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Marcel and Transhumanism – A Dialogue

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Abstract: This essay explores a dialogue between the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel and a school of thought known as transhumanism. Transhumanism operates on the premise that humanity ought, as technology develops, to seize control of our biological destiny. The transhumanist looks forward to conscious beings freed of limitations that are biological in nature—such as evolutionary behavior and thought, physical fragility and decay, and, most especially, death. With such a starting point, the transhumanist project seems to exist in diametrical opposition to Marcel. Marcel is a thinker who embraces the value of given reality and the life-sustaining hope that flows from it. Rather than seeking autonomy and greater control, he acts as a witness to the value of what exists. This essay explores this transhumanist-Marcelian dynamic by way of the afterlife. For Marcel, hope for the afterlife arises most especially in response to the value found in intersubjective love. Within transhumanist discourse, by contrast, the afterlife becomes a vehicle to achieve the fullest extent of individual autonomy. While pay special attention to the difference between Marcel and transhumanism, the essay is ultimately meant as an introductory dialogue. As a result, the essay concludes by inquiring as to whether there are other possibilities for a Marcel-transhumanist dialogue to travel. These possibilities include an argument as to a shared foundation—the experience of existential value.

Purpose of the Essay

In this essay, I bring the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel into conversation with transhumanist thought. The prospect of a transhumanist afterlife, specifically the prospect of a digital or mind uploading[1] version of the afterlife, provides the occasion for such a conversation. I will point out that a Marcel-transhumanist dialogue highlights a tension, if not direct a contradiction, between these two schools of thought. The tension emerges from the emphasis on autonomy in a transhumanist worldview versus the emphasis on intersubjectivity and the value of given reality[2] in Marcel's philosophy. Despite these differing points of emphasis, the current study will also illustrate potential areas of cooperation. Marcel's approach to the afterlife could be used as a guidepost or anchor should a digital afterlife come to fruition. Marcel's philosophy could also serve as a source of introspection in transhumanist thought insofar as it reveals a potential tension within their value system. In exploring such possibilities, along with a few

[1] Mind-uploading, as described by Gabriel Andrade, "is about transferring mental contents from the brain to a non-organic device, most likely a very sophisticated computer. Under this concept, the death of the brain does not imply the death of the person, for the mental contents of the person would be safeguarded in a computer." See Gabriel Andrade, "Philosophical Difficulties of Mind Uploading as a Medical Technology," *The American Philosophical Association – Newsletter* 18, no. 1 (2018), 15.

[2] Intersubjectivity refers to a communion between persons. In reference to given reality, I refer to value in a more general sense. Giveness indicates a foundational or existential value—a value that exists in the reality human beings find themselves within. It exists, rather than is created. For Marcel, intersubjectivity functions as the most important source of existential value and it is the primary medium in which such value is revealed.

others, this essay is meant to initiate a dialogue, rather than come to definitive conclusions, when assessing the relationship between Marcel and a still emerging but clearly formidable worldview.

Introducing Transhumanism

The claim that transhumanism is a formidable worldview stems from the exponential growth of and potential implications derived from technological advances. The application of such advances, particularly as related to the medical sciences, have increasingly put humanity's biological destiny in human hands. Control of who we are, the capacity to determine how long we live, and the ability to compensate for biological failures/limitations are traditionally powers reserved for God. Yet, as Gabriel Andrade points out, "it is not altogether irrational to believe that, in the not-too-distant future, science will offer technologies indistinguishable from the ancient promises of science and religion."[3] To take the place of God, at least in reference to certain possibilities of life, ultimately rests upon the threat or promise (depending upon one's worldview) of merging technology with biology. As Wrye Sententia puts it, "…never before has the technology at issue been so close to our brains,"[4] or, as Roy Ascott notes, "we are all becoming, to a greater or lesser extent, bionic."[5] Because of rapid and significant technological development, the possibilities derivative from such development call one to pay attention to transhumanism, the philosophical movement most invested in the merger of biology with technology.

While technology has indisputably developed in novel ways and has been marked by exponential increases in power, this essay is not meant to enter the debate as to whether transhumanism's faith in technological development is warranted. Suffice it to say that there are many, such as Andrade, who argue that such optimism is either warranted or at least plausible.[6] It should also be noted that others are actively working to realize transhumanist objectives.[7] On

[3] Andrade, "Philosophical Difficulties," 14.

[4] Wrye Sententia, "Freedom by Design: Transhumanist Values and Cognitive Liberty," in *The Transhumanism Reader* eds. Max More and Natasha Vita-More (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 355.

[5] Roy Ascott, "Back to Nature II: Art and Technology in the Twenty-First Century," in *The Transhumanism Reader* eds. Max More and Natasha Vita-More (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 442.

[6] See, for instance, Randal Koene: "[S]everal important developments have made substrate-independent minds a feasible project in the foreseeable future. The transistor density and storage available in computing hardware have increased between 50- and 100-fold, at an exponential rate." See Randal Koene, "Uploading to Substrate-Independent Minds," in *The Transhumanism Reader* eds. Max More and Natasha Vita-More (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 149. Joseph Tham claims that "[t]echnological advances allow modern man to program the future with technical precision in almost every aspect of his economic, political and aesthetical life. Even health, sickness and death become organized." See Joseph Tham, "Will to Power: A Critique of Nihilistic Tendencies in Reproductive Technology," *The New Bioethics* 18, no. 2 (2012): 122. Quoting a transhumanist, Mark O'Connell relays a sense "that within a few generations it will be possible to transform the substrate of our humanity. And I think artificial superintelligence will be the engine that drives that." See Mark O'Connell, *To Be a Machine* (London: Granta Publications, 2017), 81. See Michael Graziano, "Endless Fun," *Aeon*, December 18, 2013, at *http://aeon.co/magazine/technology/virtual-afterlives-will-transform-humanity/* or his essay "Why You Should Believe in the Digital Afterlife," *The Atlantic*, July 14, 2016. As a final exemplar, Peter Kyslan writes of realizing the transhumanist dream of overcoming death "by means of a very advanced human-machine system where the boundary between organic (brain) and artificially organic, or electronic, media (computers) becomes irrelevant. The death of the biological component of the system would no longer mean the death of the entire system." See Peter Kyslan, "Transhumanism and the Issue of Death," Ethics and Bioethics 9, nos. 1-2 (2019), 78.

