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Gabriel Marcel and Dietrich von Hildebrand on Freedom: Fidelity and Hope as Necessary for Freedom

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Abstract: Fidelity and freedom can easily seem opposed to each other. Paradigmatically, freedom involves choice, and loosening of restrictions. Fidelity places demands on us that can countermand our wants and restrict our choices. Nonetheless, the personalist philosophers Dietrich von Hildebrand and Gabriel Marcel both understand fidelity to be intrinsic to freedom, to be freedom most being itself. This, I will argue, is because they both understand freedom to be identifiable with self-donation. Self-donation is giving oneself as a person to something or someone recognized to be intrinsically good and precious, with both philosophers using the term "value" to denote such intrinsic goodness and preciousness. I will conclude by showing that for both philosophers freedom is also linked to and requires hope in order to overcome moral struggles that threaten freedom.

Introduction

Fidelity and freedom can easily seem opposed to each other. Paradigmatically, freedom involves choice (I can do action A or not do action A), doing what we want, and loosening of restrictions.[1] Fidelity, however, places demands on us which can countermand our wants, limit our choices, and are thus restrictions. Nonetheless, the personalist philosophers Dietrich von Hildebrand and Gabriel Marcel both propose that fidelity, far from being opposed to freedom, is intrinsic to freedom itself.[2] For both, I will argue, freedom *is* fidelity, because it is self-donation. Hildebrand terms "self-donation" giving oneself to what is recognized as intrinsically valuable.[3] The love one gives to one's spouse is a paradigmatic example of self-donation.[4] One gives

[1] To use Aristotle's example, even a sailor throwing cargo overboard in a storm does what she does not want because she does want to live. See Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Lesley Brown, trans. David Ross, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), III, 1110a10, p. 38.

[2] Dietrich von Hildebrand, "Faithfulness," in *The Art of Living*, by Dietrich and Alice von Hildebrand (Steubenville, OH: Hildebrand Press, 2013), pp. 9–18. (Hereinafter *AL*) The first five chapters of this book were written by Dietrich von Hildebrand and outline the basic moral attitudes that Hildebrand sees as essential to the moral life. The first is titled "Reverence" (pp. 1–8), which I discuss below, and the second is "Faithfulness." It should be noted that Alice herself wrote a chapter titled "Hope" in this book but since the focus here is on the relationship of Dietrich von Hildebrand to Marcel, this chapter by Alice will not enter into the discussion as it stands as an independent work credited to Alice, not Dietrich, though obviously the couple shared a significant philosophical affinity. To avoid confusion with her husband, I will refer to Alice by her first name and her husband as Hildebrand or Dietrich. See also Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*. trans. Robert Rosthal (New York: Ferrar, Straus and Company, 1964), pp. 165–173 (hereinafter *CF*).

[3] See Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, ed. John Crosby (Steubenville, OH: Hildebrand Press, 2020), p. 231 (hereinafter, *E*).

[4] See Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, trans. John F Crosby and John Henry Crosby (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine Press, 2009), p. 52 (hereinafter *NL*).

oneself, one's very personhood, to the beloved in and through loving the beloved. In an analogous though lesser way, an artist gives herself to her painting as something intrinsically precious, a vision she is unveiling to the world. For Marcel and Hildebrand alike, freedom, at its core, is self-donation. This does not, of course, negate the obvious fact that we can and do freely choose to reject value (e.g., as in sin), but this for both philosophers ends up being a case of freedom betraying itself. Indeed, thanks to the possibility of such moral struggles and falls, I will also argue that for their Christian philosophies, which do not shy from investigating hope as an object of phenomenological reflection, hope is also necessary for freedom.

