordingly, Ulrich speaks of the person’s “en-otherment” (*Veränderung*, as distinct from the common German word for transformation, *Veränderung*) through his stretching forward toward perfection. It is of the very structure of freedom to grow into myself by becoming someone whom I do not expect, someone who, as it were, descends upon me as a surprising fulfillment. My future self approaches me from ahead like another until in the encounter with this person I become him. In this light, we can describe the immanent end that is my own happiness as my future-in-person: the me I may yet become. This suggests that in my ontological constitution there is also internal difference between the person I have been and the person I will be. There is a dramatic, personal difference with respect to myself that does not belie my integrity, as my most original form of self-othering has the form of familiar encounter, of finding myself approaching me. Following Ulrich’s parsing of the German word for the future, *Zukunft*, as

Zu-kunft, that which even now comes toward me (*kommt zu*), this end does not merely hover elsewhere as “not yet,” but is always already arriving. My own fullness stands ahead of me as a good worth striving after, but because it comes toward me to be met I am drawn forth to welcome and so become this other confidently. The erotic past speaks of the person’s given wholeness as the prior and ongoing ground for his self-becoming, such that one’s desire need not be lived as a grasping after a needful thing that has been tantalizingly withheld. The erotic future, conversely, makes sense of my experience that the best is yet to come, waits still to be found, and calls me forth to take hold of it. Looking back I find the promise of the ever-more I desire, and looking forward I find the ever-more I desire is promised to me. My perfection not only wells up or is brought forth from within, but comes upon me so securely that I can and must go forth to receive it. Only because this future is my own not only as drawing me forward but as coming toward me beyond doubt can self-development be a mode of becoming another without this being a matter of alienation or escape from self.

This sense of my happiness as an approaching future-in-person is the ground for that root experience of personal becoming that is “willing tomorrow.” Most fundamentally, we do not look to tomorrow as an escape from today or even as its mere prolongation, but as a new giving of the gift with which we have already been entrusted. It is in this sense that our relation to the future is one of hope in which we can confide ourselves forward, come what may. This is not an irrational thrusting forth of self, but rather a sign of how richly God’s generosity is expressed in the created order. Even if severe trauma or catastrophe has habituated one to guard himself against future betrayal, to exist is always first to take the goodness of reality for granted, and so to be disposed to wait for this goodness to be confirmed (perhaps in zealously demanding that it be) in the still-better. Charles Péguy beautifully captures this natural disposition, and its fulfillment in the theological virtue of hope, in portraying our will to tomorrow from a “God’s eye view”:

That these poor children see how things are going and believe that tomorrow things will be better.
That they see how things are going today and believe that they will go better tomorrow morning.

That is surprising and it's by far the greatest marvel of our
 grace.
 And I'm surprised by it myself.
 And my grace must indeed be an incredible force.
 And must flow freely and like an inexhaustible river.
 Since the first time it flowed and since it has forever been
 flowing.
 In my natural and supernatural creation.²⁵

Now, it is already in the depths of my interior past that I encounter as present and familiar the God to whom I stand in relation by virtue of my very creaturehood. This implicit recollection of our origin that comes with our fundamental self-reception helps to ground the poet Wordsworth's view, conveyed in his "Intimations of Immortality: An Ode," that the child comes into the world with a native sensitivity to eternal glory. Of course, in Wordsworth's portrayal, this sensitivity is the trace of the soul's existence prior to embodiment that fades increasingly through our life in the world. We should rather say that the "intimations" given to the child are a mark of how intimately God offers himself to us from our conception. Yet this itself discloses the goodness of my embodied creaturehood. It is only because I am given to myself, and so absolutely different from God, that I can, in relating to myself, know God as the all-sourcing origin who infinitely transcends me. Furthermore, it is God's endowment of me with myself that opens me to my need of the God I am decisively not and so moves me toward him across my life in time. My own interior past is the necessary medium for God to call me to himself. And desire's resourcefulness, again, is empowered by the given presence of that for which it longs.

If my interior future expresses how my own perfection comes to me from elsewhere, we can see how this dimension of desire refers me to God too. The first gift of being is like a pledge of a further gift for which to hope. The ground for this hope is indeed offered in the rich promise with which my being is always already laden. But just like my being at all, my immanent, intrapersonal relation to my fulfillment is situated within a transcendent, interpersonal relation. As in my beginning, so in

25. Charles Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, trans. D.C. Schindler (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 6.

the end of my desire I come to myself by receiving myself not only from ahead, but ultimately from above. I remain a future-in-person promised unto myself because I am at every moment given to myself by God. Importantly, this means that my own perfection is my accomplishment only insofar as it is first and always bestowed. I truly receive all that I truly do. Because my very effort of self-articulation is at once a matter of being more deeply granted to myself by God, my desire for happiness is, already at the level of nature, an act of entrustment to and hope in the ever-futural other (God) who is himself the end of my desire. Of course, this personal future I am to myself remains an expression of the first reception of being from God, a reception that, while supratemporally complete in the creation of a substance, is properly unfolded in the substance's co-responsible fulfillment of the gift over time.

Desire always lives from memory and in hope. My self-othering in becoming is a recapitulation of what I have always been *as* my encounter with, reception of, and transformation into the person I am destined to become. These dimensions of becoming, then, are not merely juxtaposed, for my future self comes to me from afar *through* the past of the person I always already am. We can fruitfully characterize this emergence of the newly given person I will be from within the person I have been as birth. And this birth is precisely the present dimension of desire, its happiness, the time of fulfillment. For the bearing forth of self happens in the very actions through which each person perfects himself. So Aristotle speaks of man as "a source and begetter of actions just as much as of children."²⁶ If his good deeds are like offspring, it is he himself who is reborn in his self-performance. St. Gregory of Nyssa famously gets at this same idea when he writes that "we are in a certain way our own parents, giving birth to ourselves as we will, by our decisions."²⁷ In view of this sense of goodness as the regeneration of self, it is nevertheless crucial to stave off the misconception that happiness consists in an unoriginated *autogenesis*. Doing so, we can see again and most fully how self-relation is realized inside of other-relation.

26. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.5.113b20.

27. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses* 2.3.55–56.

Diotima helps us address this problem when, at the climax of her discourse, she presents at last the form of begetting in divine beauty at which all desire aims, a form she explains precisely as the soul's attainment of self-perfective virtue:

In that life alone, when he looks at Beauty in the only way that Beauty can be seen—only then will it become possible for him to give birth not to images of virtue (because he is in touch with no images), but to true virtue (because he is in touch with the true Beauty). The love of the gods belongs to anyone who has given birth to true virtue and nourished it, and if any human being could become immortal, it would be he.²⁸

If the soul in love bears forth his own final wholeness in begetting true virtue, this begetting is itself fecundated by the eternal beloved. Because one is made beautiful in the very act of looking toward and receiving divine beauty, we could say that this begetting is at once an experience of *being-begotten* to oneself anew. This, then, is what it means to be mediated to oneself as other in the enjoyment of God: rebirth in, through, and from another (God). It is only in attending to the beautiful for itself that God's ever-superior beauty can be effective in me of the perfection I spontaneously desire for myself from the first. And this immortal wholeness is the person at his most beautifully self-manifesting and generatively self-giving. This sheds light on how fitting it is, then, that the fruit of baptism is the grace of being "born from above" (Jn 3:7) through dying into the death of Christ (Rom 6:3–4), the supernatural regeneration in which we are made capable of the immortalizing vision of God that Diotima divines. Though the "second gift" of grace is uncalled for by the nature it presupposes and inwardly fulfills, openness to a "gift in place of gift" (Jn 1:16) is already prefigured in the structure of creaturely becoming without in any way preempting the miracle of our salvation.

Here we can revisit the accusation that becoming in time is an experience of death. It is true that the severance of body and soul brought into the world by sin (Wis 1:13; Rom 5:12) touches every moment of our experience, but becoming for us is

28. Plato, *Symposium*, 59–60 (212A–212B).

fundamentally good as the mode in which we fully receive and answer God's giving. Sin obscures the original sense of temporality because it lives off the fear that what is most necessary has been kept back, that we are not lovingly made, and so inhibits us from entrusting ourselves to movement forward. The future thus seems either to do violence to us or to rescue us from violence. In this way sin tinges change with the look of the miserable kind of death it deficiently causes. But, as we will return to below, there is a happy sense of death proper to becoming that is at once a natural mode of regeneration, becoming another in receiving ourselves anew. Diotima herself suggests something of this when she says of one who becomes that "he is called the same, but he is always being renewed," and concludes that "in that way everything mortal is preserved, not, like the divine, by always being the same in every way, but because what is departing and aging leaves behind something new, something such as it had been."²⁹ Our hope for fulfillment is obviously not advanced in every moment and event of material time, but the relation between first and second act into which we are constituted forms our orientation to the temporal future as *expectancy*.³⁰ We look forward to the issue of the whole person we are meant to be, who is born forth in our good actions from the person we have always been, and so we cannot help but will tomorrow. Our desire to bring forth the promise of our being's original endowment in happiness is fostered and enlivened through time's passage. On this view, each present moment's turning appears as a "death into life."

1.3. *Newborn forever*

Though the promise of immortality, the first reason for hope in tomorrow, is given already with my very being, I cannot bring this hope to fruition by my own power alone. For this will comes only in my adoration of and rejoicing in a beauty that exceeds me endlessly. As my emergence from myself in the course of becoming

29. Ibid., 55 (207E, 208B).

30. I mean this term not in the sense of "life expectancy," the average duration of human life in a given period of history, but in the sense that we speak in English of a pregnant woman as "expecting," the readiness to meet the person she bears "under her heart."

is at once an ever-new reception of myself from above and from without, I am reborn in my own action by the God who gives me to myself *in giving himself to me*. I can only bring my fulfilled personhood to term because I am first wooed and fecundated by the beautiful whose tidings are given in every beautiful form. Indeed, I am begotten to my own immortal perfection only in willing God's eternal perfection—that is, in consenting to and cleaving to this eternity as intrinsically lovable. Hence my relation to my own desired happiness as futural—that is, as a destined gift descending toward me—opens me to the ultimate desire to receive God's self-giving unconditionally and for itself. My God-elicited movement toward my own happiness necessarily mediates my more primary desire for God himself. This mediation is necessary because only out of the wealth of being given to myself can I be poor enough to be made happy in another. Desire's lack is its power to be "open to life"—that is, to be further enriched with one's own life in being enriched by the life of another (God). Not only is my God-relation imaged in my positive otherness with respect to myself as a future-in-person, but this self-relation is expectantly oriented to the acquiescence in God that most radically moves my whole will to become who I am. I want to be myself forever above all *so that* I can enjoy permanent togetherness with God, and my being only presents itself to me at its best when I will its perdurance for the sake of boundlessly embracing and being embraced by the *communio personarum* that God is.³¹ Yet it is not as if my immortality is only the necessary means for this everlasting enjoyment, for this birth into immortality is also the sign that enjoyment of eternal beauty cannot but supply the creature with its fullest integrity as the proper result of this enjoyment. Being given one's own

31. St. Bernard contemplates how, on the path to union with God, my rightful self-love (expressed already in the desire to preserve my bodily life) matures, through learning to love God for my own good and learning further to love God for himself alone, into a love of myself for God's sake—that is, as I am loved by God. This reflects both how I find and love my own perfection in the bliss of losing myself in God, and how my givenness-to-myself (by which I am related to myself so that I can seek my own happiness) is finally for the sake of belonging to another (God). I love myself best by loving God above all things, and I cannot perfectly love for God for himself unless I see that he loves me and love myself with his same love for me. See St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God*, in *Selected Works*, trans. G. R. Evans (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 173–205.

perfection in willing God's ever-futurally self-giving perfection—mediation to oneself—belongs to the very form of intimacy with him. Loving God first brings with it the abandonment of self to God alone, but through this death one is most defined (and most vitally abundant) in one's own integrity: sainthood.

The movement toward the other that I am to myself, becoming as “en-otherment,” which belongs to the process of self-appropriation, is not a violent interruption or agonizing delay of self-sameness. Instead, my integrity is internally ecstatic, so that my ecstasy toward other substances will more deeply confirm and ennoble this integrity. Since my relationship to my own perfection is itself already like turning to another, my path toward substantially distinct persons is already prepared in my very constitution. This is also why I am meant to meet myself only through transcending myself toward others: I am already beyond myself within myself. The next section, together with “Part II” of this essay, will reflect, then, on how the sense of mediation presented here—“being begotten in giving birth before the beautiful”—is expressed in relation to a finite beloved. A concluding section will discuss how finite begetting is integrated within everlasting union with the eternally fruitful God, a truth that only becomes clear in that hope which is the fruit of Christ's death out of love and of his Resurrection in the flesh.