[7] Anna Bugajska provides a quick overview of such attempts, "[I]nitiatives like the European Human Brain Project or New Zealand's Baby X show serious attempts at emulating the human being—and consciousness—on a

the other hand, some view transhumanist promises as fool's gold and as philosophically and logically untenable, another of humanity's endless quests to discover a fountain of youth.[8] Such critics view the transhumanist effort to master nature as misguided exuberance and correspondent to a history of human hubris. The following insight is representative: "At present, we do not even know what it means to have a thought, and therefore the transhumanist vision...should not be taken too seriously."[9] Thus, while one may certainly adopt a skeptical approach when it comes to the power of technology to supersede nature, the transhumanist vision of the future is a matter whose practical realization will or will not occur independently of theoretical disputes as to its feasibility. As such, this essay serves as a meditation on a possible future in which the increasing ability to control life via technology culminates in humanity's ability to preserve ourselves in a reality of our making. Thus, even if one dismisses the possibility of something like mind-uploading specifically or transhumanist projects more generally, this essay speaks to a contemporary reality in which technology continues to grant humanity greater control over our destiny.

At present, the salient point is the aspiration that forms the basis of transhumanist thought—the aspiration to conquer biology. Transhumanism is predicated on the belief that humanity will increasingly overcome the biological limitations imposed upon the species. Peter Kyslan's definition of transhumanism speaks to this view:

> Transhumanism is a set of ideas and expectations about the future of humanity based on the optimistic technological advancement of science (biotechnology, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, cryonics, uploading, and others). Transhumanism is a class of philosophies of life that seek the continuation and acceleration of the evolution of intelligent life, beyond its current human form and human limitations.[10]

Moving "beyond…current human form and human limitations" is explicitly linked to autonomy by Mark O'Connell: "transhumanism is a liberation movement advocating nothing less than a total emancipation from biology itself."[11] Offering a metaphorical account of the same aspiration, one can turn to Max More, a leader in the transhumanist movement. In his "A Letter to Mother Nature," More writes:

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digital drive. In fact, startups like Humai or Nectome are trying to raise funds for the realization of a similar scenario. The experiments with telomerase expression are under way, e.g. at the Stanford University, nanotechnology is being developed by Google, synthetic biology at e.g. Harvard and Oxford. Mostly, though, these are interdisciplinary international teams, funded either privately or from supra-national programs." See Anna Bugajska, "Will Postmortal Catholics Have 'The Right to Die'?: The Transhumanist and Catholic Perspectives on Death and Immortality," *Forum Philosophicum* 24, no. 2 (2019): 402.

[8] See, as an example, Andrade, "Philosophical Difficulties," 16-19. It is also worth noting that the idea of a digital afterlife faces not only practical but logical problems. Specifically, what it would mean to exist within a machine? Would one control one's destiny or be subject to the commands of some overarching computer code or consciousness? Would one possess individuality at all if one's existence was ultimately nothing more than a set of code? Could such a code possess the kind of stability necessary to be called personal consciousness? What would it mean to shift between or become a different set of code?

[9] Benedikt Paul Göcke, "Christian Cyborgs: A Plea for a Moderate Transhumanism," *Faith and Philosophy* 34, No. 3 (2017): 352.

[10] Kyslan, "Transhumanism and the Issue of Death,", 71.

[11] O'Connell, *To Be a Machine*, 6.

> Mother Nature, truly we are grateful for what you have made us. No doubt you did the best you could. However, with all due respect, we must say that you have in many ways done a poor job with the human constitution. You have made us vulnerable to disease and damage. You compel us to age and die—just as we're beginning to attain wisdom….We have decided that it is time to amend the human constitution….Over the coming decades we will pursue a series of changes to our own constitution, initiated with the tools of technology guided by critical and creative thinking.[12]

More's brash tone is representative of transhumanism's unabashed faith that technology will usher in a new, post-human era of existence in which biological limitations, such as vulnerability to disease and death, along with emotional/psychological patterns derivative from evolution and genetics, are overcome. Rather than a product of nature, transhumanists look forward to a world in which conscious beings utilize technology to recreate nature, including, and perhaps most importantly, humanity's biological nature.

A Transhumanist Emphasis Upon Autonomy

Defined as a project to overcome biological nature in order to liberate individual consciousness, the centrality of autonomy is evident. The aim of transhumanism is to grant humanity and whatever follows human existence the capacity to control reality. Rather than a subject of nature, the transhumanist wishes to become the author of nature. Autonomy, conceived as a central tenet of the transhumanist movement, is supported by the definitions of transhumanism offered above. It also finds support in an aspect of human nature that transhumanists do wish to preserve as well as the foundational moral principle derivative from that nature.

Speaking to the vision of human nature from which transhumanism emerges, O'Connell traces it to an ancient human urge:

> As long as we have been telling stories, we have been telling them about the desire to escape our human bodies, to become something other than the animals we are. In our oldest written narrative, we find the Sumerian king Gilgamesh…[who] travels to the far edge of the world in search of a cure for mortality.[13]

In a more contemporary as well as critical vein, Joseph Tham traces transhumanism to Nietzsche's will to power and Enlightenment projects. He writes, "when liberty becomes absolute and technology unchecked, 'transhumanism' is the logical outcome of this hubristic 'will to power'."[14] Touching upon both positions, O'Connell references the longstanding and influential transhumanist Ray Kurzweil. In response to those who reject transhumanism as a denial of human nature, Kurzweil views transhumanist promises as "a final achievement of the human project, an ultimate vindication of the very quality that has always defined and

[12] Max More, "Letter to Mother Nature," in *The Transhumanist Reader* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 449-450.

[13] O'Connell, *To Be a Machine*, 1.

[14] Tham, "Will to Power," 126.

distinguished us as a species—our constant yearning for a transcendence of our physical and mental limitations."[15] While critics and transhumanists disagree as to the value of the project, there is a shared sense that transhumanism adopts an autonomy-based worldview. Human efforts to enhance and transform human nature are not, in the transhumanist account, an expression of hubris, but of humanity's basic longing to overcome the limitations biological life imposes upon us. Transhumanism portrays liberation from biology as the natural and welcome culmination of human history.

Operating from the premise that it is the nature of consciousness to exceed the boundaries that define and confine it, autonomy becomes a bedrock ethical principle. Benedikt Paul Göcke expresses the point well: "No morally acceptable interpretation of transhumanism entails that the agenda is one of restricting the autonomy of human subjects and nothing that undermines such agency could count as an enhancement."[16] A prominent transhumanist, Anders Sandberg, argues that "nobody may force us to change in a way we do not desire or prevent our change. This maximizes personal autonomy."[17] Returning to More, he claims that "transhumanists all support personal choice in the use of self-directed technological transformations."[18] Finally, one could reference O'Connell's definition of transhumanism as "a movement predicated on the conviction that we can and should use technology to control the future evolution of our species."[19] The violation or restriction of autonomy constitutes a moral failure, whereas the enhancement or realization of autonomy constitutes a moral imperative. Such a dichotomy occurs when autonomy serves as a foundational ethical principle.