Hildebrand and Marcel have distinct methodologies. Hildebrand, while warning against the dangers of premature systemization, is himself a systematic philosopher who examines experience to find universal essences in the realist method of the Edmund Husserl and, especially, his friend and mentor Adolf Reinach (*E*, 15). Marcel provides, for lack of a better word, a more existentialist philosophy in its flavor.[5] Nonetheless, writing in 1960, Alice von Hildebrand (*née* Jourdain), who was both a Marcel scholar and Dietrich's second wife, notes deep parallels between the two philosophers.[6] At that time, both previously "had no influence on each other" (*VH&M*, 17), though in later works, particularly his *Über den Tod* (lit. *On Death*, but translated as *Jaws of Death, Gate of Heaven*), Dietrich is directly influenced by Marcel's account of hope.[7] Both place what is given (Latin *datum*, plural *data*) in experience at the very core of their philosophy. As a result, the two men, both converts to Catholicism, see no problem with introducing religious data into their philosophy. Doing so does not dissolve the division between theology and philosophy, rather it acknowledges, as Alice puts it, "the phenomenon of holiness is *given* independently of any theological acceptance of the conditions which must be fulfilled" (*VH&M*, 16; italics in the original). In other words, one can be struck by and phenomenologically analyze the *datum* of Christian hope without oneself necessarily appealing to the Revealed truths of that religion. Both give prime importance to values, that is beings revealed to us in our ordinary experience as intrinsically good and precious.

This leads their accounts of freedom to be remarkably similar. Alice notes that both discover what Dietrich von Hildebrand terms "'cooperative freedom', i.e., a deeper dimension of human freedom which collaborates with the call implied in each value" (*VH&M*, 29). This cooperative freedom is self-donation, and thus Alice is pointing out the fact that both discover a deep dimension of freedom that can be identified with self-donation. Thus, I will begin by reconstructing Hildebrand's systemic account of cooperative freedom, where his main account of the link between freedom and self-donation is found. Then, I proceed to sketch out Marcel's more existential account of freedom and how for Marcel, though he does not precisely use the term, freedom is self-donation, just as it is for Hildebrand. For both, freedom can ultimately be identified with self-donation, i.e. freely giving ourselves to what is intrinsically valuable or

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[5] Sartre was the first to call Marcel a "Christian existentialist," a term Marcel initially accepted but then repudiated as the term "existentialism" became inextricably linked with Sartre's own atheistic existentialism in the popular imagination of mid-century France. He decided to call his method "Socratic." Nonetheless the term "existentialist," which is now not necessarily linked to Sartre in the same way as it was in the 1950s, is an appropriate term for the overall tenor of Marcel's philosophy, which focuses keenly on direct situations.

[6] Alice Jourdain "Von Hildebrand and Marcel: A Parallel" in *The Human Person and the World of Values: A Tribute to Dietrich von Hildebrand by his Friends in Philosophy*, ed. Balduin Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 1960), pp. 11–35 (hereinafter *VH&M*). Alice herself typically went by her maiden name "Jourdain" to avoid confusion with her husband.

[7] Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Jaws of Death, Gate of Heaven* (Steubenville, OH: Hildebrand Press, 2020), pp. 6–7, 13 (hereinafter *JDGH*).

precious. Thus, fidelity is freedom when it is most itself, a commitment to one recognized as intrinsically valuable or precious that endures despite any trials. I will then turn to their accounts of hope, beginning now with Marcel as Hildebrand directly builds on Marcel's foundation (*JDGH*, 6–7, 13). I will conclude by showing that both philosophers rehabilitate Kant's controversial doctrine that freedom requires both faith and hope, albeit from a phenomenological and realist basis which markedly contrasts with Kant's transcendental idealist approach.[8]