2. DESIRE'S ENGENDERING

2.1. *The love-death*

If our happiness is found in willing God's eternity, something of this root-desire is expressed in our life in time. Much of the glory of the Platonic vision of love lies in its acknowledgment that eros for God is positively prefigured in and borne along by eros for a finite beloved. The Romantic movement in art and thought endeavored in various ways to retrieve a sense for the will's aspiration toward an absolute bliss, but often imagined such union as a release of life in which the person's determinacy would be altogether dissolved by beauty's overcoming power. Here the will's consummation is its absorption and cessation. So the death of the

beloved conjures, after a time of mourning, the bereaved lover's celebratory cry: "Lost in the loving, floating ocean of thee, / Laved in the flood of thy bliss, O Death."³² Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*, strongly influenced by Schopenhauer's philosophy of the will's evanescence in the experience of beauty, portrays such a release of self in its euphoric closing aria, the *Liebestod*, in which Isolde dies enraptured by a "star-haloed" vision of her departed beloved. Implicit in this "love-death" is an exaggeratedly negative relation to limit, and a sense of fulfillment as the utter escape from temporality. Yet the Romantic impulse takes its fullest form in a gesture that would seem at first glance to be the inversion of this inebriated liquefaction and oblivion of the lover. In Goethe's *Faust*, the titular character seeks, it seems, not to escape but to suspend time. He voices his desire to Mephistopheles as follows:

If to the moment I should say:
Abide, you are so fair—
Put me in fetters on that day,
I wish to perish then, I swear.³³

Faust's restless heart wills to be overcome by an experience so intense that all thought of past or future is simply extinguished. What he desires is an eternal present in time, a single moment beyond which nothing more could be desired. This is a radically anti-Platonic wish, one that foreshadows Nietzsche's "eternal recurrence of the same." Faust comes to concentrate this desire for an intense present on feminine beauty, first in Gretchen and then, in the play's second part, in Helen of Troy. Of course, the blessed moment for which Faust searches eludes him. His exalted love for the simple maiden Gretchen devolves into tawdry seduction of an innocent, which ends tragically with an unwed mother committing infanticide and then taking her own life in prison. And before their love can come fully to fruition, the figure of Helen dissipates into thin air, leaving only her robe and veil in Faust's outstretched arms.³⁴ While Faust seems to reject eternity

32. Walt Whitman, "When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom'd."

33. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 184 (pt. 1, lines 1700–04).

34. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: A Tragedy*, trans. Walter Arndt (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 281 (pt. 2, lines 9940–44).

with God out of a self-abandoned love for the world, rather than dying into the moment as he pretends to want, he instead strives to withstand its departure, and thus to hold himself in place. His seemingly boundless embrace of the transient betrays a contracted despair of any future, and so consists in the rejection of time. If there is a gesture of freedom embodied in Faust's wish, it is that of a grasping hand (*die Faust*). The apparent nobility of his longing to will the everlasting in the finite masks the truth that he who here swoons is in fact trying to take captive what can only be given. What looks like being arrested by and lost in the beautiful is at bottom a staging and arrest of the beautiful as a means for securing self-equality. Romanticism in both its euphorically releasing and its intensely embracing forms manifests an inability to hold together love for the temporal with love for the eternal.

Though flawed, perhaps Faust's wish is not altogether unreflective of reality. There is indeed a rightful attachment to the finite, albeit one that flows from and back to the longing for God. With this in mind, the present section descends from the mediation to himself that the created person experiences in the presence of God to the images of this end on lower rungs of the "ladder of love."³⁵ The natural desire for immortal happiness is inflected in the flesh, and this distinctive inflection expresses anew in its own order the will's foremost orientation to God. In the gracefulness and radiance of appearing bodies man as lover is touched, however subtly, by the near presence of the all-forming beauty for whom he has a native affinity and toward the vision of whom he is innermost attracted. Though spiritual kinship with God is the deepest source of human eros, it is only enkindled for us through the pleasure we take in the delightful integrity of whole substances met through the senses. It is not, then, that the will is first repelled toward its infinite end by way of its disappointment in the insufficiency of the world to satisfy it. To be sure, finite things cannot exhaustively offer of themselves the rapturous peace whose promise is announced through them, and confusing finite beauty for

35. "This is what it is to go aright, or be led by another, into the mystery of Love: one goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using them like rising stairs" (Plato, *Symposium*, 59 [211C]).

the beauty it portends is always tragically destructive of love. Man is perennially in danger of idolatrously confusing a finite good for God, and this inversion of what Augustine calls the *ordo amoris* is even the root expression of sin.³⁶ Nevertheless, desire is carried upward only by signs that are themselves whole, that have themselves been gratuitously willed to be, and that are therefore themselves worthy of enjoyment, each in keeping with its kind. In possessing their own participated end character, these can only be desired toward the ultimate in being desired for their own sake.³⁷ Finite singulars do indeed convey desire toward their rest in the infinite, but, as naturally embodied, the human person is drawn upward toward rejoicing in God at once by being drawn outward toward rejoicing in corporeal things. Though desire's outpouring toward things can conflict with and so undermine its ascent to God, such opposition is not natural. Instead, the more faithfully desire follows out its drive into materiality the more purely it takes flight.³⁸ Human eros, ultimately oriented toward intellectual vision of God, is at once "enfleshed" in a descent into the realm of bodies.³⁹ Desire thus rightly finds a place in the positive limits of a perfected deed and of determinate goods. On this basis, we can begin to retrieve, while critically resituating, the Faustian longing for an "eternity in time." Following out the exigencies of our will to immortal happiness in its embodiment will help us elucidate

36. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, bk. 1, chap. 27.

37. This is an interpretation of the relationship between the will's ultimate end and the means to that end discussed by Aquinas, for instance, in *Summa theologiae* II-I, q. 8, a. 3.

38. This approach fundamentally takes its bearings from Ferdinand Ulrich's insight that embodied spirit moves toward God at once by following the path of God's giving. As the gift of being is poured out to the point of material subsistence, in what Ulrich calls its "movement of finitization," so the powers of man's soul kenotically enter into the life of the flesh and gratefully discover the presence of God therein (Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 41).

39. In what follows I will refer often to "enfleshed desire," which I understand as the finite realization of the human will's orientation to eternity in its bodily life among fellow bodies. I draw this expression from Paul Camacho's "The Promise of Love Perfected: Eros and Kenosis in *To the Wonder*," with which this present article shares many affinities. Camacho's essay can be found in *Theology and the Films of Terrence Malick* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 232–50.

the relationship between the desire for union and the desire for fruitfulness.

Enfleshed desire finds its noblest and proper resting point in delighting in the beauty of one kind of body above all, that body than which none more beautiful could be perceived. We propose here that the carnal modality of the desire to enjoy the good forever is concentrated on eros for another human person, which presents a supreme created image of receiving oneself immortally in adhering to the eternal God. Hence the feeling of poignant kinship, of true homecoming, in the event of falling wholeheartedly in love.⁴⁰ Here I find a trace of the happiness for which I am made to yearn and finally to enjoy. But why say that the created beloved herself addresses something of my will to immortality? The human body, as the bearer of a person who transcends her bodily life, is only rightly delighted in if the lover is carried faithfully through and over the other's flesh to the whole person mediated therein. For love is fundamentally expressed in consenting to the existence of the beloved as good, as intrinsically lovable. Desire for a person cannot consent to and so receive the whole of the beloved, however, without doing so to the point of actively willing the good of her perfection. This is the pure impulse that moves the lover from the first. He enjoys his beloved for herself in desiring her own vital flourishing from within, as if with her own rightful self-love. *Her* happiness will be good *for him*. Out of love's affirmation of the beloved's being—"It's good that you are; how wonderful that you exist!"⁴¹—the lover at once wills the beloved's fulfillment—"May you be!" Because her beauty is a cause of joy for him, he wills the beloved to abide tomorrow and indeed forever. "To love a person means

40. "Such emotion all beauty must induce—an astonishment, a delicious wonderment, a longing, a love, a trembling that is all delight. It may be felt for things invisible quite as for things you see, and indeed the soul does feel it. All souls, we can say, feel it, but souls that are apt for love feel it is especially. It is the same here as with bodily beauty. All perceive it. Not all are stung sharply by it. Only they whom we call lovers ever are" (Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.6, in *The Essential Plotinus*, trans. Elmer O'Brien [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1964], 38).

41. Josef Pieper, "On Love," in *Faith, Hope, Love*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 170.

to say: You will not die.”⁴² But how does the lover mean this? Does he seek like Faust to envelop the beloved in his own studied oblivion of the moment’s passage, or does he will for the beloved a future that surpasses every death?

Affirming his beloved as a whole, the lover brings to light for her God’s gratuitous yearning for her everlasting perfection. In the lover’s eyes, she comes to glimpse anew, perhaps fully for the first time, the possibilities of her own immortality.⁴³ Notice, then, how the manner in which love consents to and acquiesces in the beloved necessarily brings about an event of personal mediation. In the very act of desiring union with her, the lover gives back to the beloved her own beauty and its inner promise, but with a difference—her own beauty is presented to her as a gift received by and a source of delight for another. In the loving gaze and gesture, a measure of her own wholeness and her hoped for future happiness is mediated to her. The lover has the joy he seeks in the beloved herself, but this joy is always accompanied by the lover’s return of the beloved’s beauty as refracted through his own personal difference from and relation to her.

Though the lover’s “complacency” in the beloved’s wholeness is essential to desire, the lover does not seek merely to bask in her beauty as desirable, but at once to behold and affirm her beauty as it is shown forth in *her desire for him*. His eros for the beloved leads of itself to his desire to be desired by his beloved: *anteros*, “love for love.”⁴⁴ The human lover acknowledges that the human beloved is, as person, equal to him in nobility, and that she therefore transcends his desire for her, so that union with her can only come through her free requital. At the same time,

42. Gabriel Marcel, *Geheimnis des Seins* (Vienna, 1952), 472, cited in Pieper, “On Love,” 169. For an English translation, see Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, vol. 2: *Faith and Reality*, trans. G. S. Fraser (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2001), 153.

43. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-logic: Theological Logical Theory*, vol. 1: *Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 114–15. See also Pieper, “On Love,” 171: “Human love, therefore, is by its nature and must inevitably be an imitation and a kind of repetition of this perfected, and, in the exact sense of the word, *creative love of God*.”

44. Plato, *Phaedrus*, in *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, ed. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 57–67, at 66 (255e). *Anteros* was popularly worshiped as the brother of the god *Eros*.

in opening himself up to and being affected by this requital the lover secondarily receives back his own beauty differently in the beloved's loving gaze. That is, he is mediated to himself *as other* by the other whose good he wills for her own sake.

His end in pursuing her is not to enjoy himself through her, for obviously such a direct focus would be nothing but a pretense of love masking self-infatuation, and would in effect be powerless to give the love to himself. As we saw with Diotima's speech, the lover only enjoys his own fullness in loving attention to the other—heterocentricity. Rather than seeking an outward duplication of his own self-love, it is in receiving the beloved's enjoyment of him, and her own desire to foster his happiness, that the lover can most fully embrace *her* beauty. For one created person can only most intimately bestow her own beauty upon another in desiring him as he desires her. To receive the other's beauty as intimately as possible, then, is at once to receive back one's love (and therein oneself), but as transfigured through the beloved's answer. In reciprocating differently one another's desire, lover and beloved mediate to the other the other's own self-presence. That is, each is more present to himself for being present to the other, and, therein, for the other's presence to him. Each knows his own wholeness and its inner promise more richly in loving first the other who loves in return. If receiving oneself back through the beloved's requital is a fulfillment of one's own "self-love," the priority of attention to the beloved marks this as "selfless."⁴⁵ Each lover thus "has" himself only *in* the beloved; personal union possesses in the mode of belonging *to* the other.