An Autonomous Afterlife

Autonomy as essential to the transhumanist project naturally leads to a transhumanist afterlife conceived in terms of autonomy. For the transhumanist movement, overcoming death is a focal point, a motivating force, and the ultimate expression of autonomy. As a focal point and motivating force, one could return to Kyslan. He writes, "most transhumanist perspectives and projects are based on the need to delay, redefine or confront the problem of human death."[20] O'Connell writes that "[t]here was the truth of its [transhumanism's] premise, that we were all of us trapped, bleeding, marked for death. And there was the strangeness of its promise, that technology could redeem us, release us from that state."[21] Death, as an inviolable limitation, constitutes the ultimate adversary to a movement based upon autonomy. Death defines the limit, beyond which the individual can no longer act and at which the individual loses control of his/her destiny. Hence, technology that prevents such losses is salvific, for it provides humanity control over the event at which human beings lose all control.

To achieve power over death would simultaneously liberate humanity from another restriction, the body. Describing the transhumanist position, Anna Bugajska writes that "all factors that lead to involuntary death should be eliminated, so as to leave a human being with the

[15] O'Connell, *To Be a Machine*, 74.

[16] Göcke, "Christian Cyborgs," 348-349.

[17] Andres Sandberg, "Morphological Freedom," in *The Transhumanism Reader*, edited by Max More and Natasha Vita-More (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 57.

[18] Max More, "The Philosophy of Transhumanism," in *The Transhumanism Reader*, edited by Max More and Natasha Vita-More (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 13.

[19] O'Connell, *To Be a Machine*, 2.

[20] Kyslan, "Transhumanism and the Issue of Death," 71.

[21] O'Connell, *To Be a Machine*, 40.

possibility to exercise unfettered free will….death is a threat not so much to biological processes but to the cherished autonomy, prized by the transhumanist movement."[22] The realization of a digital afterlife constitutes a form of salvation in transhumanist thought because individual consciousness would no longer be restricted to bodily limitations. O'Connell puts the point well, "I knew this notion of the disembodied mind was central to transhumanism. I knew that this final act of secession from nature was, in fact, the highest ideal of the movement."[23] A digital afterlife would serve as the crowning achievement of humanity's drive for autonomy. No longer limited to bodily existence, a digital/mind-uploading vision of the afterlife would allow consciousness to take on whatever form it wishes. Bugajska describes such a life as "subject to never-ending mutability."[24] While "never-ending mutability" would almost certainly allow for some kind of re-entry to physical life,[25] re-entering physical life would be a choice rather than a necessary condition of conscious existence. The key, along with the reason that a digital afterlife serves as "the highest ideal of the movement," is that it would allow humanity to achieve "morphological freedom."[26] This freedom, which would allow one to exist in whatever form one wishes, speaks to the ability to place one's existence fully within one's control. A digital afterlife thereby represents the fullest fruition of autonomy.

Marcel – A Love-Based Afterlife

The defining element of Marcel's approach to the afterlife, what I will hereafter call a love-based afterlife, is that the afterlife acts as a response to value. The Marcelian scholar David Rodick explains how, for Marcel, "something of utmost significance is 'given' in life, which neither I nor any other human being could have possibly created."[27] Marcel notes how "at the root of hope there is something which is literally offered to us."[28] Marcel begins his approach to the afterlife with something offered. What, therefore, is "offered" and how does it inspire hope for life beyond the grave?

Marcel begins with the beloved. As the Marcelian scholar Xavier Tilliette notes, "it is that love of the other, that opens the door of hope, and which gives access to a symphonic universe."[29] Capturing the same intuition in more direct terms, Marcel claims that "to love someone, is to say to that person: '*Thou, thou shall not die*.'"[30] Love, for Marcel, is revelatory. It reveals a value, the experience of which prompts one to hope that death is not final. The Marcel scholar Thomas Busch states the point eloquently:

[22] Bugajska, "Will Postmortal Catholics," 409.

[23] O'Connell, *To Be a Machine*, 43.

[24] Bugajska, "Will Postmortal Catholics," 404.

[25] Think of an avatar type of existence. One takes on a body and can just as well remove themselves from that body.

[26] Sandberg, "Morphological Freedom," 56.

[27] David Rodick, *Gabriel Marcel and American Philosophy: The Religious Dimension of Experience* (Lanham, MD.: Lexington Books, 2017), 108.

[28] Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), 62.

[29] Xavier Tilliette, "Threshold Introduction," in Gabriel Marcel *Thou Shall Not Die*, ed. Anne Marcel and trans. Katharine Rose Hanley (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2009), xiii. Italics are those of Tilliette.

[30] Gabriel Marcel, *Thou Shall Not Die*, ed. Anne Marcel and trans. Katharine Rose Hanley (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2009), 64.

> In the experience of love the value of the beloved is not presented as a projection onto the beloved from some extrinsic source, but is rather recognized to be there intrinsically ('love is revelation'). The act of love does not create the value of the beloved; this value was present on the level of existence in the form of appeal, prior to love as a personal act.[31]

It is because one encounters the beloved as possessing a worth which, in Marcel's words constitutes an "irreducible," "unconditional"[32] and "overwhelming"[33] value, that one hopes for life beyond death. Love challenges death and it does so by offering the beloved as a first witness.

The challenge *is* the hope which emerges from the experience of the beloved and culminates in the faith that love is the governing principle of reality. Marcel's approach to the afterlife is predicated upon an existential ontology. It begins with a revelation of what is from the basis of experience. Thus, it is not a question of whether love reveals something real, but whether love reveals something absolute. The hope born of such revelation, as Marcel's underappreciated but darker passages reveal,[34] may ultimately prove itself false. For Marcel, death is a test of the beloved's ultimate or deepest ontological reality. The threat of death is the threat that the real value experienced in the beloved is not an ultimate value. Reality, in this regard, may prove tragic. However, even if tragedy possesses reality's final word, such tragedy is only possible because hope emerges from the experience of real value discovered in the beloved. The reality of this value is the basis to hope that death need not be humanity's ultimate destiny. It is the basis of an ontology of love rather than an ontology of despair or limitation.