Dietrich von Hildebrand: Cooperative Freedom and Fidelity

Hildebrand's entire philosophy is based on the notion of *Antwort*, German for "answer" or, Hildebrand's own term in his English language works, "response." We experience the world, according to Hildebrand, as filled with objects that are good, evil, or neutral (*E*, 25–26, 62–63). Neutral objects fail to move us, while we are attracted to the good and avoid the evil. However, things can be good in different ways: as intrinsic values, as subjectively satisfying, and as objective goods for the person. The essence of value is to have, or rather to be, something intrinsically good and precious (*E*, 36–51). Value is in this respect like Kant's conception of the good will, something that is good-in-itself. But unlike the Kantian goodwill, which for Kant is the only thing good-in-itself along with the moral law,[9] many objects can be values for Hildebrand, from beautiful artworks to (especially) a person whom I can love. Hildebrand defines value as being good independent of any stance I take toward it. The importance of the beggar, as one who possesses human dignity and innate worth, in no way depends on me, though my receptivity to the value of the beggar can be enhanced or diminished depending on my circumstances and moral character.[10] The second is the subjectively satisfying. Here the "goodness" of the object (say an underserved compliment, which is a disvalue in itself) depends solely on its relationship to my satisfaction. If I find the attempted compliment insulting, then the compliment has lost its subjectively satisfying character for me (*E*, 37). The third and final category is the objective good for a person, for example a healthy meal (*E*, 52–62). Like the subjectively satisfying, the objective good for the person is good by a relationship to that person, it is not independent of that relationship to me in the way that a value is. However, like a value, this relationship is based on an objective rather than subjective relation, namely a relation to my own good overall. Human persons are so constituted that anything of value is itself also an objective good for a person.

Hildebrand adopts the Scholastic adage *nihil volitum nisi cogitatum*, nothing is willed if it is not first cognized or intuited (*E*, 27). For Hildebrand, to intuit something (as good) is a relation

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[8] See Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN.: Hackett., 2009), hereinafter *R*.

[9] See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4:393, p. 49 (hereinafter *G*).

[10] We can think of how warring parties often dehumanize the other, and they thereby fail to see the value of members of the enemy party or nation as having any positive value. Very often this is due to a notion that the enemy's victory would require the obliteration of much that one holds to be valuable, and thus the value of the enemy as a whole person is set against the value of what one loves. It is thereby obscured and denied. Nonetheless, the value of the enemy remains, it is merely one's receptivity to that value which has been diminished or extinguished. This is why dehumanization is an "-ization," a process consciously or unconsciously undergone or performed by belligerents and their compatriots against a perceived enemy or threat.

where I am "void" and the content of the relation is solely on the object side (*E*, 206).[11] "Intuition" here is taken in the broadest sense as any perception of a real or imagined object. Importantly, Hildebrand considers intuition to be purely receptive, it involves no activity beyond the active reception of the object (*WP*, 20–21). This concept of intuition, thus, places *givenness* at the very heart of Hildebrand's philosophy. Now, if intuition is receptive, and the will cannot will unless something is first intuited as a potential object for the will, then it follows that the will's function is to respond. Hildebrand, possibly following Husserl (who was himself following the American philosopher and psychologist William James), terms this response the *fiat* of the will (*E*, 211).[12] I see a beggar, and I give my *fiat* to giving my food to him. Crucially, for Hildebrand, this response of the will is not determined by its object, but rather is engendered by the person (*E*, 208–213). Hildebrand contrasts this with the heart, which is the seat of affectivity. Affective responses possess a felt "affective plentitude" that is missing in a purely volitional response (*E*, 213). A felt affective esteem for a person is qualitatively more and different than a mere will to esteem that person. However, affective responses are engendered in us by their objects. We are unable to engender them in us, we can only receive them as gifts. I see a beggar and I cannot but help feeling a mix of sympathy and yet revulsion toward him. The will, however, is directly under our power. I, and I alone, elect to give my *fiat* to help or not to help this beggar. The mind or intellect is the third center of responses along with the will and the heart. Its responses are theoretical responses, such as conviction, that deal mainly with truth and falsity (*E*, 208).

The will must be "supported," to use Hildebrand's term, by some object for it to will (*E*, 305). This object is either a value, something subjectively satisfying, or something objectively good for one. When I intuit a value, when I see the piercing eyes of the beggar, I receive a call to give it a proper affective and volitional response. This call "appeals to our free spiritual center" from "above" and at a "sober distance." (*E*, 40–41). I cannot give a value a fully adequate response unless it is a free response. Values call for the free *fiat*, they do not compel it. In the same passage in his *Ethics*, Hildebrand says that the subjectively satisfying, in contrast to values, often "takes hold of us in an obtrusive manner" and "tends to dethrone our free spiritual center" (*E*, 40–41). He does not elaborate on why this is the case. In my own view, the reason why the subjectively satisfying tends to diminish our freedom is because it refers only to our satisfaction and not to the will *per se*. It tends to bypass the will and enslave us to desires engendered in us.