For the fallen, love is plagued by the temptation to instrumentalize the other solipsistically in a futile endeavor against fragmentation. Having failed to accept the love given with the embarrassment of being, the sinner has bound himself to desperate groping after being through the use of another, the absorption of the other's freedom in his own. If desire always seeks

45. Pieper speaks of an "(only seemingly paradoxical) selfless self-love" ("On Love," 278). We seek to emphasize how this new reception of oneself in and through attending to the reciprocating beloved in all her difference from oneself involves something other than what we find in Hegel's definition of recognition as "when each is for the other what the other is for it" (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977], 113 [B.IV.186]).

union, the form that true union takes between persons is, rather, an intimate exchange of freedoms in which neither will can be confused with the other even (and above all) in their inseparable accord. True reciprocity is not had in the mirroring of one's own intention. It is not that the two lovers together should compose a larger ego so that each can more efficaciously sustain his own wholeness through the recognition supplied by the other. Instead, the lover wills and delights in the beloved's inalienable difference from himself—a difference, it should be noted, that nevertheless can only be desirable for the lover because the beloved is coequal to him in natural dignity. In this sense, the answer the lover awaits from the beloved always remains futural even in being given to and enjoyed by the lover: it forever transcends the lover's own address. Refusing to seize the beloved's answering desire, which is in any case impossible, the lover lets the beloved remain beyond him, but does so for the sake of receiving her as she comes toward him from afar. Personal intermediation entails a releasing affirmation of the other that ennobles the difference it presupposes and depends upon. This bears, then, on the way in which each gives the other back to the other in loving him. Though love's interpersonal exchange cannot be recuperated back into a closed loop, its abiding openness does not make it so that the consummation of love is insurmountably delayed into a future yet to be. Rather, the very completeness of this union, as mutual fruition, is formed from within by each lover's awaiting the other's requital in its being given. By dint of this asymmetry, the lover can always expect to receive himself as a new other in the loving beloved to whom he turns himself, rather than to be stabilized against transformation in one who merely reflects his own desire.

Consider how a lover in such a relationship implicitly consents to his personal determinacy as permanently good, since it is the necessary condition for sharing in as other, rather than taking over for oneself, the other's life. Even as his desire for reciprocity means that he does not will to fix her in place and so absorb her into his own willing—Faust's "Abide, you are so fair"—his self-giving toward her is also not a will toward the kind of love-death through which he would be absorbed into *her* willing. Before returning below to a fuller discussion of how this form of union addresses the desire for immortality, we seek

first, then, to articulate more fully the sense in which difference is essential to the intermediation of persons.

2.2. *Embodied reciprocity*

If I return to myself in one and the same event of being lovingly present to that which is other to me, I can go forth from myself toward another creature nowhere more perfectly than in my love for a fellow human person, who, coequal to me in nature, is maximally counter to me among creatures in her utter singularity. For this reason, she alone can perfectly answer my will with her own, offering this in her expressive countenance. Indeed, enfleshed desire can receive the answer it seeks nowhere more perfectly than in one whose very flesh is wholly informed by a correspondingly different mode of being human expressed therein—that is, the woman before and for the man; the man before and for the woman. As embodied spirit, desire is *engendered* in us in a twofold sense: it is moved by another, and it is so moved across sexual difference. This difference cannot be closed, and it is this permanent asymmetry that allows for the intimate exchange between lovers through which each is given to himself as whole in the other's desire in a manner that is irreducible to his own.⁴⁶

In reflecting on how sexual difference enables the interpersonal mediation proper to nuptial love, it is instructive here to compare the myth of human origins Aristophanes tells at Agathon's feast in the *Symposium* to the recounting of woman's creation in Genesis. As Aristophanes has it, the primordial unity of man consisted in a round figure expressed in three types: a double male, a double female, and an androgynous form composed of male and female parts. Each of these types, we should note, could not be spoken of as genders, since each was complete in itself and not ordered toward coupling with the others. Man's "terrible" greatness in his state as a self-enclosed sphere seduced him to an overweening rebellion against the gods that Zeus punished by dividing each in twain. Sexual difference was thus born of tragic

46. These points draw on D.C. Schindler's argument in "Perfect Difference: Gender and the Analogy of Being," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 194–231.

presumption, and sexual desire is shot through with nostalgia for a return to the natural beginning we lost through the division our own *hamartia* brought upon us. “Now, since their natural form had been cut in two, each one longed for its own other half, and so they would throw their arms about each other, weaving themselves together, wanting to grow together.”⁴⁷ We see here the poignancy to this otherwise-ludicrous picture: lovers detect in their mutual predilection that they were always meant to belong together, and their embrace intimates restoration to a peace and innocence that had not yet known transgression. Each comes home in the other, however, because he finds there an uncannily familiar but forgotten side of himself. Whatever their sexual orientation, Aristophanes says, lovers “are struck from their senses by love, by a sense of belonging to one another, and by desire, and they don’t want to be separated from one another, not even for a moment.”⁴⁸ The enigmatic delight of their encounter is really the foretaste of some elusive healing never fully to be accomplished, whereby one person would again be made from two.⁴⁹ Yet this suggests that what lovers want is not the other’s difference but precisely the overcoming of the unnatural misery that difference is, along with the mortality it brings. It implies that lovers in their present state are not themselves whole, and indeed that each cannot love the other as whole in himself, but only as the missing half of the single self they were once meant to be. It is this one “I” that is the true end of each partner’s love. “Love is born into every human being; it calls back the halves of our original nature together; it tries to make one out of two and heal the wound of human nature.”⁵⁰ This healing, Aristophanes concludes, can only come from the gods, so that love as we know it

47. Plato, *Symposium*, 27 (191B).

48. *Ibid.*, 28 (192C).

49. *Ibid.*, 28 (192E). This is not meant by Aristophanes in the sense of a child coming forth from the union of parents. According to the myth, child-bearing was a concession that Zeus introduced when he took compassion on the sadness of man and woman in their division from one another (27 [191D]). In light of the whole narrative, it might be conjectured that, for Aristophanes, the child as one person born of the union of two offers a second-best image of what lovers actually seek: restored unity with one another that collapses their distinction.

50. *Ibid.*, 27 (191D).

is “the best that can be done for the time being,” a state to which we are condemned until the gods relent.

This view of eros cannot affirm any ultimacy to personal intermediation, but only to a self-mediation of an original whole that lovers do their best to recover. Such lovers can only hope from one another to return to a lost “once upon a time,” rather than to open together toward a new “happily ever after” before them. The myth serves for Aristophanes as a justification of the principle “like is always drawn to like,” which Glaucon will make explicit and which all of the speakers but Socrates take to be the foundation of love.⁵¹ In this, it expresses the characterization of natural, preferential love put forward by Kierkegaard, with a wink at Aristotle, as “the *I* intoxicated in the *other I*.” “At the peak of erotic love and friendship, the two actually do become one self, one *I* . . . a new selfish self.”⁵²

In Genesis 2 we find a wholly different account of the origin of sexual difference that likewise envisions a primordial unity of man and woman. Formed from the dust of the ground and in-breathed with God’s own life (Gn 2:7), Adam is created complete in himself and first and always in a grounding relation to God. At once he is granted his mission of fruitful stewardship over the world (2:15), but neither his fundamental bond with God nor his dominion in the Garden suffices to address the deep need he has for companionship with another of his kind. “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gn 2:18). Man wants to receive from within the world fulfilled confirmation of his (God-answering) desire to be, which must come from without in another’s desire for him. Herein he can find God’s anterior will that he exist recapitulated in the gaze of a fellow creature. Yet no neighbor could provide this so well as one who is coequally different in an absolute sense: a woman. For his desire for his wholeness to be finitely confirmed is secondary to and can only be fulfilled in his desire to delight in a finite beloved. To invoke our discussion of the in-between character of eros in section 1, we can say here that it is *because* he is endowed with himself that Adam can be ready to receive such a companion. The Lord

51. *Ibid.*, 32 (195B).

52. Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard’s Writings*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, vol. 16 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 58.

God allows this longing to awaken in man out of his fullness as created, and then answers it not by adding a new creature from nowhere, but by drawing forth the fulfillment of Adam's longing from within him, fashioning a rib delivered from his own body into his helpmate and counterpart (Gn 2:21–22). Adam suffers this miracle painlessly, in a deep slumber (*tardemah*) that is like his own re-creation from nothing—except that nothing of his original wholeness is undone—or like a deathlike rapture into a new state of being—except that he is not violently parted from himself. That the woman is of his very flesh allows for a recognition of distinction in the same order that Adam lacked in relation to God above and his fellow creatures below him. At the same time, that the part drawn forth from Adam is formed into a whole person means that this blessed wound does not need healing through the recuperation of the woman back into the man. Her difference from him is given primordially with her own existence, and this permits Adam the possibility of hearing a free response he could not know anywhere else in the world. And this response invites him to participate in the life of its speaker from within. Such intimacy with Eve only deepens in turn his sense of his beloved's difference from himself—the fact that she only comes forth from him because she is given from above. She too is grounded in herself by and before God, and this unabsolvable difference is experienced by the man only as a cause for ever-renewed exultation in and rejoicing over her. “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!” (Gn 2:23). The genitive (“of my flesh”) expresses how Eve is so perfectly *from* Adam that she can relate *to* Adam as whole in herself. Adam's love of his given body, the seal of his own integrity, thus issues out into and is fulfilled in love of a like person who can never be drawn back into his own self-unity, but to whom he can, for this reason, “cleave” so that they “become one flesh” (Gn 2:24). This one-flesh union lives from the embodiment of their personal difference, so that it is an encounter of freedoms that brings rest even as each remains inwardly open to the other as a continual source of future giving and of their future life together, as indeed to the God by whom each is given to the other. Because she is irreducible to him, Eve, herself made to the image and likeness of God, can mediate God's “It is good that you exist! May you be!” to Adam, as he to her. “Being created by God actually does not suffice, it would

seem; the fact of creation needs continuation and perfection by the creative power of human love.”⁵³ Though Adam could hear the Lord God walking in the Garden in the cool of the day, it was this mediation of God through the answering desire of another of his kind that Adam yearned for as the awaited crowning of God’s giving.

In view of Diotima’s account of the lover as begotten into his perfection in the presence of the beautiful, we might say Adam’s exclamation signifies his own rebirth in the event of Eve’s creation from his side. Genesis sheds light on the truth distorted in myth espoused by Plato’s Aristophanes: I cannot consummate by myself the promise of the other I may yet be, but I can only receive my wholeness through *and with* another. We can better understand the need for a coequally different answering desire in turning again to our analysis of our ontological constitution in section 1. My inward openness to my own future person is the foundation for and is only fulfilled in an excessive recapitulation of this asymmetrical self-relation in the reception of the beloved as a future-in-person. So it is that the lover comes to know the fullness of the original embarrassment from which he lives through another’s affirmation, the same other in relation to whom he responsively reaffirms the gift he is to himself through loving action. The beloved is not derived from me, can never be exhaustively gathered back into my own inner sources, but nevertheless fulfills the heretofore-inarticulate longing in me for a person to be given to me from afar.⁵⁴ The longing for this finite counterpart is prefigured in my own waiting for my perfected self as an immanent other who will be given to me only from above and from ahead. As the end of my desire for happiness always means receiving myself as another, natural love of self naturally exceeds itself toward love of another person whom I can love “as myself.” Personal desire is always ordered toward a personal end (whether that be the proximate

53. Pieper, “On Love,” 174.

54. Compare this to John Paul II’s reflection on the phrase “God has given you to me” in his “A Meditation on Givenness,” printed in translation in *Communio: International Catholic Review* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 871–83. As John Paul II shows, this sense of being personally given another person need not be tyrannically egotistical but precisely the opposite.

end of a finite person or the ultimate end of the tripersonal God). It is because my integral self-relation is already ecstatic that I am disposed from within to be moved by another. More than this, I am related to myself as other for the sake of receiving another for herself. The beloved's futurity with respect to me is manifested in that she is one whom I cannot comprehend but only revere, even as it is with such reverence that I truly can embrace her wholeness. The requital of my desire—which, necessarily powerless to compel or claim, I can only woo from the other—seals this permanently futural aspect of the beloved, which itself mediates to me God's ever-futural self-giving.

The faithful pursuit of my wholeness leads of itself to the surprise of receiving a beloved person as herself, that ungrasping embrace through which alone I experience fulfillment in her. I am mediated to myself in an abidingly unexpected way by another whom I could never deduce from my own needs, but whose presence I am oriented from within to be surprised by. Only because she is in herself inexhaustibly whole can she be a source of rest for me, as her address toward me is an ever-new presentation of the person she is. For this very reason, I can secondarily receive my own inexhaustibility unfolded and multiplied ever-anew in her desire for me. So I am reborn to myself in the gaze of a beloved who wills my immortality as I will hers. It nevertheless bears repeating that the future she represents, even as it calls always for attention to her difference from me and her perpetual newness relative to me, is ordered to a consummation that this difference makes possible. Permanent openness to the beloved's requital is thus a form of rest, through which I am mediated to myself in turning to her, and mediate her to herself in her turning to me.