The Value of the Beloved

Serving as the foundation of a love-based belief in the afterlife, more needs to be said about the value of the beloved. The value that generates hope for further life is deeply tied to a view of the beloved as irreplaceable. The beloved's worth is intimately and perhaps ineffably tied to the notion that there will never be another like him/her. Speaking to this notion in a first-person register, Marcel writes: "What exists and what counts is such and such an individual, the real individual that I am, with the unbelievably minute details of my experience, with all the special features of the concrete adventure, assigned to me and to no one else."[35] There is no copy or substitute for this "concrete adventure." Marcel unequivocally states his position when, in

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[31] Thomas Busch, "Introduction" in *The Participant Perspective: A Gabriel Marcel Reader* ed. Thomas Busch (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 16-17.

[32] Thomas Anderson, "Gabriel Marcel on Personal Immortality," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (2006): 401.

[33] Ibid.

[34] I say this with specific respect for one of my mentors. Thomas Busch once remarked, and I take the liberty to paraphrase, that "one will find passages in Marcel as dark or even darker than one finds in Sartre." Such darkness can also be found in those instances where Marcel speaks of death in seemingly nihilistic terms. In one such passage, Marcel writes, "[d]espair is possible in any form, at any moment and to any degree, and this betrayal may seem to be counselled, if not forced upon us, by the very structure of the world we live in. The deathly aspect of this world may, from a given standpoint, be regarded as a ceaseless incitement to denial and to suicide." See Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism* trans. Manya Harari (New York: Citadel Press Books, 1956), 26.

[35] Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 136.

response to the notion that "men are replaceable," he instead exclaims, "scandalous, and even sacrilegious words, for in fact a human individual is precisely *that which is not replaceable*."[36]

Allow me to flesh out this insight. I have three children, one of whom is named Abigail. When she was two and half years old a momentary interaction, which since became repetitive, is worthy of attention. One day, I said to her, "Abigail, you're a big girl." She looked at me, furrowed her brow, and clenched her fists. A serious face met my gaze and her tone was definitive. She said, "I not a big girl, I Abigail." The exchange, as it often is with toddlers, was hilarious and endearing. Yet there is a philosophic point in play. While intellectual development will allow her to see the logical possibility of existing as an individual as well as a member of a group, in another sense there is something deeply right about her statement. No one will inhabit the world exactly like her. Her history, her quirks, her triumphs, her failures, and her interests are packaged together to make her a person that will never be replicated no matter the scale of time nor the amount of persons available for comparison. From the perspective of a love-based approach to the afterlife, she is, most fundamentally, Abigail rather than the broader but nonetheless important categories used to define her.

Love, as a response to the revelation of irreplaceable worth, brings forth an attentiveness to the individuality of the beloved and gratitude for the privilege of witnessing his/her singularity. I love Abigail, and that her to which I refer is in no way disconnected from the irreplaceability of her singular personhood. That the lover partakes of an encounter with an irreplaceable other constitutes the sacred nature of one's relationship with those whom one loves. Love, in turn, is a living recognition that one is granted such a privilege. The world is enriched because the beloved exists within it or, in my example, because Abigail exists within it. There are, of course, many other "big girls" in the world, and these other "big girls" will utter many other cute phrases. But the value that prompts hope for further life is intimately tied to the notion that no other "big girl" could replace her. Reality is better because she exists within it and, vice versa, her absence would leave a hole that can never be filled, no matter how precious are those future others.[37]

A second dimension of the value that gives rise to a love-based belief in the afterlife is the inexhaustibility of the beloved. Marcel categorizes love as referring to a reality that is "impossible in principle to exhaust."[38] Marcel writes of how "we emerge into a region where one is not merely one among others, where transcendence takes on the aspect of love. The category of the given is transcended; 'never enough, always more, always closer.'"[39] For Marcel, the

[36] Marcel, *The Existential Background of Human Dignity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 139.

[37] While it would take the essay too far afield from its primary aim, it is worth mentioning an important objection to this claim. One could certainly question whether all persons are worthy of eternal preservation. Rather than a springboard to the beyond, some persons live in ways that generate the ultimate rebuke: it would have been better had they never been born. Think, for instance, of a mass shooter or a heroin addict whose child roams freely while he/she lays in a drug-induced stupor. Marcel's response to this rebuke is to look upon such persons as having betrayed the fundamental value that constituted their personal existence. Only those who love such individuals and who participate most intimately in their goodness would be able to remain attentive to a goodness that they have so violently and thoroughly betrayed. For such persons, the afterlife becomes a hope for reconciliation. The lover hopes for a domain that will heal the divorce between the value constituted by the beloved's personhood versus the way in which the beloved lived his/her life.

[38] Marcel, *Existential Background*, 6.

[39] Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, trans. Robert Rosthal (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 72.

beloved's personhood is open to ever-further and always-renewable encounters, which is why he defines relationships in terms of depth and excavation.[40]

Love, in this context, involves an exposure to and a recognition of a never-ending reserve regarding those we love. Love is predicated upon as well as generates further openness to the possibility that there is always something more, always the potential for surprise, always the potential for deeper understanding. Love thereby demands an attentiveness to the beloved's reserve. To those one loves, and so long as one resists an inertia that leaves the lover stale and empty, one is in the presence of a fullness that extends beyond the lover's ability to envelop. We are in the presence of a fullness that can never be exhausted. The depth of such fullness provides hope for a realm commensurate to such fullness, namely, an afterlife. We are in the presence of a fullness, in other words, that questions the adequacy of the limits imposed by finitude.

Exploring the nature of such fullness, inexhaustibility lacks vitality when framed in abstract terms. As Marcel puts it, "if I read in the newspaper of the death of Mr. So-and-so, who is for me nothing but a name, this event is for me nothing more than the subject of an announcement."[41] If I were to assert that someone I do not know or someone that I know in a cursory, superficial, or even stale sense is inexhaustibly valuable, my words would have weight only as a statement of principle. The statement can certainly be accepted as theoretically valid—and one can certainly come to ethical conclusions based upon it—but it is inadequate for prompting hope for life beyond death.

To underscore the point, it is evident how often encounters with others become transactional or part of the routine fulfillment of our social obligations. We may swap stock phrases and move on. Our interaction with another may be encompassed by a simple exchange, usually of a utilitarian variety. Or we may shield ourselves from a genuine engagement with others, perhaps for a lifetime, via the strategic use of routines and other socially devised masks. These and many other ways of interacting highlight how we often do not relate to others as inexhaustible presences. Such interactions do not become springboards to the beyond because the inexhaustibility that serves as one of the springs does not function. There is not a depth that calls one to engage persons ever further—an experience of "never enough, always more, always closer." Rather than depth and a call to everlasting life, such interactions are restricted to the domain of the useful. Commensurate with this observation, the more one approaches the other in terms of his/her use value, so too does a value worthy to contest death evaporate.[42]

To summarize, Marcel's entry point to the beyond is love. In love, one experiences another person as a fundamental good. The lover is called as a witness to the beloved's irreplaceable and inexhaustible worth. The lover testifies that this person matters and is worthy of mattering forever. The beloved is experienced as a good not of limited value or utility, but as a

[40] Describing his move from systematic rationalism to a philosophy focused on personal experience, Marcel writes that "my work which before seemed to be a scaffolding enabling me to construct a building, assumed a value, an intrinsic significance. The problem now was not so much one of building as of digging; philosophical activity was now definable as a drilling rather than a construction." See ibid., 14.