Our pursuit of the objective good for ourselves either conforms to the call of values or rejects it, and thus is subordinate to the subjectively satisfying. If I decide to eat a healthy meal and ignore helping this beggar, I may be pursuing what is objectively good for me (health). However, doing so in defiance of the objective call of value is not an objective good for me, but rather could be only subjectively satisfying. However, having a healthy regard for the objective good for oneself is something Hildebrand considers essential to our "*Eigenleben*," a word Hildebrand coins in his *The Nature of Love* which literally translated means "one's own life" but which John Crosby has translated, imperfectly by his own admission, as "subjectivity" (*NL*, 200 translator's footnote). There is a certain kind of depersonalization we experience when we utterly neglect our own legitimate objective good for ourselves in favor of serving others in a kind of

[11] See also Deitrich von Hildebrand, *What is Philosophy?,* trans. Fritz Wenisch (Steubenville, OH: Hildebrand Press, 2021), p. 18 (hereinafter *WP*).

[12] See Ullrich Melle, "Husserl's Phenomenology of Willing," in *Phenomenology of Values and Valuing,* edited by. James G. Hart and Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Springer, 1997), pp. 169–192; also William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 1913), p. 501.

distorted altruism. Indeed, if I tell my beloved that I have no care to be made happy by our love, I only want what is good for her, she can conclude I have insulted her or am mentally ill. This is because I have in essence failed to develop my own subjectivity to the point where I can give that subjectivity to my beloved by making our love the condition of my own happiness (*NL*, 220).

It is clear that, for Hildebrand, we have what John Crosby has termed "fundamental freedom" to choose between good and evil, to affirm the world of values or to reject it in favor of the subjectively satisfying.[13] For Hildebrand we can discern three most basic and fundamental moral attitudes that condition our responses to the world: reverence, pride, and concupiscence.[14] These attitudes are not only basic attitudes or directionality of the will toward the world of values but also of my affectivity, of my heart, and even of my mind. Hildebrand's position logically follows from the notion of value and response. Any philosophical anthropology based on willing what is good-in-itself will discern in every act a most basic attitude either in favor of the good-in-itself or against the good-in-itself. Kant, for example, contrasts a morally good and morally evil *Gesinnung*, a word which has no direct parallel in English, but which could be translated as "conviction" or "attitude." The morally good *Gesinnung* is respect for the moral law, this is the source of all good acts (*R*, 6:14, 13). By contrast, the morally evil *Gesinnung* consists in a willingness to submit to subjective inclinations, and it is the root of all moral wrongdoing (*R*, 6:20, 20). For Hildebrand, there are two basic morally evil attitudes: pride and concupiscence. Concupiscence is concerned with having subjectively satisfying objects (*E*, 455–465). Dominated by concupiscence, I will walk past the beggar as if I did not see him, so focused am I on enjoying my delicious pastry. Pride, by contrast, is focused on being in a subjectively satisfying superior position. Here, too, I am closed off to values, but now because I am hostile to their "metaphysical power" as threats to my superior position (*E*, 466–468). Concupiscence implies pride insofar as to have subjectively satisfying goods in a wrong manner is to occupy an illegitimate subjectively satisfying position.

By contrast, the fundamental attitude in favor of the good-in-itself is reverence (*SW*, 580–588; *AL*, 5–6). In reverence, I am open to responding to the call of values and giving myself to them in the way their call demands. While a free act stemming from pride or concupiscence does respond to something, namely what is subjectively satisfying, we find, I would argue, that this intention curves back on the self.[15] Reverence, by contrast, brings a full response of self-donation. We respect what Hildebrand terms the fundamental "autonomy" that beings and their values have as independent from our wants and desires, in contrast to mere fantasies (*AL*, 6). Indeed, Hildebrand directly cites and radicalizes Kant's famous humanity formulation of the Categorical Imperative when discussing reverence: "Because of this autonomy, being is never a mere means for the reverent man and his accidental egoistic aims. It is never something that he can use, but he takes it seriously in itself" (*AL*, 6).