2.3. The promise in and beyond our promise

In view of this reciprocal character of intermediation, we can develop further how human lovers are moved to one another by the desire to be forever. To embrace the beloved is to detect the ever-more of her own destiny, to will her immortality, and, in her will for my own happiness, to rediscover my own call to abiding happiness. However, finite eros carries with it not only

a sense that the beloved must never cease to be, but also a sense that the beloved could not but be. The longing for the beloved to endure beyond death is latent in love's awakening, but so is the recognition that she already possesses a "timeless" quality, the character of everlastingness. Again, Faust's temptation is not altogether unfounded. If only eternal beauty can grant immortality to him who enjoys it, there is a resemblance to eternity in the beauty of the finite beloved, which thus restores to the lover something of the "intimations of immortality" that Wordsworth felt surrounded the experiences of early childhood. This paradisaical presentiment is given in the beloved because she is herself meant for an end without end in God, but also because she is caused by God as though without beginning. That is, she is, as created, so radically and abidingly emplaced within her own subsistence that, though she had a decisive birth in time, her being has an immemorial originality about it: the rose's whylessness.⁵⁵ Though her existence is indeed contingent, this note of timeless necessity is a sign of the perfect gratuity with which God lets her and every creature wholly be. Even as her requital of love comes upon the lover as a call from a future bearing within it the promise of ecstatic completion, in herself the beloved also presents to him a past-in-person that he cannot plumb, but may only reverence by willing her existence as given. For this depth, her "original solitude,"⁵⁶ is grounded only in her creaturely relation to the groundless God. This "past" is the most profound assurance of the asymmetry between lover and beloved, or of the beloved's "futural" character for the beloved, that allows them to dwell as one in an abidingly open reciprocity. It grounds the awe that moves the lover to self-sacrifice for the other, or even tempts him, as Plato describes in the *Phaedrus*, to a quasi-idolatrous act of sacrifice *to* the beloved. The lover, Socrates says,

is amazed when he sees any one having a god-like form,
which is the expression of divine beauty; and at first a

55. This is expressed by Ferdinand Ulrich with his idea of the "uncaused character of being qua being" (*Homo Abyssus*, 124ff.). I discuss this in my "Plenitudo Fontalis: Love's Groundless Yes and the Grateful Originality of Nature," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 134–81.

56. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books, 2006), 146–55.

shudder runs through him, and again the old awe steals over him; then looking upon the face of his beloved as of a god he reverences him, and if he were not afraid of being thought a downright madman, he would sacrifice to his beloved as to the image of a god.⁵⁷

If it offers me a point of rest in the world, the beloved's addressing-answering desire does not close me back in on myself but draws me further beyond in the promise of ever-more that was already present in love's first enkindling. Being in love, I not only will the immortality of the beloved, but will the immortality of this willing. That is, I necessarily will to enjoy the beloved's presence forever (or for all the time that is given). One's own desire toward the finite beloved is, then, at once boundless with respect to the temporal future, or else it falls short of and falsifies its own innermost motive. Enfleshed desire wants to abide across time in the intermediating exchange of union, and so love in its very conception intends permanence. The vicissitudes that come with temporal distension can of course lead to the betrayal of this pristine impulse, but, *pace* Faust, this problem cannot be overcome by an obsession with the intensity of the momentary experience. We do not affirm finite beauty by clutching at the present against its passage, or indeed in the refusal of eternity. To the contrary, we are only true to the present in accepting its parting and embracing it in this gesture of consent, in following its own momentum of entrustment forward to the carnal future. Yet for the lover this letting go need not consist in foregoing the possibility of permanence to love's timeless moment across time's flowing. The grandeur of the fleeting present lies in its bearing and re-presenting a wholeness it cannot exhaustively grant—the presentiment of the timeless, the properly never-ending. There is a letting go that is really a mode of resignation, which imagines what happened in the past as irretrievably behind us. This disposition goes hand in hand with the progressive flight toward a possible self who forever evades capture because this self has not been given first. Then there is a letting go that knows the past can be sustained only in a transformation that at once grows out of what has been and comes to greet us from ahead—a rebirth. This is an act of vouchsafing, which releases in the expectation

57. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 62 (251).

of receiving anew, albeit differently and perhaps more perfectly. Such fertile renunciation is epitomized in the posture of the wedding vow.

The human will descends into the flesh not only to the point of loving another embodied person, or even of willing that this beloved's corporeal integrity perdure forever, but to the point of willing that this very love itself be incarnated in a concrete form that lasts. The promise of immortality given in the loving encounter can only be "made good on" by each lover's deed of promising fidelity to the other. In the unique instance of the wedding vow, we see fulfilled what Faust groped after: the transcendence of time, the gathering up of the whole of one's future (and, within this, the whole of one's past) in a single moment—not through taking all this into one's grasp, but through "giving one's hand." The decisiveness of the wedding establishes the finished order of the marriage, but this closure is what opens up a future of continually renewed exchange over time. I give over the whole of my lifetime in the vow for the sake of lifelong enjoyment of the beloved's presence, thus unfolding the timeless event of our love for as much time as is given us. Through exclusivity and indissolubility, marriage offers a "moving image" of dwelling immortally with and before the beautiful beloved.⁵⁸

The wedding vow already encapsulates in itself the shape of this communion that will be unfolded sequentially. For the lover speaks his vow in dialogical unison with the beloved's vow, which both invokes and confirms his own, so that each spouse gives himself *through* the other's requital. In giving himself each receives from the other his own future life, which could not be wholly his own but for the other's consent to his self-giving. Each receives himself as a whole together with the promise of the other to whom he promises the whole of himself. In the very structure of the vow we thus see how marriage is a state wherein spouses intermediate one another's perfection.

As each spouse only has the future he gives through the other's response, his promise is more than he himself can keep,

58. To invoke and attempt to reconcile categories Kierkegaard opposes to one another, the aesthetic ecstasy of love is *only* sustained in the ethical form of marriage. See "In Vino Veritas" and "Some Reflections on Marriage," in Soren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 7–184.

for it can only be fulfilled through the other. The will spouses share for their own love's everlastingness can only come in mutual entrustment to one another's safekeeping. Yet even they together cannot secure this common lifetime by themselves. The promise by which they are kept must itself be kept by another (God). Hence, their mutual entrustment is at once an entrustment to God's providing for the future that stretches out ahead of them. In making their vow before God, they thereby exercise their relation to the future opened up by this genesis as an act of hope, one that will always be grounded in the faithful recollection of the abiding past that their exchange of vows is.

By virtue of the totality of the vow, moreover, the whole of each spouse's future life will be included within their exclusive reciprocity. The promise of this life was already given to each in his love's awakening, where each lover first glimpsed that every good that would come to him from then on would in some sense be enjoyed *through* the beloved, inasmuch as it would be enjoyed *with* the beloved.⁵⁹ In this sense, within the vow all the things that belong to and all the works that flow from the lives of each spouse will serve to embody and so mediate (multiply) their common existence. That is, everything that each will experience will take place within and contribute to the boundless openness of their personal intermediation. The time-encompassing moment of the vow properly abounds, and endures, in the events, encounters, endeavors, and effects that make up the common life it generates. The lover henceforth encounters the world through the beloved's requital, and the world's every prospect is given to him wholly from within the common future they look forward to together: "Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one."⁶⁰

This will toward the embodiment of their bond is representatively enacted in the conjugal embrace that both consummates the vow and recapitulates its form. Here the capacity to requite eros that is written into each spouse's gendered body defines the difference between them as correspondence. In the mutual fruition made possible by the embodiment of this

59. As is portrayed vividly in Wendell Berry's novel *Hannah Coulter* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2004).

60. John Donne, "The Good Morrow."

spiritual correspondence, each spouse receives the other's joy in him through enjoying first the beauty of the other's existence, and in the other's joy in him enjoys secondarily the beauty of his own existence. Each is most expressive of himself in cleaving to the other. So the conjugal embrace is a locus of what we mean here by intermediation, the receptive-responsive giving of self to another that at once gives the other to the other. As representative, this co-action in turn gives form to the whole one-flesh union that is their future life, through which they carry out their will for their love to remain immortally. And indeed, as we will discuss in "Part II," the conjugal embrace opens up for and from within their marriage a future beyond the future of their marriage.

This foundation can afford us a further perspective on the place of death in love. The Romantic notion of the love-death (*Liebestod*) dangerously collapses the pleasure of eros with the misery of *thanatos*, the wretched death introduced by sin. But love also knows an original "blessed death": the other-focused self-surpassing through which the lover receives new and larger life from and with the beloved by willing and serving her happiness first, even to the point of commending her beyond their union to a still better good, everlasting birth before the beauty of God.

This death unto life belongs inwardly to the "happy order" in which love is made concrete. True union between persons means a relationship of mutual self-communication whereby each consents to the other as a whole in dwelling wholly with the other. Loving union thus represents the form of intermediation, for here each participant's reception of the other's goodness is at once a gift of the other's goodness to the other and a reception of his own goodness from the other. To be given oneself anew through another is to be enlarged by this transfiguring representation of one's goodness in the other's reception of oneself and so by one's effect on the other. Each is more richly himself for having his integrity affirmed by one whom he affirms in turn. Mediation thus brings to light how selfhood is intimately other-centered, as it is fulfilled at once in loving and in being loved. We might say, then, that mediation is the personal enactment of paradox, where one so lives for and in another that the other's life is one's own without ceasing to be inviolately distinct.

What remains to be seen is how this form of relation is essentially “triune,” where the communication between two persons looks beyond the activity of each and indeed of both together from its very inception. Just as each person’s self-love is only perfected in loving another as oneself, so love between two properly transcends and multiplies itself in love of a third that has a life of its own. Mediation is naturally fruitful. □

ERIK VAN VERSEDAAL is tutor of philosophy at Magdalen College of the Liberal Arts, New Hampshire.

MEMORY ETERNAL:
FRUITFUL DEATH AS THE FORM
OF PERSONAL MEDIATION
(PART II)

ERIK VAN VERSENDAAL

“[T]he child is the proper finite consummation of the person’s enfleshed desire, and so the child is that created end for the sake of which man and woman do all that they do in the world.”



It is proper to one’s inmost desire for perfection in the *bonum* to be made happy, and so to receive oneself most richly, by adhering first to God’s own happiness. “To love is to take delight in another’s happiness.”¹ Mediation to oneself thus belongs to the form of personal union with the divine beloved. The first part of this essay considered Diotima’s view, presented in Plato’s

1. Gottfried Leibniz, “A Dialogue,” in *Leibniz: The Shorter Leibniz Texts*, trans. Lloyd Strickland (Continuum: New York, 2006), 170 (translation modified). Elsewhere, Leibniz writes, “The happiness of those whose happiness pleases us turns into our own happiness” (“Codex Iuris Gentium,” in *Leibniz: Political Writings*, 2nd ed., trans. and ed. Patrick Riley [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988], 171).

Symposium, that one's own fulfillment can only be sought in seeking God's beauty for itself. Immortality, the longing for which is inflected in time in the act of "willing tomorrow," is a matter of being given wholly to oneself by the God one loves for his own sake, hence in being "born from above."

"Joy," Josef Pieper remarks, "is the response of a lover receiving what he loves."² In keeping with this principle, personal "intermediation" (William Desmond's term) proves to be an expression of reciprocal generosity, an open order where two are bound together by rejoicing in one another's being good. The paradisaical peace in God for which we are made is already mediated to us through our action in this world and through our fellowship with other persons. Each is given to himself for the sake of being present to others, and in giving himself to others he is most fully present to himself. Indeed, it is only in enjoying another's fulfillment that the self sufficiently enjoys his own. The first part of this essay took familial love, and above all nuptial fruition, as the natural, embodied locus of this interplay between finite persons that lies at the heart of creation. If we are made to answer God's desire that we should be, we naturally yearn to have our own desire answered (equally but differently) from within the world. Each lover in giving presence to the answering beloved at once gives the beloved to the beloved anew. But the partnering communication between the two, in which each is given more perfectly to rest in him- or herself through and with the other, exceeds and empowers the contribution of both at once. In this sense, the reciprocity between two in love is already a third to which they openly turn and which thus precedes their mutual desire as its end. Hence, the theme of mediation serves to explain why the desire for union with the beautiful in which the lover is made happy (born anew forever) would at once be, as Diotima has it, a desire for begetting before the beautiful. If it is through and with a beloved other who loves me that I fully indwell myself, we two most fully abide with one another, and so most fully address ourselves to our hoped-for tomorrow, through and with a third whom we together contemplate and live for. "Thus, it is necessary that those who are—and are worthy to be—supremely

2. Josef Pieper, *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1999), 22–23.

loved seek with the same desire someone else to be included in their love.”³ Mediation preserves and perfects difference, and the beloved joyfully acquiesces in the beloved’s difference from himself above all in receiving her (and himself in union with her) through the “second difference” of their fruit. Indeed, the difference from God and others that each created person receives with being is for the sake of such fecundity. In part two of this essay, accordingly, we attend to the manner in which the inner generosity of all loving mediation between persons appears in its natural proliferation in further mediation. The will aspires toward God through its descent into the flesh, and, we argue, the natural destiny of the will in its mediation through the body is generative communion with another embodied person.