[41] Marcel, *Philosophy of Existentialism*, 37.

[42] Marcel writes, "the more the relationship which has united me to another being has been strictly possessive, the more his disappearance must come to be likened to the loss of an object." See Gabriel Marcel, *Presence and Immortality* trans. Michael A Machado (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1967), 235. In another work, Marcel discusses the devolution of the contemporary world. The devolution consists in viewing the person in terms of functions that could be managed to produce the most socially useful or economically productive outcomes. In such a world, Marcel muses, "death...becomes, objectively and functionally, the scraping of what has ceased to be of use and must be written off as total loss." See Marcel, *Philosophy of Existentialism*, 11-12.

good wherein the universe would be forever poorer should the beloved disappear from the registers of being.

A Foundation in Intersubjectivity

Immediately noteworthy in Marcel's approach is that his starting point is not predicated upon refashioning humanity's given reality. Instead, Marcel points to a value discovered within temporal, incarnate reality. The reality of a being other than oneself, rather than a power found within oneself, serves as Marcel's springboard to the beyond. Trust and receptivity rather than mastery and power are characteristic of the love-based approach.

The Marcel-transhumanist contrast is clear. A foundation in giveness contrasts with an emphasis upon autonomy. While the current divergence—giveness versus autonomy—has been drawn from Marcel's starting point in the beloved, it should be noted that a contrast between intersubjectivity and autonomy has not yet been developed. Rather, much has been said about how a love-based afterlife is intimately bound up with otherness. To cease the analysis at this point would be to mistake Marcel for a kind of Levinasian. It is not solely the value of the other, but the value of love that serves as the genuine foundation of a Marcelian afterlife. A fuller investigation of a loved-based afterlife requires a further meditation upon intersubjectivity.

Interpreted intersubjectively, a love-based afterlife begins with the value of the other, but its next stage of development refers to a value that includes the lover. Marcel makes clear that hope for life beyond death ought to be understood in this expanded sense: "Hope...is always hope for us."[43] He writes:

> Hope is essentially...the availability of a soul which has entered intimately enough into the experience of communion to accomplish...the transcendent act—the act establishing the vital regeneration of which this experience affords both the pledge and the first-fruits.' This means that in the first place hope is only possible on the level of the *us*, or we might say of the *agape*, and that it does not exist on the level of the solitary *ego*.[44]

Hope for post-mortem life begins with the revelation that there is something profoundly valuable about those we love. This starting point then reveals a more foundational value. Marcel refers to a value discovered in the communion between persons: "As a rule, nothing is easier at a certain time of life than to accept death for oneself if one considers it a dreamless sleep without awakening; what cannot be accepted is the death of the beloved: more deeply still the death of love itself."[45] The experience of value manifest in the beloved challenges death, but that challenge is augmented by a communion between persons.

A belief in the afterlife that begins with an active love of others culminates in a hope for one's personal postmortem existence. Such a conclusion follows if it is not simply the love of others that animates a hope for life beyond death. Rather, such a conclusion follows when post-

[43] Marcel, "*Presence,*" 232.

[44] Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 10. All italics are from Marcel's text.

[45] Gabriel Marcel, "Theism and Personal Relationships," *Cross Currents* 1 (1950): 41. Marcel's point in arguing that the death of the self can be accepted but not that of the beloved is not to disregard the value of the self. His point is that, should one concentrate value solely/primarily within the self, then the value of the self will wither away in the isolation of individualism.

mortem hope is animated by a relationship in which the lover partakes. Such a conclusion follows, in other words, if love itself animates a belief in the beyond.

Exemplifying such a conclusion, I would like to make a brief reference—and brief because I have commented on it in other publications—to one of the most beautiful and profound summations of a love-based afterlife. In what is often regarded as his magnus opus, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Fydor Dostoevsky describes an afterlife based upon love. The sage of the novel, Father Zosima, finds himself confronted with someone in despair. He is approached by a wife whose husband just died. Her despair is a product of the fact that she no longer possessed a living belief in the afterlife or a living connection to her beloved. Zosima reorients her perspective:

> Try to love your neighbors actively and tirelessly. The more you succeed in loving, the more you'll be convinced of the existence of God and the immortality of your soul. And if you reach complete selflessness in the love of your neighbor, then undoubtedly you will believe.[46]

In Zosima's/Dostoevsky's metaphysics, a belief in the afterlife originates from love. The vitality of the belief is then tied to the depth which one loves. The more one loves, the greater one's belief. This insight runs parallel with Marcel's approach. The greater one's exposure to the existential reality that prompts hope for life beyond death—namely love—the more one becomes a participant within an experiential value worthy to contest death.

Love, as the afterlife's animating source, ultimately expands the scope of intersubjectivity and brings both Marcel and Dostoevsky/Zosima into contact with God. While such an expansion is integral to a full understanding of Marcel's philosophy, the foundation rather than the terminus of the belief is most critical to this essay. It is the reality of value experienced in a communion of persons that provides the most profound challenge to death. Such a foundation highlights the key contrast between an afterlife whose genesis and value is associated with autonomy versus an afterlife that begins with given value.

A Caricature?

Having set an autonomy-based afterlife in opposition to an afterlife emerging from love, a transhumanist objection emerges. A transhumanist could argue that the preceding analysis is based upon a caricature of their position. Such an argument would likely begin with the reality that transhumanism is not exclusively or singularly focused upon autonomy.

Transhumanists often think of their project as life-affirming. Bugajska notes that transhumanists frame their movement as "pro-life, treating death as an enemy to be vanquished."[47] Death is to be overcome not solely or, according to the forthcoming objection, even primarily for the sake of autonomy. Notwithstanding the transhumanist premise that biology limits life and requires enhancement, a transhumanist could argue that a primordial affirmation of life generates the movement's opposition to death. It is because life is worth living and because existence is fundamentally good that transhumanists seek to overcome death. Describing the prominent transhumanist Randal Koene's pursuit of mind-uploading, O'Connell

[46] Fydor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 56.