Reverence not only aligns our responses to the world of values but also opens us to this world. Indeed, Hildebrand states in his *Metaphysik der Gemeinschaft* (*Metaphysics of Community*) that in every value-response we experience the "*virtus unitiva*" (uniting power) of

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[13] John F. Crosby, *Personalist Papers* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), pp. 194–220.

[14] See Dietrich von Hildebrand, "*Sittlichkeit und ethische Werterkenntnis*," *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Phänomenologische Forschung* 5 (1922), p. 520 (hereinafter *SW*). All translations from the German are my own, though I am indebted to a draft translation of this work done by Robin Rollinger.

[15] This is my own interpretation of what the subjectively satisfying does to us, not Hildebrand's *per se*.

values which opens us, at least implicitly, to the whole world of values, to all other persons, and, ultimately, to God.[16] In a value response to a beautiful artwork, or the moral goodness of Socrates, there is a breakthrough (*Durchbruch*) where reverence is actualized. One becomes aware of the whole world of values (*MG*, 99). Egotism, pride, and concupiscence, at least for the moment, fall away. Simultaneously, I feel the connection of this value with all other values, and of myself with all to whom values address their call. In the same passage, Hildebrand says we experience a "lived, experiential connection with other people," and recognize "all other persons at their objective metaphysical location," that is, as ordered to the world of values (*MG*, 100–101).

> The person who [experiences the *virtus unitiva*] is really embraced by the "touch" of values and is thereby "opened up" in a loving basic attitude, valid, resolved, not only open to others, but rather including them all in his love (*MG*, 101).

This is not to say one value response to one artwork instantly makes me a universal lover. Indeed, controversially, for Hildebrand this is only achieved in *Caritas*, infused love of all in and through love of God (*NL*, 312–317; *E*, 484–489).[17] But it is to say that I am oriented toward that universal love and indeed, implicitly, toward God. Even if I do not explicitly believe in God, I am opened to all values including Him who is the summit and source of all values.[18]

Now I can introduce the cooperative freedom that Alice refers to. Cooperative freedom is our freedom to either sanction or disavow experiences already existing within us (*E*, 331). It is our ability to take a free stance toward them which can either merge with the original response or repudiate it. For example, I cannot help but feel *Schadenfreude* when my rival falls in the mud, but I can disavow this response. Conversely, I can sanction the affective love for my spouse that involuntarily wells up in me on seeing her. Cooperative freedom's most unique feature is that it can only be actualized in accord with what Hildebrand calls a "general will to be morally good" (*E*, 357). In his *Sittlichkeit*, Hildebrand first develops his notion of cooperative freedom in relation to the fundamental moral attitudes of pride, concupiscence, and reverence themselves.

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[16] See Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Metaphysik der Gemeinschaft: Untersuchungen über Wesen und Wert der Gemeinschaft*, Vol. 4. of 10 of *Gesammelte Werke* (Regensburg: Josef Habbel, 1975), pp. 99–101 (hereinafter *MG*). All translations from the German are my own.

[17] Hildebrand's controversial claim is motivated by his belief that natural (i.e., non-infused) love of neighbor is not possible, nor is it possible to love one's enemies except in Christ. John Crosby and Josef Seifert, two of Hildebrand's students, have mentioned to me that they think Hildebrand may have overlooked the genuine possibility of natural neighbor love. Further, the Jewish philosopher Levinas makes an argument for love of enemies without reference to Christ. I for one suspect that Hildebrand's claim is too quick, but it is not my purpose here to either defend or reject this claim, only to point out that any value response at least implicitly places us in the direction of universal love, even if we fall quite short. This can be accepted even if one thinks Hildebrand is too quick to claim that universal love is only possible in *caritas*, rather than merely being fully actualized in *caritas*. The point about love of enemies is found in Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Celibacy and the Crisis of Faith* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971), p. xxxiii.