1. PREGNANT FROM BIRTH

1.1. *Carnal eternity*

We have seen how finite desire as enfleshed wills first the immortality of the beloved, and, within this same love, wills to take joy in her beauty together with her forever. The lover is moved to will his own immortality, then, out of this primary desire to belong with the beloved. In turning to her, he most ardently cleaves to his own being as good, as he wants to remain himself at his best for the sake of receiving and responding to her without conditions. Lover and beloved each want for the other to exist everlastingly, but they want this even for their togetherness itself, which is concretized in the lifelong bond within which husband and wife personally intermediate. Of course, this hope for their union to last tomorrow and throughout time is bound to fail with death. Christian spouses confess, moreover, that hope for a permanent, exclusive union with the created beloved will not be fulfilled even in the blessed life with God, since in heaven “they neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Mt 22:30). Hence, one familiar form of the vow in the sacramental celebration of matrimony closes with the assent to the bond’s inevitable dissolution—

3. Richard of St. Victor, *On the Trinity*, trans. Ruben Angelici (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 126.

“till death do us part.” The nuptial vow, though it encompasses the whole lifetime that remains for spouses to share, and within this gathers up the years each lived prior to their wedding, is ordered from its inception toward being surrendered with the surrender of life. The future that each spouse finds promised in the beloved stretches, so it would seem, no further than this limit.

In her conversation with Socrates, Diotima presents the desire for a historical immortality as an image of the desire for eschatological immortality in God. The hero or luminary lives on in the world after his death in the memory of those who have witnessed, recorded, and passed down the story of his exceptionally noble (or perhaps ignominious) deeds, and in some measure all men and women desire not to be forgotten among their kind. “I believe that anyone will do anything for the sake of immortal virtue and the glorious fame that follows; and the better the people, the more they will do, for they are all in love with immortality.”⁴ To be sure, perduring in the world’s recollection can offer only the dimmest trace of the joy of permanently beholding divine beauty for oneself, which the Christian faith confesses is at once the joy of being known exhaustively and without end. One might even view the duration of historical immortality as the perverse opposite of true beatitude, insofar as earthly commemoration comes after one’s departure from the realm in which one “lives on” and so is, strictly speaking, powerless to make good on the promise of outlasting death it seems to offer. What help is it for me to be celebrated if I am no longer here to enjoy my renown? And if I still exist, but in the bliss of heaven, what need could I have still to be thought of among strangers centuries removed, even if it does them some good? It might even be precisely in glimpsing the vanity of being kept in human memory—for, say, a few millennia for those who leave behind something truly monumental?—that one takes solace, hoping for a state in which personal integrity is secured unceasingly. Disappointed by the vagaries of human fashion, or by the gradual erosion and oblivion of our best works over ages, we turn longingly toward heaven. Might this not pose a variation on Kierkegaard’s glory-hungry man who wills to be Caesar so as

4. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1989), 56 (208E).

to be no longer himself? Despite the reality of such temptations, the fact that Diotima holds historical immortality to be a genuine image of our perfect felicity, though faint, encourages us to ask in what way it might indeed bear a positive resemblance to the true life we await in God.

It is with this question in mind that we consider in this section the reason why begetting in the beautiful would be the consummate end of finite love. As Diotima explains, sub-personal organisms—which, as composite, naturally undergo corruption—overcome death in time above all by generating offspring. “For among animals the principle is the same as with us, and mortal nature seeks so far as possible to live forever, and be immortal. And this is possible in one way only: by reproduction, because it always leaves behind a new young one in place of the old.”⁵ Animal propagation offers, of course, a lower image of begetting timelessly in the presence of eternal beauty than, for instance, engendering virtue in another through education. Man shares with all other organisms the longing to remain through his fruit, but because he is spiritual his procreation would seem to be the least dignified form in which he is capable of ensuring himself a future beyond death. As an image, bodily fruitfulness is not itself the enjoyment of the heavenly eternity it expresses. Earlier in the *Symposium*, Pausanias seems to relegate all eros that can issue into children—that is, all heterosexual eros—to the domain of the vulgar Aphrodite, as opposed to the love of character that descends from the celestial Aphrodite. Yet while Diotima is sensitive to gradations in nobility of love, she is willing to say that a form of begetting crowns the *scala paradisi*, and so acknowledges that bodily fruitfulness is on the spectrum of mediating images of this perfection. In this concluding section I propose further that the child is the proper finite consummation of the person’s en-fleshed desire, and so the child is that created end for the sake of which man and woman do all that they do in the world. This is so, I argue, because personal begetting perfects the *Gestalt* of intermediation, the happy union through which persons come to themselves through and with one another, and does so by abounding between and over this union. We approach this

5. *Ibid.*, 54 (207D).

here by asking: In what manner does interpersonal fruitfulness bring about a natural surpassing of death by love, and how is this expressed especially in human childbearing? How might we envision the immortality that comes with the succession of generations as more than a deficient counterfeit of the everlasting life that comes by the grace of divinization?

Now, insofar as begetting promises a kind of immortality in time, the child mediates to each of his parents that parent's own wholeness. Aristotle, whose own thinking is descended from Diotima's via his master and his master's master, holds it as a principle that "each living substance, insofar as it is perfect, seeks to beget its like,"⁶ or to communicate its nature. Consider how it is that the agent perfects himself *in* the works that he accomplishes, and how these effects can themselves become causes that mediate the efficacy of the agent into the future. All such works are forms of communicating one's nature, but only childbearing, where the effect is itself another human person, represents the most complete communication of this nature. Here we come upon a significant ambiguity that presents itself to us when we think of living on beyond death through another. Aristotle does not say that a substance is not perfect *until* it begets, nor does he say that perfection is indifferent to begetting. If perfection were determined by begetting, the fruit's own meaning in and for itself would be lost, as it would be reduced to an instrument for its parents' attainment of integrity, and with this, for their preservation *against* death. On the other hand, were begetting not an act in which perfection naturally issued, the fruit would have no bearing on the parent's

6. This is a paraphrase of a statement in *De anima*, bk. 2, that is indispensable for our theme and that will resound throughout the rest of this essay. Joe Sachs renders it as follows: "The most natural thing for a living thing to do, if it is full-grown [τέλεια = perfect] and not defective . . . is to make another like itself, for an animal to make an animal and a plant to make a plant, in order to have a share in what always is and is divine, in the way that it is able to. For all things yearn for that, and for the sake of it do everything that they do by nature. . . . So since it is impossible for them to share continuously in what always is and is divine, since no destructible thing admits of remaining one and the same in number, each of them does share in it in whatever way it can have a share, one sort more and another less, enduring not as itself but as one like itself, that is one with it not in number but in kind" (Aristotle, *On the Soul*, trans. Joe Sachs [Sante Fe: Green Lion Press, 2004], 91 [415a230–415b]).

wholeness, and so could not mediate life to each parent through its reception of life.

We encounter once again the paradox of a wholeness that properly abounds beyond itself so as to receive itself anew in another. Diotima offers a principle in which we need to ground this paradox. At a crucial moment in her discourse, she tells Socrates that all people are “pregnant from birth,” insofar as each is inclined toward giving birth out of his own inner resources. “Pregnancy from birth” betokens a readiness to abound rooted in the embarrassment of riches that is our own being. In the first place, one is plentifully whole from the beginning, not only through that which one begets. One can either deny this original wealth in using one’s fruit to become whole or exaggerate this wealth in neglecting the fruit. At the same time, it is out of the fullness of this original pregnancy that we open up to the promise of a beauty that must come to us from without—yes, of the immortal happiness that we cannot but pursue, but at once of external fruits with which we are burdened from the beginning. Even of one who is “pregnant in soul” rather than body, Diotima says that “while he is still a virgin, and, having arrived at the proper age, desires to beget and give birth, he too will certainly go about seeking the beauty in which he would beget; for he will never beget in anything ugly.”⁷ Since our native power to effect ever-more can only come to fruition in and through another, we are ordered from within toward letting the one by and with whom we give birth be given to us.

If one confirms the perfection of one’s being in communicating it and therefore in bringing forth another, the fruit one gives must at once be received, so that together with the fruit one receives a sign of one’s own co-accomplished perfection as a futural gift from a beloved to whom one adheres for her own sake. “Reproduction goes on forever; it is what mortals have in place of immortality. A lover must desire immortality along with the good, if what we agreed earlier was right, that Love wants to possess the good forever.”⁸ Again, our own goodness is sealed in its fruitful communication by virtue of our cleaving first to the

7. Plato, *Symposium*, 56 (209B).

8. *Ibid.*, 54 (207A).

beloved. Hence Diotima will emphasize that all lower generative action flows over from seeking first the divine beauty in which alone we are made consummately happy, wholly ourselves, and so most efficaciously communicative. This truth is also seen by Aristotle, for whom the desire to contemplate the divine intellect from within is the ultimate source of those virtuous deeds through which we give birth to ourselves. For all sexually differentiated organisms, exemplarily in man and woman, the begetting of like that both arises from and deepens in turn one's own perfection occurs with another of the opposite sex. If love means willing the spouse's wholeness, in childbearing each spouse mediates this wholeness to the other—that is, both praises and contributes to this wholeness—through causing with the other the most noble bodily effect possible, another human person, which neither spouse could cause alone, and for which each of their different roles is inexchangeable with the other. This fruitfulness of the child belongs to the logos of enfleshed desire because this co-agency with the beloved is the fullest bodily expression of the loving reciprocity we desire from an equal whose different mode of being (and loving) is an irreplaceable counterpart to our own. The begetting in which perfection naturally seeks to be expressed comes upon one gratuitously out of the good “love-death” that is the embrace of the beloved, and this gratuity determines the manner in which immortality is given through the child.⁹

9. In his treatise *On the Making of Man*, Gregory of Nyssa took up a variation of Diotima's idea that offspring represent an overcoming of death for corporeal creatures. For Gregory, the unnaturalness of human mortality, brought into the world through sin, was mercifully accommodated for by God in advance with the gift of sexual organs. These had no function in Eden, precisely because our first parents were not made to die, so their use only came into effect after, as a consequence and first response to the Fall, much like the “skin of beasts” that clothed their nakedness. This view is encouraged by the fact that Adam and Eve have no children before their sin. This need not mean that the conjugal embrace is itself evil—it is not, for instance, equated by Gregory with the primordial temptation itself—but neither does Gregory hold it to be present in the state of original innocence. Bodily procreation is rather a good that is offered to address imperfectly and provisionally the great problem of fallen life until the coming of Christ. The temptation lurking in this view—one to which I would not say Gregory himself succumbs—is to conceive of childbearing as nothing but a reaction to death's misery, and therefore as merely the best available means for the survival of death, the need for which is itself regrettable. The fruit of love would be an instrument

Before dealing with this directly, we can find a significant aid to our reflections in another image of fruitfulness alluded to in passing by Diotima, the making of art.

1.2. *The genius as mother*

In what sense can an artist look for immortality in his works? Think first of the artist's motive in making. The aesthetic gaze lovingly waits for the beautiful to approach and to present its own gratuitous efflorescence. This self-showing is the asymmetrical and unanticipable response that the artist generously yearns for in attending to the beautiful at all. He is compellingly attracted into a wooing that is fulfilled from beyond him in this other's presence, before which he can rejoice. His main purpose in setting about his work is to take in the beautiful so fully that he can, in the end, return or present its beauty to it, differently, in an expression of praise—that is, as mediated in a third fashioned with the artist's own self-perfecting skill. Since it is the beautiful's requital to his gaze that fructifies his skill in the first place, however, we can say that the artist cooperates with the beautiful throughout his making. The work is not just a vestigial record of something the artist has beheld elsewhere, but is through and through the fruit of an encounter and exchange. In its very origin, the work comes to the artist not only from resources within

for dealing with the despair of realizing and remaining oneself brought on by mortality. Without entering into the theological and exegetical concerns that would be called for in a full engagement with Gregory's position, and acknowledging the truth of his insight that nuptial love is inflected differently in our postlapsarian condition than it was first meant to be, I wish to contend here that we overcome the dangers to which this position is prone when we recognize (1) that childbearing expresses a "good death" of spouses that is original to human eros, and (2) that it is proper for the fulfillment of the natural desire for immortality to be mediated to parents by their child(ren). As we saw above with the false interpretation of Aristotle's principle concerning the co-begetting of one's like, there is a need here to interpret the desire for a future in the child in light of our "pregnancy from birth," to our God-endowed power for self-perfecting that renders us inwardly available to belong to and with a beloved. Though the death that comes through sin presents parents with the temptation to use their child for the sake of a spurious future, the mercy of God given in being supplies man and woman with the resources for overcoming this temptation in the very order of childbearing as we know it.

himself, but proximately from the beautiful itself, and, by inspiration, foremost from God. Better, this inspiration from on high is given *through* the integrity of the beautiful. As coming from above and from without, the work is for the artist a free gift that all his endeavor awaits, and which indeed characterizes all his generative endeavoring as first receptive.