[47] Bugajska, "Will Postmortal Catholics," 428.

recounts that it came from "a preoccupation with the limitations of creativity, a precocious awareness of how many things he wished to do and experience, and how little time was allowed for the pursuit of those projects."[48] Death, in this context, severs Koene, and all persons for that matter, from a further exploration of reality's richness and depth.

Yet it is not life in a general sense, but individual life, that is threatened by death. Speaking to the value of such life, along with the corollary need to challenge death, the transhumanist Anders Sandberg offers the following observation:

> What is the value of a star?...A star in-itself is kind of interesting, if you have just one of them. But if you have trillions of them? Well, they are actually fairly alike. There is very little structural complexity there. But life…and in particular the life of individuals—that is highly contingent. You and I have a life story. If we reran the story of the universe, you and I would end up as different human beings. Our uniqueness is a thing we accumulate. That is why the loss of a person is something very bad.[49]

The value not of autonomy, but of individuality, animates Sandberg's opposition to death. It is because individual existence is fundamentally good—in this case, and with echoes of Marcel, because of the unique nature of personal existence—that death is to be overcome.

There are other goods that appear in the transhumanist discourse. More associates the movement with "continual ethical, intellectual, and physical self-improvement, through critical and creative thinking, perpetual learning, personal responsibility, proactivity, and experimentation."[50] Bugajska notes how a number of transhumanist luminaries, such as "Harris, More, Bostrom, de Grey or Pearce…[point out] possibilities of personal development unimaginable for today's unenhanced humans…constant change and development…[and] the broadening of cognitive horizons."[51] Kyslan references increased wisdom by way of an ability to retain "all the lessons learned through experience."[52] One could certainly locate other animating goods in the transhumanist discourse, but, for the sake of the objection, the point has been made.

Thinking of transhumanism purely in terms of autonomy is untrue to transhumanism. The transhumanist can argue that it is a fundamental love of life that drives the transhumanist effort to overcome barriers that limit or destroy life. This same love of life then reveals a host of other goods that could be preserved and/or more fully realized via the integration of technology with biology or even by overcoming biology via technology. In this view, reducing transhumanism to autonomy constitutes a failure to recognize more primordial or, at the least, more diverse transhumanist longings.

Transhumanism and Marcel in Conversation

In response to the objection, one must acknowledge that it is correct, especially when juxtaposed to a simplistic account. The simplistic account envisions transhumanism as blindly and singularly endorsing autonomy. Certainly, autonomy is not the only value prized by

[48] O'Connell, *To Be a Machine*, 46.
[49] Quoted in O'Connell, 19
[50] More, "The Philosophy of Transhumanism," 5.
[51] Bugajska, "Will Postmortal Catholics," 422.
[52] Kyslan, "Transhumanism and the Issue of Death," 78.

transhumanist thinkers. The caricature consists in the denial of or ignorance about a richer and more extensive set of transhumanist values. It is, in turn, precisely a transhumanist appreciation of this richer reality that allows for a richer and more complex conversation with Marcel. Because this essay is meant to introduce such a conversation, I conclude by offering five sketches of how such a conversation could unfold.

1st Path for a Marcel-Transhumanist Dialogue - Critique: Even granting that transhumanism does not exhibit a singular focus on autonomy, autonomy remains a foundational and, on the whole, predominate value in transhumanist thought. Granting the presence of multiple values in the transhumanist project does not annul the fact that autonomy is the most consistently and highly prized value. One may view it as the value that drives all other values. Hence, autonomy, specifically autonomy from biological limitations, defines the movement. In this same vein, the affirmations of life mentioned in the objection reflect an ongoing concern with autonomy, specifically individual autonomy. Koene's pursuit of mind-uploading was associated with "a precocious awareness of how many things *he wished* to do and experience." More linked the transhumanist project to "continual ethical, intellectual, and physical *self*-improvement." A series of transhumanists located the value of the movement in "*personal* development unimaginable for today's unenhanced humans." These thinkers consistently place their sought after goods within the context of individual enhancement. This is not to impugn the sincerity of those espousing the variety of goods mentioned in the objection. It is simply to point out that autonomy is, at the minimum, a foundational good in transhumanist thought. Autonomy acts as a center of gravity around which the transhumanist movement revolves.

As has been exhibited, autonomy's foundational status serves as the basis of a Marcelian critique of transhumanism. A worldview inseparable from autonomy naturally comes into conflict with a worldview inseparable from intersubjectivity as well as the value of given reality. Reiterating a theme: Marcel's love-based afterlife begins with a revelation of value within present reality. Recognition of such value requires humility and a receptive posture that stands at odds with or, at the very least, exists in tension with an approach that emphasizes mastery and autonomy. By unequivocally anchoring future life in the elemental goodness of this life, specifically the value of intersubjective love, Marcel's philosophy naturally generates a sense of gratitude. The given is not an inert reality to be transformed, but a source of value. Nor is given reality defined by deficiency. Instead, its fullness/depth inspires hope. The discovery of value that defines a love-based approach naturally leads to the view of life as a gift or, at the least, to a gratitude for waking up in a world that possesses a value worthy to contest death.

Such gratitude is likely undermined in reference to a worldview that emerges from autonomy. It goes against the grain of natural impulse to view as a gift that which must be remade in order to obtain what one desires.[53] Rather than a gift, the given, incarnate nature of human reality is better associated with an obstacle to be overcome. Rather than gratitude for an experience of inexhaustible value, an experience that prompts hope for something more,

[53] Bugajska articulates the point in theological terms: "Todd T.W. Daly does not hesitate to say: 'I suggest that the aspiration to overcome death through technological is sinful if sin is understood as striving to become *sicut deus*, 'like God.' He goes on to explain, following Dietrich Boenhoffer, that the proper state for a human being is to accept one's creatureliness and the giftedness of life whose constant source is God. Daly calls transhumanism's quest to end death 'muddled and ontically shallow'—addressing only facet of existence, and, to that, not the most important one. The evil of rejecting God as a source of life makes it impossible to receive life." See Bugajska, "Will Postmortal Catholics" 416.

humanity is thrust into a world that appears deficient should technological or medical science not advance. That transhumanists could fail to appreciate the value of given reality and fail to treat life as gift, would certainly constitute a Marcelian concern. To lack gratitude, for Marcel, presages a world destined for despair; a world without heart and reduced to function.[54]