[18] Of course, other religions such as (Mahayana) Buddhism will interpret the phenomenon of radical openness, which they claim does exist in their traditions, in very different ways from Hildebrand's theocentric interpretation, e.g., as an experience of Nirvana. It is not my objective here to contest these claims only to show why Hildebrand and Marcel's philosophies lead them to posit fidelity and hope (leading to Christian fidelity and hope as they assume Christianity's truth) as crucial to freedom. There are, of course, arguments for why hope, for instance, would imply a personal God rather than Nirvana but these are not my concern in the present work beyond illustrating how they function in Marcel's and Hildebrand's philosophies.

We recognize in ourselves pride and concupiscence as basic stances that we already "stand" in (*SW*, 558). The very fact that we all do evil acts can be traced back to these basic evil stances, which Hildebrand attributes to Original Sin. We can try to sanction this pride and concupiscence, consciously identify ourselves with it. Hildebrand's example is the Greek cynic Aristippus who proclaimed pleasure (i.e., the subjectively satisfying) to be the only good. But this is only a "quasi-sanction" which is "an arbitrary assent that fails its own objectification" (*SW*, 553). It lacks the seriousness (*Ernst*) "which can only be given as founded in an objective demand" from values and remains a mere "private infatuation" (*SW*, 552–553).[19] But we can freely disavow our pride and concupiscence. And we can sanction the reverence within us (think of a child's natural, unconscious reverence), transforming it from a mere stance (*Stellung*) into the free attitude (*Haltung*) of ourselves as free persons. Thus, we find that freedom is not only called to self-donation, but in its very structure it is self-donation. Our will gives itself, and the person, either to the subjectively satisfying, trapping the self within the self, or it can transcend itself through giving itself to values in a freely sanctioned attitude of reverence.

Hildebrand links reverence with fidelity (*AL*, 7–9). He begins with a consideration of an extreme lack of fidelity and what that does to a person and to freedom. An unfaithful person does not resist whatever momentary impression catches one's attention. Indeed, such unfaithful persons "are inwardly dead; their personality lacks a lasting center" (*AL*, 15). By "center" here, Hildebrand means that from which a person stands firmly in him- or herself, what gives a person depth. A person who lacks fidelity cannot "'nourish' his soul upon a value once discovered" (*AL*, 16). Self-donation is impossible, for to say, "I love you now, but how long it will last, I cannot tell," is no real giving of oneself, and the same applies analogously for other value-responses. By contrast, a person who has fidelity "lives and masters every moment from the depth" (*AL*, 13). This person is able to give what Hildebrand calls "super-actual" value responses, that is responses that color one's life even when one is not conscious of them (*SW*, 494–498). My love for my spouse colors my whole life even if I am not presently thinking of her. This is a mark of fidelity. Fidelity allows me to develop a center, personal depths, from which I can respond to values more appropriately as they themselves demand. "The building up of one's personality is possible only if one holds firmly to those truths and values that one has already discovered" (*AL*, 9). It enables true self-donation, and, thus, true freedom. Just as every value-response embodies at least some degree of reverence, so they also embody fidelity. Thus, far from being opposed to freedom, fidelity is what sets freedom free to be itself, to be self-donation, and, ultimately, love.

Marcel: Creative Fidelity and Freedom

Marcel in many ways takes a divergent, more existential approach when compared to Hildebrand. Yet they end up, as Alice notes, in remarkably parallel conclusions about freedom. In his *The Mystery of Being*, Marcel, unlike Hildebrand, denies that freedom can be thought of as a predicate belonging to the human essence.[20] Instead, for Marcel, freedom is itself a decision. I am always free to deny freedom, to say I did what I did not want to do because my desires or circumstances overwhelmed me. Besides the point of whether this is true or false, I realize that "I cannot win this acquittal except at the expense of my own being" (*MBII*, 112). We find here,

[19] I am indebted to an unpublished draft translation of *Sittlichkeit* where the translator, Robin Rollinger, translates Hildebrand's *Liebhaberei* as "infatuation."