What, then, does the artist hope for in offering the original its image? Admiring the beautiful's everlasting inner character and willing it never to cease ("A thing of beauty is a joy for ever"¹⁰), his representation promises to the artist the survival of this original before its fleeting appearance subsides with change and destruction. This trope of safeguarding the life of the beloved in the work of art is well known within poetry. Take, for instance, the ending to Shakespeare's well-beloved Sonnet 18 ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"):

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

The poet's "eternal lines" have the power to keep fresh the "eternal summer" that is the beloved's beauty, so that she receives life beyond her death from the work. Yet the artist cannot prepare a work to mediate this beauty throughout time without preserving thereby his own experience of and togetherness with the beautiful. In the labor of making, he bears himself forth and so necessarily communicates himself in the work. Prior to self-expression, what he seeks to share in the work is an expression of the beautiful, but he can only do so by sharing his seeing of it and rapture into it. So he rightly desires the perdurance of his exchange with the beautiful, through his delight in which he received a renewed delight in his own wholeness, but this always only follows upon his principal will for the beautiful itself to remain. Because he cannot but pour himself into the work in making it, the work, which mingles in itself the mark of both its sources, thus also promises to the artist his own historical immortality. Yet notice that this immortality

10. John Keats, *Endymion*, bk. 1, line 1.

itself can be had only in reference to the beautiful. Were he to seek merely to be renowned as a genius, rather than first to celebrate the beautiful mimetically, his anxiety to live on could only come to frustration. Were he to treat the work as a vehicle for his direct self-prolongation, his lust after fame would offend against the most characteristic property of beautiful art: its gratuity, its self-justified for-its-own-sake-ness. To the extent that he failed to yield to the work its own inner end-character, the artist would, moreover, immediately undermine the uses for which he wants the work. For the piece itself must be worthy of remembrance for its artist, secondarily and as a result, to be remembered in it. However, it will not be gratuitously pleasing, and so will not last, unless its own integrity genuinely re-presents the beautiful¹¹—unless, that is, it is fashioned out of the artist's primary desire for, abandonment to, and enjoyment of this original, rather than out of his fearful self-fascination. The only fruit that can last is that which is generated before the beautiful, so that the artistic *gen-ius* is one who is fecund by and with another. For the sake of the beautiful alone he composes a work that can embody in itself their union, and which only does so as its own beautiful whole.

Thus the poet can promise the beloved person that through his "powerful rhyme,"

'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity
 Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room
 Even in the eyes of all posterity
 That wear this world out to the ending doom.
 So, till the Judgement that yourself arise,
 You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.¹²

11. For imitation as a kind of re-presenting, or making the original newly present, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

12. William Shakespeare, Sonnet 55. The full poem reads:

Not marble nor the gilded monuments
 Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme,
 But you shall shine more bright in these contents
 Than unswept stone besmeared with sluttish time.
 When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
 And broils root out the work of masonry,
 Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn

To be sure, the artist himself is already endowed with the vision and gifts needed to depict what he has beheld—he is “pregnant from birth” with all that he will make—but this interior wealth is expressed at once in the “poverty” of turning first and abidingly toward the beautiful as futural gift. This orientation to a coming future both remains and is transformed in his relation to the work born of the aesthetic encounter. For, having delivered from within the work given from afar, the artist is turned, out of the same eros that moved him to await the beautiful, to the work’s own life to come. This work offers a future for the beloved insofar as it has its own future. Out of his will for the beautiful and his union with the beautiful to remain, the artist wills the work’s union with others, and with this end in mind he serves the work’s own wholeness. Only if the poem is itself beautiful can it bear the artist’s experience so that the beloved’s praise might “still find room / Even in the eyes of all posterity.” The good artist does not, we could say, seek to live forever by having his work turn back to his own gaze—such a return was the end sought in the beautiful’s self-showing—but rather by having his work turn forward to an audience.¹³ He and what he cherishes remain in the work only if he disappears into it, by letting it stand for or bear its own meaning within itself. Once the work is born, its reference to the artist’s experience of the original, the experience out of which the work was conceived and by which it is pervasively informed, need no longer be recognized for the work itself to be enjoyed and kept in universal memory. The work remains available to give all future beholders a share in this union, but only insofar as it is enjoyed *for itself*. As he died to himself in the ecstasy of receiving the beautiful face to face, the artist dies anew in the ecstasy of surrendering the work

The living record of your memory.
 'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity
 Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room
 Even in the eyes of all posterity
 That wear this world out to the ending doom.
 So, till the Judgement that yourself arise,
 You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

13. Compare this to Pygmalion, who, rejecting love of women for love of a statue of his making, manifests an incestuous longing for co-equal reciprocity from the fruit rather than from the beautiful.

to face other gazes. In this entrustment he receives his own good wholeness back only through the admiration of the beautiful original via the work's reception. His embrace of the beautiful lasts forever, or remains vitally effective in the world, only when he lets the work that bears the image of that embrace transcend both himself and the beautiful original in its own tomorrow. Immortality is mediated to the artist insofar as the beautiful lives on in the work's own enduring, for only thereby can the beautiful "dwell in lovers' eyes."¹⁴

1.3. *Dying unto life*

We can return to the family with this example in mind.¹⁵ After all, Shakespeare himself acknowledges a limit to the immortalizing power of art, and even its inferiority in this respect to childbearing: "Who will believe my verse in time to come, / If it were filled with your most high deserts? / . . . / But were some child of yours alive that time, / You should live twice, in it, and in my rhyme."¹⁶ In what sense does the child offer a response to the problem of death?

We have seen how the finite person's desire for happiness—that is, for the future person he is unto himself—is expressed in the world through his reception of the futural self-gift of the beloved, ultimately in the beloved's requital of his desire in the wedding vow. In their common love, husband and wife will an everlasting future for one another, and, following upon

14. Shakespeare, Sonnet 55. The trope offends only if we see the artist's desire for immortality as a presumptuous, pre-Christian, and inherently futile effort at self-deification through the use of one's gifts. Our conclusion will gesture at how the desire for the immortality of the beautiful that moves the artist to make should instead be seen as a natural prefiguration of true immortality—"till the Judgement that yourself arise . . ." (ibid.)—and is only all the more deeply driven when it knows this most perfect hope.

15. William Desmond discusses the family as an order of intermediation in *Ethics and the Between* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 385ff.

16. William Shakespeare, Sonnet 17. See also, *inter alia*, Sonnet 2: "Then being asked, where all thy beauty lies, / . . . / If thou couldst answer 'This fair child of mine / Shall sum my count, and make my old excuse,' / Proving his beauty by succession thine! / This were to be new made when thou art old."

this, will an everlasting future for their bond itself. A trace of their bond can perdure in all the effects of their co-activity, but nowhere more integrally than in the child, and this because he personally embodies the everlasting future (the “happily ever after”) for which they long together. They want for the life of their “one flesh” union to be personalized in the flesh, and for this “flesh of their flesh” to live on abidingly, as he bears in himself testimony to the bond from which he springs. Their mutual mediation proliferates in being mediated by a third.

It is crucial to appreciate here the sense in which openness to life is rooted in the asymmetrical reciprocity of spouses and properly flows from the ever-new character that this exchange manifests precisely in its completeness. The bridegroom desires to present his bride with her own beautiful wholeness as perfectly as possible, even to the point that this mediation is itself whole, can stand for itself. Loving her first, he also desires for her to be able to present him with his own beauty so mediated. The same is true of the wife with respect to her husband; each desires to give to the other a fruit that must simultaneously be received from the other in order to be given. Moreover, as the child resembles both parents at once, each recognizes in the child the image of the spouse transfigured through his own requital. Each thus finds himself given back to himself by the spouse in a third, and no such third could be so whole or so wholly re-present the beauty of both of his parents at once, as one who is himself a person.¹⁷ The rebirth each receives from the other gives way to and is given again in the birth of a third who is as whole as each and wholly from each. The child, that fruit than which no more perfect one can be yielded, thus concretizes the intermediating exchange of enfleshed desire as its most complete point of rest, holding together in himself the boundless interplay, the inward excessiveness, that is the personally and sexually differentiated union of his parents in their common life.

The child himself comes upon his parents as a future-in-person because he is an effect that each can only cause with

17. Paolo Prosperi, “This Mystery is Great: Reflections on the Fittingness of the Nuptial Analogy in Trinitarian Theology,” in *Enlightening the Mystery of Man: Gaudium et Spes Fifty Years Later*, ed. Antonio López (Washington, DC: Humanum Academic Press, 2018), 148–77.

and as received from the other, but, more deeply still, because he is an effect they can only cause together with and as received from God. Their fulfillment in one another's free return of love awaits from within a gratuitous overfulfillment from elsewhere, a hope beyond their power to realize that will nevertheless be given through their own natural co-activity. The promise of enduring joy that parents will have in this future-in-person is intimated already in the pleasure of the conjugal embrace, which itself touches on timelessness, as if in the presence of the divine holiness through whose giving the act may bear fruit.¹⁸ Diotima herself suggests this foretaste of childbirth in sexual union: "This is the source of the great excitement about beauty that comes to anyone who is pregnant and already teeming with life: beauty releases them from their great pain."¹⁹ The reciprocal ecstasy in which oneness is enjoyed is already a gesture of common entrustment to God's providing and of common openness to delivery of its fruit. We can perhaps detect an expression of this prefiguration of the child in love's requital when in this light we reread what Aristophanes says about lovers (albeit against his original intention): "No one would think it is the intimacy of sex—that mere sex is the reason each lover takes so great and deep a joy in being with the other. It's obvious that the soul of every lover longs for something else; his soul cannot say what it is, but like an oracle it has a sense of what it wants, and like an oracle it hides behind a riddle."²⁰ Abandonment to the embraced spouse is at once, though tacitly, readiness to receive the child as so given by God that he comes forth from the two. The love between spouses is thus most perfectly expressed in a turning to one another that is in itself a shared turning toward an awaited third someone.

18. Adrian Walker made a similar point in his lecture "The Heart of *Humanae Vitae*: The Inseparable Nexus between the Unitive and Procreative Significations, Love, and Fruitfulness," presented at the conference "The Body as Anticipatory Sign: Commemorating the Anniversaries of *Humanae Vitae* & *Veritatis Splendor*" (Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family at The Catholic University of America, November 15–17, 2018), the proceedings of which will soon be published by Humanum Academic Press in a volume edited by David S. Crawford entitled *The Body as Anticipatory Sign: Commemorating the Anniversaries of Humanae Vitae and Veritatis Splendor*.

19. Plato, *Symposium*, 53 (206E).

20. *Ibid.*, 28 (192D).

This order is obviously inscribed in the teleology of the body itself.

The child's life signifies for his parents the future of their love, but the love they bear toward him is by no means exhausted in this representation. First and foremost, they recognize that he has a purpose that transcends the union out of which he was conceived. Indeed, the child is the perfect medium through which their love can remain precisely because, as meant for happiness in God, he more perfectly has and is his own end than any other fruits they can bring forth together. Moreover, the memory of their bond can be carried forward historically in him most efficaciously precisely because the child, as himself ontologically "pregnant from birth," is apt to bring forth his own good works both of the flesh and of the spirit. The hopeful surrender out of which parents conceive their child in their love for one another forms their love for their child as hopeful surrender to his own future life, where he will be mediated to himself by others and mediate others to themselves in turn. He embodies the future for them—as a gift between them received from above who carries forward in himself their loving exchange—by having a future beyond them. It is the child's very transcendence of and proliferation beyond their bond that spouses wish to offer one another in their mutual requital.

This point bears on the difference between the end-character of embracing the beloved and the end-character of the fruit that gratuitously overfulfills this embrace. We should recognize first that these two ends—union and fruit—belong to the self-same desire, even as the twofoldness of this desire reflects the difference between the modes in which these two ends are pursued and enjoyed. If their mutual longing for everlasting rest in one another's beauty is expressed and partly fulfilled in the child, spouses find this in him not by keeping him for themselves, but in sending him forth to his happiness. The fruitfulness of nuptial love does not conclude, of course, with birth, but continues to be expressed throughout the years-long gestation that is the child's education in the home. It is hardly true that the child's original "intimations of immortality" need be forgotten as he grows, for these are rather meant to be fostered in the home, as it is through his parents willing him to be to the full that the child wakes up to the promise of his own happiness in eternal

beauty, the promise with which he is endowed at his conception. Wordsworth seems to hold that the whole world glows only for and by the light of the child's own spirit or subjectivity. That the world, luminous in itself with God's presence, does *also and above all* glow for and by the light of spirit is in truth an intersubjective event. The home protects and hands over the memory of the abiding embarrassment of being, and so instills a perennial reassurance that reality is good and God is trustworthy, setting the child free to will tomorrow. Family life rightly cultivates the child's native sensitivity to the attractive and commanding presence of God, even as he will need the experience of God's mercy, imparted through the Church and received also in the home, not to become hardened against this presence. Childrearing consists in mediating to the child his own desire for perfection so as to commend him forth to his own homemaking in the world and, finally, to his homecoming in God. All this is symbolically enacted already in the paternal act of cutting the umbilical cord.²¹ In turn, it is also true that the existence of the child mediates a perennially refreshing reminder to the parents of their own calling to immortal life.