This Marcelian concern is lent weight by evaporating or even non-existent senses of gratitude in transhumanist texts. Returning to More's portrait of transhumanism, one sees gratitude quickly displaced by critique. More's gratitude appears sarcastic or, at the very least, belittling/ paternalistic: "Mother Nature, truly we are grateful for what you have made us. No doubt *you did the best you could*. However, with all due respect, we must say that you have *in many ways* done a poor job with the human constitution."[55] Gratitude, if it exists at all, quickly dissipates. Correcting nature's errors and deficiencies becomes the focal point now that humanity has entered the age of transhumanism. O'Connell quotes the transhumanist David Wood to this effect: "Can we get rid…of some of the biases and mistakes in reasoning that we've all inherited from our biology? Instincts that served us well when we roamed the African savanna, but which are not now very much in our favor?"[56] Speaking to this same view with even greater disdain, O'Connell quotes the transhumanist Tim Cannon. Reiterating the notion that our given, biological reality is a primitive state to be surpassed, Cannon proclaims:

> Far as I'm concerned…there is no amount of optimization of this barely evolved chimp that is worthwhile. We just don't have the hardware to be ethical, to be the things we say we want to be. The hardware we do have is really great for, you know, cracking open skulls on the African savanna, but not much use for the world we live in now. We need to change the hardware.[57]

Cannon's drops the pretense of gratitude altogether. One could wonder whether the love of life mentioned in the objection is really a love restricted to a possible life, a future or aspirational life. At a minimum, the love of life that animates transhumanists is a qualified love.

Another Marcelian concern related to an autonomy-based afterlife would arise on the grounds of fidelity. Fidelity is a central concept in Marcel's thought and it is intimately tied to his vision of the afterlife. Love calls one as a witness to a relationship of immense worth.[58] To serve as such a witness is to make an unqualified promise to the beloved. It is to promise oneself to the beloved no matter what. Marcel makes the claim directly: "What must be brought to light is the fact that love, in the fullest and most concrete sense of the word, the love of one person for another, seems to have as its basis the unconditional: '*I shall continue to love you no matter what happens.*"[59] While this unconditional promise must be lived out creatively (the subject of Marcel's *Creative Fidelity*), the point is that genuine love is a recognition that one's personal reality is inextricably united with the beloved. As a result, one is called to remain faithful to the intersubjective union of which one is a part.

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[54] See, for instance, Marcel's essay "On the Ontological Mystery" in *The Philosophy of Existentialism*. (specifically, 12 & 27).

[55] Max More, "Letter to Mother Nature," 449-450. Emphasis/italics in the quote are mine.

[56] Quoted in O'Connell, *To Be a Machine*, 11.

[57] Quoted in O'Connell, *To Be a Machine*, 139.

[58] Marcel, *Philosophy of Existentialism*, 20.

[59] Marcel, *Thou Shall Not Die*, 26. Italics are Marcel's.

With a starting point in autonomy, fidelity is necessarily relativized in a transhumanist worldview. Fidelity is not a demand to which one is called to respond, but a choice. Fidelity, in all its forms, is an option that could just as well as be adopted as not. In this vein, one could recall how individual autonomy acts as a bedrock moral principle in transhumanist thought. Göcke claimed that "*No morally acceptable* interpretation of transhumanism entails that the agenda is one of restricting the autonomy of human subjects and *nothing that undermines* such agency could count as an enhancement";[60] Sandberg declared that "nobody may force us to change in a way we do not desire or prevent our change. This maximizes personal autonomy";[61] More concluded that "transhumanists all support personal choice in the use of self-directed technological transformations."[62] While there are certainly some individuals who would value fidelity, just as there some who would prioritize other goods in the transhumanist universe, fidelity does not arise as a demand or a higher reality to which individuals ought to pledge themselves. Whereas Marcel's ontology anchors the self in the we, a transhumanist ontology is anchored in the me. Whereas, in Marcel's approach, I am responsible to another; in the transhumanist approach I am responsible to myself.

A third Marcelian critique of autonomy is related to his notion of hope. Hope is born not of mastery, but from trust. To hope is to act as a witness to value, not as the creator or generator of such value. Seemingly in anticipation of transhumanism, Marcel writes:

> It will perhaps be said: This optimism of technical progress is animated by great hope. How is hope in this sense to be reconciled with the ontological interpretation of hope? I believe it must be answered that, speaking metaphysically, the only genuine hope is hope in what does not depend on ourselves, hope springing from humility and not from pride.[63]

Marcel precludes autonomy born of technological mastery from animating or participating in "genuine hope." Vice versa, "genuine hope" requires trust. It requires one to trust that the value of what one experienced in love is supported by reality's governing principle. Humility calls forth trust not as an act of will, but as a recognition that one is granted access to an experience of overwhelming value.

Gratitude, fidelity, and hope constitute a critical, but by no means exhaustive, set of experiences that could serve as the basis of a Marcelian critique of an autonomy based/transhumanist approach to reality in general and the afterlife in particular. In each case, Marcel returns not to autonomy but to given reality. In each case, autonomy exists in tension with (or even outright opposition to) Marcel's emphasis upon the value of given reality.

Because of the multiple ways in which an autonomy-based approach comes into tension with Marcel's emphasis upon the value of intersubjectivity and given reality, it is very likely that a Marcel-transhumanist dialogue would be defined by their opposition. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to explore four additional approaches. First, even should one agree that an autonomy-based approach is foolish, misguided, dangerous, philosophically invalid, etc., it is a direction in which humanity certainly seems to be travelling. In reference to humanity's contemporary trajectory, moving beyond the framework of critique allows one to examine the

[60] Göcke, "Christian Cyborgs," 348-349. Italics added.
[61] Sandberg, "Morphological Freedom," 57.
[62] More, "The Philosophy of Transhumanism," 13.
[63] Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, 32.

productive potential of a Marcel-transhumanist dialogue. A second reason to move beyond critique, or to not restrict the dialogue to that of critique, is to take seriously a transhumanist investment in life. A movement that makes overcoming death a pillar of its worldview is a movement that, however much it values autonomy, is also one that is invested in the value of life. Thinking about what Marcel might mean in relation to such a movement is a sign of respect for transhumanism as well as an opportunity to further the dialogue in sympathetic, creative, and productive manners. Perhaps a Marcelian approach can be integrated into a healthy form a transhumanism?

2nd Path for a Marcel-Transhumanist Dialogue - Revelation: One can interpret the Marcel/transhumanist dialogue as Marcel exposing a tension in transhumanist thought. The tension resides in transhumanism's undeniable emphasis on autonomy versus the movement's attraction to other goods. Should Marcel's thought prompt the transhumanist to acknowledge such tension, it would set the stage for serious discussion within the transhumanist movement.