If the bond between lover and beloved lives from their mutual awaiting of a co-equally different reciprocity, parents clearly do not beckon from the child generated from their union the answering desire they rightly demand from one another. After all, the child does not constitute their bond, even though he arises from within its intimacy. So it is that the child must know that the love his parents share for one another is always complete prior to their love for him in order to receive himself as the unmerited fruit of this love and so grow into himself. Nevertheless, spouses do want their shared love to be returned by the child, and this personal return of love is itself the future they look for in him. We could speak of this return as a "second answer," which accords with the personal fruit's place as a gratuitously proper but rightly secondary end of eros beyond nuptial union, the overabounding of desire's first fulfillment. In what way does the child reciprocate the common love his parents bear toward him? Yes, he is called to live filial piety toward his parents, but

21. Ferdinand Ulrich often invokes this event as an image of liberating another to his own self-responsibility.

this piety lives from the acknowledgment that the child *cannot* adequately answer the love his parents bear him. This limit is not itself miserable; instead, it reflects the difference in the modes of parental and filial love that allows for a real, hierarchical intimacy between parents and children. Yet this limit reveals that the only way that the child can co-equally reciprocate parental love, and so bring to fulfillment what his parents together desire from him, is by directing his love forward—that is, by his own perfection, or, put otherwise, by becoming a parent himself in whatever way is given him to do. Hence the futural answer that parents await from the child, the answer that completes their giving desire for the child, is had in the child's life with others.

This outward-turning looking forward together to what will be the child's own future (his vocation and destiny) does not diminish but intensifies the mutual desire of spouses and holds it together. For it is this "second answer" given in the child's future that is hiddenly awaited already in the longing for the beloved's requital. The mutual love by which each spouse comes to himself in another is perfected through its mediation in the child they together love for his own sake and so set free to his own life.²² Diotima cautions us, "Don't be surprised if everything naturally values its own offspring, because it is for the sake of immortality that everything shows this zeal, which is Love."²³ But just as the lover only takes joy in the beloved if he does not seek the beloved for the sake of his joy, so parents only find immortality in the child if they do not pursue the child for the sake of this immortality, but love him for himself. It is by turning together

22. Adulterous desire rests on a refusal to acknowledge the way the one beloved mediates in her own perfection the goodness that surpasses her. It fails to follow out love for the spouse to the point of its flowing over in a nonerotic love for the fruit borne together with the spouse. It is the search, doomed to frustration from the first, for a future that has been indefinitely forestalled. The adulterer should instead seek a future precisely in the presence of the person to whom he has given himself over without qualification, and to see that there is an intensive boundlessness in the spouse to whom he is faithful that is expressed in the singular fruits of the union he enjoys with this beloved. In this sense, we might say that he has confused his desire for living out fruitfulness with his spouse with a desire for a new beloved (and endlessly more new beloveds beyond her). This can of course take place in a marriage that is already blessed with many children.

23. Plato, *Symposium*, 55 (208B).

toward a future in which they each remain only by succession, in the lifetime of another that comes forth from both of them, that spouses are most present to one another. Their union is most whole by virtue of that which comes so radically from this bond that it exceeds it.

If the ecstasy each felt in his first attraction and movement of desire toward the other was already an opening toward their common expectation of a time when they will be no more, this sheds light for us on how the intimation of immortal life given in the dawning of the beloved's beauty before the lover is an experience of death. In the child we see that the reciprocal giving of self through which each spouse receives his own future from the other has the form of accepting mortality in a common entrustment to a shared future of which neither will personally partake. This entrustment is actively expressed by their ceding of their own place in order to emplace their child, or to grant him his own standing beyond them. Charles Péguy beautifully illustrates how a father lives on in the child through his meditation on a woodsman who, in the midst of his harsh midwinter work, is warmed by imagining his children at home, and above all by imagining their life to come:

He thinks tenderly of the time when he will be no longer
and his children will take his place.

On earth.

Before God.

Of that time when he will be no longer and when his
children will be.

And when they say his name in town, when they talk about
him, when his name

gets brought up, at some chance remark, it will no longer
be him that they talk about but his sons.

All together, it will be him and it will not be him, since it
will be his sons.

It will be his name and it will no longer be and it will not
be his name, since it will be (will have become) his sons'
name.

And he is proud of it in his heart and he thinks about it
with such tenderness.

That he will no longer be himself but his sons.

And that his name will no longer be his name but his sons'
name.

That his name will no longer be at his service but at his

sons' service.
 Who will bear the name honestly before God.
 Openly and proudly.
 As he does.
 Better than he.
 . . .
 He thinks tenderly about the time when he will no longer
 be even a remark.
 It's to this end, it's for this that he works, because doesn't
 one always work for one's children.²⁴

The father rejoices at the thought of his children taking his place in the world. He himself will live on in them as they carry on his name, but this means that he will be remembered *in* being forgotten. The father's being forgotten is a sign of how fully the child lives his own life as willed into his own selving by his parents. So too the artist finds a legacy only in being forgotten in favor of his masterpiece, or in being remembered first of all as the maker of this work. In each case, temporal immortality is had not in evading or "cheating" death, but in dying *into* the life of another, or, better, in living for the sake of another. What is involved here, then, is not merely a surrender of the other, but a remaining present in and through the other so surrendered. There is of course a parasitic form of "living vicariously" through one's child that fails to reverence the child's need to follow out his own calling in freedom and instead makes the child live for oneself, neglecting thereby to receive the child as a future-in-person. Such parenthood refuses mortality and so seeks self-prolongation by taking over the life of the child because, out of his despair, this parent ignores or denies that he has been sufficiently given to himself in being created, and that the richness of this being is at once the poverty of being other-oriented (ontological expectancy). Accepting his own finitude as given, he can instead trust its inner abundance, and so love his own being in entrusting himself toward another whose existence he affirms as perfectly distinct from his own. He finds here that there is no better reason for cherishing his own being and for wanting to exist *as himself* than for the sake of the fruit.

24. Charles Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, trans. D.C. Schindler (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 14, 16.

“Because no one ever works except for children.”²⁵ In the mouth of the poet, this most commonplace sentiment turns out to be a principle with metaphysical heft. Releasing oneself forward to another is the proper mode of resting in oneself as given to oneself. True vicarity—living beyond oneself in another who takes one’s place—does not need to involve a rupturing of one’s original self-relation in order to affirm another’s own integrity, but it is instead the most natural ripening of this self-relation. That is, the possibility of sharing another’s life from within in such a way that gives life, or to have one’s own substance mediated to oneself through another in consenting to his difference from oneself, is rooted in the inward openness of one’s own self-being to the ever-more. Because the person exceeds himself within himself in his orientation to his own ontological future (goodness, fulfillment), he can receive this future also in the future that another is in relation to him. Here again we have to keep before us the priority of the beloved for anyone in love: one can only receive one’s life anew in the other if he first lives for the other.²⁶ In willing the beloved’s futural happiness, the lover lives “from within” the beloved, as his own happiness comes to be bound up with his will for her own. Hence St. Paul says, “He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh” (Eph 5:28b–29). As his integral desire for his own future person expresses an immanent ecstasy that opens out of itself toward another, so he can live anew in the other across the death of affirming the decisive difference of the other’s personhood and destiny from his own. Likewise, parents together see themselves and their common love reborn in the child, and they live on in him by fostering him, accompanying him, and finally setting him free to his own life.

How does this bear on the view, suggested by Diotima, that parents overcome death in childbearing through something like the survival of the species?²⁷ Consent to one’s own finitude

25. *Ibid.*, 12.

26. In view of our discussion of Gregory of Nyssa in note 9 above, we can say now that this dying whereby one’s life flows over and arises anew in the life of another reflects an original property of love that would be expressed in man had he not succumbed to temptation.

27. Like Diotima, Hegel sees the connection between the fecundity and the perishing of individual organisms. He observes that an animal seeks to

comes exemplarily in consent to another's difference from oneself as the inner condition for rejoicing in the other's existence and for a mutual sharing of self with the beloved. The consent to one's own finitude is, in our fallen state, at once the acceptance of mortality, and so the readiness for this wretched death is contained within the lover's blessed death toward the other.

We have insisted throughout that love seeks of itself to surpass the curse of death into immortality, but here we can clarify that it can only do so through living out the blessing of its own love-death. For if acceptance of personal difference is the condition for total sharing and reciprocal mediation, only such consent can be fruitful. Now, the communication of nature in which the conjugal embrace results never leaves behind the singularity of the spouse, love of whom is what principally moves the lover. Moreover, the one who receives this universal nature does so in being given himself as a person, as an "end-in-himself." And parental love lives from consent to the child's difference from the spouses, whereby they can offer a real communication of life. The blessed death of love does indeed involve an opening of the two toward mankind, but first as this nature is expressed in the singular child.

In his phenomenology of the face, Emmanuel Levinas speaks of how I find behind another's gaze the virtual presence of a "third party" whose witness calls for my just response to this one person: "the whole of humanity."²⁸ The child mediates to his parents not just the universal nature they communicate to him in his conception but the concreteness of all other persons who do or may share this nature. His flesh mediates the universal

copulate out of its desire, impossible to realize, to express its universal nature comprehensively. As the impartation of one's nature in and with another of one's kind, copulation, whereby the species is preserved in a new member, represents the transcendence of individuality not so much toward the mate as toward the universal. This surpassing of its own partiality is already a sign of the animal's inevitable perishing, so much so that it reveals the inner meaning of that perishing as a movement toward a more inclusive whole. Death is in this sense as a moment within generation (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature: Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* [1830], Part 2, trans. A. V. Miller [New York: Oxford University Press, 2004], §367ff., pp. 410ff.

28. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 213.

concretely also through the power in his flesh to continue with another the lineage of persons of which his parents were beneficiaries before him, a lineage that can in principle be perpetuated for the rest of time. If not in children of his own, this mediation occurs through the incalculable ways in which his actions will proliferate to the good in the lives of others. Through the child, what Kierkegaard speaks of as the “boundless exclusivity” of preferential love shows itself to be inclusive of boundless others.²⁹ The fact that nuptial union opens boundlessly out to the universal in the concrete fruit is also reflected in the way in which this union is ordained, not only to a single third, but to children, who as brothers and sisters intermedial together in the family and then separately in their own lives the one bond from which they spring. “Paternity is produced as an innumerable future; the I engendered exists at the same time as unique in the world and as brother among brothers.”³⁰ It is in the death of letting their children be distinct from themselves that parents are regenerated in the futures of these children, futures that mediate to the parents their own contact with all other persons who may be. Historical immortality overcomes the wretched death not by a spurious prolongation of life, but because it has the vicarious form of the communion made possible through love’s blessed death.

Loving, forward-turning surrender is the pattern for all intermediating co-activity between spouses, even when a child is not given. But the inner orientation of reciprocal desire toward the surpassing gift of this third person shows how deep a wound infertility is in marriage. This frustration reflects how radically we will to give beyond our power to give—with another, with God. Undoubtedly, the experience of infertility confirms that the perfection of nuptial eros is not itself constituted by the child, for the bond of love can be just as complete in the condition of looking forward to the gift in longing patience. Faithful love cannot but desire for its intermediation to be mediated in its fruits, and it is so already in any number of goods that spouses are responsible for fostering together, some of which may indeed outlast their lifetime. If their union enables each spouse to be

29. Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 52.

30. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 279.

most perfectly himself, out of this perfection the two will bring forth together all manner of good effects, including in the lives of other persons, such as Diotima describes in the fruitfulness of teaching another how to live well.³¹ But this activity of serving things and people can only abound fruitfully to the extent that the barren couple first of all suffers the gift-character of the child in its absence—that is, if they persevere in hope for the child as the consummate end of their love. This waiting for a good beyond the power of the two to give one another together preserves the openness through which each mediates the other and is mediated by the other in their loving union. Ferdinand Ulrich never tires of reflecting on how the seeming vanity of our failures offers, if endured in a love, a vibrant reminder of the primordial gratuity behind every successful deed. The uselessness of our service of God is symbolically epitomized in the experience of barrenness, which thus sheds particular light on the generosity of God at play in the genesis of a person. It is perfectly natural for couples to take for granted the gift of the child, and the trustworthiness of God expressed therein—after all, generation represents nature at its most perfect. However, especially in an age where children can be mass-produced just as well as disposed of, infertile couples are given to bear crucial witness to that blessed death, hoping in God, that is the unsurpassable principle from which all life-giving parenthood continually draws its strength.

Barrenness also symbolizes sin's undermining of God's original purpose for creation—summed up in the blessing and commandment to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gn 1:28)—precisely as one of sin's most visceral repercussions. So it is only appropriate that when God establishes the covenant through which he will begin to conquer the death that sin brought into the world he will do so through the sign of miraculously overcoming one couple's infertility—and from a man who was “as good as dead” (Heb

31. Of one pregnant in soul, “if he also has the luck to find a soul that is beautiful and noble and well-formed, he is even more drawn to this combination; such a man makes him instantly teem with ideas and arguments about virtue—the qualities a virtuous man should have and the customary activities in which he should engage; and so he tries to educate him. In my view, you see, when he makes contact with someone beautiful and keeps company with him, he conceives and gives birth to what he has been carrying inside him for ages” (Plato, *Symposium*, 56 [209c]).

11:12). God's covenant with Abraham illustrates how the hope to receive a child can itself mediate the hope to receive God. Likewise, the hope that this couple has for their own love to burgeon into a lineage through Isaac is bound up with hope for the good of all mankind, for through him "all the nations of the earth will be blessed" (Gn 22:18), ultimately in the seed who is Jesus Christ (Gal 3:16). So Abraham, in looking forward to Isaac, "looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb 11:10). Indeed, the merit of his willingness to sacrifice Isaac rests in the steadfastness of his hope that God will still fulfill his promise of universal blessing, even somehow through Isaac.³² His gesture of offering the child to God remains, crucially, the very gesture through which he can commend his son forward to his own fecundity, so that the covenant can advance thereby toward its fulfillment. Hope for the child's future is always an expression of oblation, lifting the child up toward God in thanksgiving. The temporal "tomorrow" personalized in one's child(ren) positively mediates, so long as it is not confused with, the hope for immortal perfection to be found ahead and above with God that sustains human life in its wayfaring.

2. BEGETTING IN THE BEAUTIFUL

If readiness for death is inscribed into the wedding vow itself, this sheds light on how the gesture of commending the spouse toward God lies at the ground of and flows from the heart of nuptial union. The loving entrustment to a future beyond death that characterizes the relation of spouses to their child already suggests that their parting with death need not be met by spouses with mere resignation, for the common joy of spouses in the existence of the third expresses an affirmation by each of the other's own being, an affirmation that abounds beyond the end of life. Procreation is a consent to mortality in the mode of adhering to the goodness of one's own substance *because* procreation consists in the giving away of this substance with another. It carries

32. A hope that represents an implicit openness to resurrection, as Joseph Ratzinger points out in his meditation on the binding of Isaac: *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 111–21.

forward and thus fully reveals the marital form of being given back to oneself in the beloved, as it involves generously receiving an excessive confirmation of one's own existence as good from ahead, from a time (and a someone) to come.

In this respect, as we found above, the “temporal and carnal eternity”³³ sought in the child is not merely an empty attempt at seizing life in the face of wretched death, a deficient and even miserable semblance of true immortality. Instead, parenthood is lived out as the blessed death of love's en-otherment: belonging to and identifying with another's own existence, and so being given back to oneself differently and anew by way of this surrender in favor of the beloved other. Through begetting, fallen mortality becomes a means of lovingly communicating one's being into another's life together with one's beloved. Of course, this does not yet address my desire to be wholly myself everlastingly with the beloved beyond suffering death's parting. Lacking this hope we would in fact be unable to sustain the goodness of “living on” in the child.

Though the lover can return to the beloved her own wholeness in his requital of love, he cannot exhaustively mediate her to herself, nor she him. The reason for this is that he cannot be the ultimate cause for her joy. Each does confirm the other's whole goodness *representatively*—that is, in a finite expression of God's loving beauty and beautifying love—and so moves the other beyond himself to the desire for being in God's presence. This act of drawing the beloved toward God does not come merely at the end of life but inwardly forms the whole of love's “May you be!” If each spouse's final gesture with respect to the other is a renunciation of union, this union, from its inception in the exchange of vows, has had the form of hopeful vouchsafing of the beloved to God. Something of this is expressed even in Socrates's meditation in the *Phaedrus* on how the ecstasy of lovers toward one another matures of itself into lifting the beloved, precisely in being lifted by the beloved, toward rapturous rest in the Good:

At last they pass out of the body, unwinged, but eager to soar, and thus obtain no mean reward of love and madness.

33. Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, 60.

For those who have once begun the heavenward pilgrimage may not go down again to darkness and the journey beneath the earth, but they live in light always; happy companions in their pilgrimage, and when the time comes at which they receive their wings they have the same plumage because of their love.³⁴

The erotic will awaits something more than temporal immortality, which cannot of itself utterly satisfy our inner openness to life, our longing for ever-more, and our affection for our own flesh. And by grace the will is presented with that for which it most deeply wills to hope. For in Christ our inborn desire for forever, our natural love for our own being, is gratuitously answered from above in the miracle of bodily resurrection. The theological virtue of hope for this supreme gift transfigures one's wretched death into an act of yielding oneself utterly to God through which one is given utterly back to oneself in the flesh. The death we cannot but suffer is now an occasion for receiving the offer of new life. In light of this hope, the marriage vow's destined dissolution in the death of the spouse, acknowledged in its very exchange, determines the whole of Christian marriage as an entrusting of the spouse through death unto life, out of gratitude to God for the beloved. This sending forth in hope is not an inversion of marriage's embrace but its overfulfillment, since the desire for the beloved's everlasting happiness belongs to the first movement of love, as indeed to its entire duration. This mutual surrender beyond death seals the unconditional and fruitful fidelity of spousal love, a totality open from within to the hoped-for infinity of God. My consent to the beauty of my spouse is at least implicitly my will for her immortal wholeness, and hence for her embodied divinization in communion with God—and mine together with her. Here the endless promise felt in her visible beauty is brought to its definitive fulfillment.

Where does the hope for the child stand in relation to this? Unlike animal reproduction, human procreation is not only an image of the begetting in beauty for which we are

34. Plato, *Phaedrus*, in *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, ed. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 67 (256d–e).

pregnant from birth, but it is completed *in* this everlasting begetting, since the child as person is himself made for beatitude. The release of the child toward his own future is ultimately a release of the child unto resurrection in God, a gesture exemplified already in infant baptism. And just as the hope for the child's future in the world is the gratuitous end that moves lovers toward one another from the beginning, so now we can say that it is the longing for the whole child, body and soul, to endure forever in God that is, to invoke Diotima, what lovers really want. "The person is that which is most perfect in all of nature and matter strives toward it as toward an ultimate form."³⁵ The root motive that runs through enfleshed desire is the fulfillment of a hope beyond nature's hoping: the bodily resurrection of the child who may be. And this is undoubtedly among the most perfect "re-presentations" of divine glory that man and woman can offer in gratitude to God. Since openness to the child's future bears within it an openness to the whole of humanity, moreover, hope for the resurrection of one's child carries parents into an intimate hope for the resurrection of "all flesh."

Though parental love always has the form of surrendering the child unto God, this act of hope culminates in the joy of a boundless belonging together before God in heaven, which includes the joy of beholding the face of one's child in the flesh forever. So King Solomon in his beatitude proclaims to the pilgrim Dante:

When, blessed and glorified
the flesh is robbed about us once again,
we shall be lovelier for being whole.³⁶

And, once his speech had ceased, the poet reports,

So prompt and ready was the loud "Amen!"
both choirs responded, it was clear to me
how much they yearned to see their flesh again,
Maybe less for themselves than for their mamas,

35. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.22.

36. Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, trans. Anthony Esolen (New York: Random House, 2005), Canto XIV, 43–45.

their fathers, and the others they held dear
before they had become eternal flames.³⁷

A trace of preferential love remains in the charity of the happy life. Though spouses surrender their nuptial bond with death, the good effects each had on the other's time in the world is remembered forever. Anyone may serve the salvation of every other, but it is no less noteworthy that only parents in conceiving their child co-effect with God the very being of someone who may by grace live always in the Body of Christ. In the resurrection, parents behold their surrendered love for one another abiding without end as embodied in the person of their child, and indeed of their lineage through the child.³⁸

If this is the most concrete hope of enfleshed desire, how is this related to our hope of resting in God and being begotten to our immortality in this rest? In a reflection that surely inspired Dante, St. Augustine dares to consider how the mediation of God's beauty in the resurrected flesh of one's neighbor belongs within the intellectual vision of God in which beatitude consists.³⁹ These two orders are not in competition with one another, and, though it is not necessary for beholding God face-to-face, God does not will that our mediation of him to one another be bypassed even in everlasting life. We even find in this ecclesial intermediation the consummate figure of eschatological begetting in divine beauty. In the presence of God, Diotima says, the soul gives birth to true virtue mimetically. So we can say that,

37. *Ibid.*, 61–66.

38. So Dante's ancestor Cacciaguida rejoices to see Dante face-to-face and identifies himself precisely with reference to his descendant: "O frond of mine who brought delight to me / Even in expectation... / I was the root of all your family!" (*ibid.*, Canto XV, 88–90).

39. St. Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1972), 1086–87 (22.29): "In the future life, wherever we turn the spiritual eyes of our bodies we shall discern, by means of our bodies, the incorporeal God directing the whole universe . . . perhaps God will be known to us and visible to us in the sense that he will be spiritually perceived by each one of us in each one of us, perceived by one another, perceived by each in himself; he will be seen in the new heaven and the new earth, in the whole creation as it then will be; he will be seen in every body by means of bodies, wherever the eyes of the spiritual body are directed with their penetrating gaze."

in the communion of saints, each interpersonally “begets” by lovingly presenting to the other the other’s lovable perfection, doing so at once by radiating visibly in his own perfection the divine beauty he beholds. Moreover, each receives his own divinized wholeness back from the created other he in turn releases so that this other can receive himself anew from God and from every other saint. What this means is that the very form of vicarious living-on-in-another through commending forward that is articulated in the relation to the child is retained forever in the life of heaven, where the exclusive universality of the home is opened out into the universal exclusivity of the Body of Christ. For fellowship in that life always consists in a blessed death to self in releasing consent to the immortal beauty of the other whereby I am at once reborn to myself in rejoicing in the other’s rejoicing. This intercreaturely form of personal mediation images that with God by communicating the beatific vision to others from within the common enjoyment of this vision.

In this present life, the parental hope for the child’s glory before God mediates, in the measure that it is not confused with, the parent’s own hope for glory. Likewise, in everlasting life, the child’s perfected happiness co-perfects, while remaining distinct from, the parent’s own happiness in God. Here, then, we receive the utmost vindication of the images on Diotima’s *scala paradisi*, as these are lifted up into and preserved within its very crowning. In the hope for the child’s resurrection, desire’s movement into enfleshment is fully integrated with its ascending aspiration for fruitfulness in God’s presence.

This destined end sheds light back on our life in time, and the will to tomorrow in which the desire for perfection is expressed in the flesh. Temporality calls forth the desire to abide, for one is glad to be. The transition from moment to moment, when lived well, is already like a giving over of self, so that one learns by this rhythm that one remains by departing, that he who wishes to save his life must lose it, and that it is *in* losing it out of love that one’s life is already saved. Time for us has a personal shape, and the very mode by which we attain immortality over time is through giving ourselves up to and for one another, in a reflection of the fundamental other-centeredness in God that is the most profound source of all our self-generative action, and in a prefiguration of the charitable life made possible by grace. To

become oneself is at once to commend forward a legacy through having a lifegiving effect upon, hence an intimate connection to, others who succeed one. Parenthood thus expresses an answer to Faust: we hold onto the present not by seizing but by entrusting, for we can only receive it back in giving it forward, and finally in “laying up” the treasure of the present in heaven.⁴⁰

Yet even as hope for the child is the consummate expression of our willing tomorrow, mediating as it does our hope to receive ourselves anew together with all flesh in the enjoyment of God, it is not only that finite fruitfulness carries us upward toward our ultimate end. For it is likewise true that hope in God is what moves us first to our descent into the flesh, and hence to our longing for the fruits of our embodied life to abide remembered forever in the Father who begets from the beginning.

Thus without exception, all the world works for the little
girl hope.
All that we do we do for children.⁴¹

□

ERIK VAN VERSENDAAL is tutor of philosophy at Magdalen College of the Liberal Arts in Warner, New Hampshire.

40. But even Faust catches sight of this in the end: “The Ever-Womanly / Draws us beyond” (Das Ewig-Weibliche / Zieht uns hinan) (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Der Tragödie zweiter Teil*, lines 12110–12111).

41. Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, 22.