In this approach, emphasis is placed upon revelation rather than opposition. Marcel would not, as it were, insert a critique or establish an opposition to transhumanism from without. Instead, his thought would prompt transhumanists to recognize a tension that already exists within their discourse and which is worthy of further consideration. Such consideration would generate many questions that could be otherwise displaced by a transhumanist enthusiasm for the future. How highly ought autonomy to be valued; should it serve as humanity's guiding value? How ought society/individuals (either in the future or in the present) navigate situations when autonomy comes into conflict with other values? Does gratitude to given reality dissipate if one's aim is liberation from biology? If so, does that loss of gratitude undermine transhumanism's ability to champion the value of life or other goods?

While transhumanism may offer adequate responses to such queries, and certainly many others, the prompting of such questions would be a fruitful result of a Marcelian interaction with transhumanism.

3rd Path for a Marcel-Transhumanist Dialogue – Guidance: In addition to opposition and revelation, one could interpret the relationship primarily in terms of guidance. Not simply for transhumanism, but for a species grappling with the development of technology, Marcel's thought could be viewed as a kind of guardrail. Faced with an abyss where autonomy displaces all other goods and considerations, Marcel's thought could prompt a call to emphasize the life-affirming values of the transhumanist project. A renewed emphasis upon such principles, not simply as additional goods to be sought, but as necessary limitations, is a potential outcome of this approach. More generally, the idea that limitations are necessary or good is a way in which Marcelian philosophy could impact transhumanist thought.

To a worldview that seems naturally oriented toward a future in which individuals pursue their vision of a desirable life, Marcelian philosophy makes the ontological claim that human reality is interconnected. Thus, whatever forms of life become possible in the future, the claim is that who one is, is not singular. Such a claim could serve as an anchor when crafting a digital afterlife or more generally in terms of how one envisions a transhumanist future. Operating from the premise that intersubjective reality is a primal good, individual autonomy is guided toward certain forms of life and away from others.

4th Path for a Marcel-Transhumanist Dialogue – Compatibility: While it is admittedly the least likely option, this path would proceed from and require further development of the objection. If one argues that transhumanism in general and a transhumanist afterlife in particular are compatible with Marcelian philosophy, the notion that transhumanism is animated by life affirming values would be the starting point. Those sympathetic to or better versed in transhumanist discourse could certainly point to ways in which transhumanist thought is more invested in such values than is granted in this essay. Given that this essay is penned by a novitiate to transhumanist discourse, it would be premature to deny that transhumanism is guided by a fuller set of values.

On behalf of the compatibility thesis, one could offer an additional argument—the realization of a transhumanist afterlife, combined with a recognition of humanity's deepest longings, would lead to an afterlife where one pursues ever deeper connections with those one loves as well as conscious beings more generally. Thus, while transhumanists may establish personal autonomy as a bedrock moral value, one adopting a Marcelian approach could argue that the use of such autonomy will inevitably return individuals and humanity as a whole to ever deeper forms of interpersonal communion. At a practical level, one could argue, Marcel and transhumanism are destined to align. Life, whether in this realm or a digital beyond, becomes worth sustaining according to this account when shared with others. A path that focuses on a potential agreement between transhumanism and Marcel could argue that the love of life animating the transhumanist project is, unbeknownst to many thinkers within the movement, less about the achievement of individual autonomy than it is about continuing to experience those aspects of reality that make life worth living, in this case, intersubjective communion.

In the compatibility account, Marcel and transhumanists are attracted to the afterlife because it allows individuals to pursue life affirming paths and, by extension, forms of the afterlife that offer such paths will ultimately be pursued over those that do not. One could argue that the different mechanisms that would generate and sustain an afterlife—theological for Marcel versus technological for transhumanism—do not deny that human beings long to lead more fulfilling lives and increasingly participate in intersubjective forms of communion. A foundation in the value of life, rather than the mechanism to sustain this value, would be the focus in this dialogue.

5th Path for a Marcel-Transhumanist Dialogue – A Transhumanist Critique: While Marcel's critique of transhumanism served as the first and most likely path for a Marcel-transhumanist dialogue, there is also the possibility of critique from the side of transhumanism. A transhumanist might ask Marcel why an afterlife that allows one to love is not an outcome worthy of his philosophy or why it would not be in keeping with the most cherished of human desires? Why deny an afterlife that allows love to be pursued and further developed? Would this not deny love an outlet to achieve its fullest promises? Would not Marcel be acting against love in denying those in love the opportunity to continue to participate in their intersubjective communion?

The basis of such a transhumanist critique could emerge from a "magic in the meat" argument that transhumanists sometimes offer in response to their critics. The argument is that a Marcelian like approach projects value, metaphysical in nature, upon a form of life that is not adequate to that value. Marcel projects a value, which properly belongs to conscious life, unto finite/embodied existence. In such a spirit, one could argue that Marcel's intention was right—recognizing that something fundamentally valuable occurs within existence—but that his

worldview prevented him from recognizing that it was conscious existence, rather than a particular, embodied form of that existence, that was truly at stake. Perhaps, he was trapped in a cultural context that prevented him from recognizing the value of other possibilities of life.

Prior to a brief conclusion, it should be noted that these five approaches could certainly overlap. One could imagine Marcel offering a critique which, in turn, generates a transhumanist awareness of an already existing tension within their discourse and which then leads to love as a guardrail to autonomy. One could imagine Marcel's exposure of the transhumanist tension leading transhumanists to more consistently emphasizing the life-affirming aims of their project and, in so doing, result in a collaboration between the two schools of thought. From the same starting point, one could argue that the exposure of the transhumanist tension could initiate a transhumanist critique of Marcel's philosophy. The transhumanist arguing that this tension need not be associated with an irreconcilable dichotomy.

There are, of course, other possibilities. But the overarching point is that a Marcel-transhumanist dialogue need not be reduced to opposition.

Conclusion

This essay introduces a Marcel-transhumanist dialogue and, in so doing, I reflected upon the relationship between autonomy and intersubjectivity/the value of given reality. In this regard, Marcel is a worthwhile dialogue partner for contemporary and future times. The trajectory toward autonomy, in the form of an increasing ability to master and manipulate biology, shows no sign of dissipating. Whether humanity is best served by maximizing such autonomy, what could/should limit such autonomy, and what could be lost in the pursuit of autonomy are questions with which contemporary and future humanity will need to grapple. The insights of thinkers, such as Marcel, who warn of the dangers of autonomy and who stress the value of given reality, are worthy of serious consideration as our species looks toward a future that may no longer be confined by biological limitations. Perhaps the enduring lesson of Marcel is that a future which promises unlimited possibility is worthy of pursuit only if it is anchored in love.