[20] See Marcel, *The Mystery of Being: Volume II Faith and Reality,* trans. G. S. Fraser (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine Press, 2001), p. 114 (hereinafter *MBII*).

Marcel says, that freedom is not something we observe like an external fact, but rather something we decide without appeal (*MBII*, 113). From this Marcel approvingly cites Karl Jaspers to claim that we become conscious of our freedom when we recognize what others expect of us (*MBII*, 113).

This insight leads Marcel, like Hildebrand, to identify freedom with responsiveness (*MBII*, 113; *CF*, 50). We must break, Marcel asserts, from conceiving of freedom as liberty of choice or indifference, the mere ability to choose to do action A or not do action A (*MBII*, 129). This is only the lowest degree of freedom. Indeed, freedom is possible only when there is a stake of real importance, which to not recognize is in some sense to betray. Thomas Anderson, in a commentary on this passage, distinguishes, like Crosby does for Hildebrand, between "fundamental freedom" and a deeper freedom which must be achieved.[21] Fundamental freedom, a term Anderson invents for Marcel, is the freedom we *are*. Yet this fundamental freedom also enables us to deny our self. I can exercise my fundamental freedom by freely deciding to be a fatalist. The freedom to be achieved is "sovereignty over ourselves," to have our wills be in control and not be controlled by what we suffer.[22]

For Marcel, a second freedom is based on responses. As with Hildebrand there are different kinds of responses. Someone asks me a factual question, and my response is to act like a "filing clerk" (today we would say a computer) looking for the proper memory (*CF*, 50). This response is on the level of having. By contrast, when someone asks for my sympathy, I have a response of a different kind. I could find myself able only to affect sympathy without really feeling it, and this I would recognize is a response that falls short of the appeal made to it (*CF*, 50–51). This response to an appeal (Hildebrand uses "call" to mean the same thing as "appeal") is the central case of freedom for Marcel, no less than for Hildebrand. "Nothing is more free, in the true sense of this term, than this acceptance and consent" (*CF*, 51). When I am coerced into giving a response (say an inquisitor forces me to say a prayer), I cease to be present to my self; coercion is based in alienation. "Appeal, on the other hand, mysteriously restores us to ourselves" (*CF*, 51). But this is not inevitable, for we can refuse to give ourselves to it. That is our fundamental freedom, to use Anderson's term. However, we need not be conscious of this ability to refuse. To give my own example, Sarah who gives her pastry to the beggar without any thought of refusing the beggar is more, not less, free in her response to the beggar's appeal than Katherine, who is tempted to keep the pastry. "For our response to be free, however, we do not have to be completely aware of the possibility of refusal; it is free, it might be said, whenever it is liberative" (*CF*, 52).

Liberative from what? Marcel proceeds to answer that question. We carry the burden of our past, of what we wanted but failed to do. When this past is viewed as an object, it can paralyze us. "This contamination of the future by the past is one of the sources of fatalism" (*CF*, 52). Here we come to *indisponibilité*, a word which has no real English equivalent. One could call it indisposability, in the sense of being unable to put oneself at the disposal of others (especially in love). This is an inability to be open to others and to the experience of admiration. By contrast, *disponibilité* is inherently linked to freedom and creativity. *Disponibilité* is an active receptivity of another person as a presence rather than as an object. Marcel draws a line between such receptivity and "receiving" in the sense of receiving someone into my home (as opposed to

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[21] See Thomas Anderson, *Commentary on Gabriel Marcel's* The Mystery of Being (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2006), p. 150.

[22] See *ibid*., p. 150.

wax "receiving," or better "undergoing," an imprint) (*CF*, 89–91). When I receive someone into my home, I give a certain gift of myself.

Such receiving is, to use Hildebrand's terms, self-donation, which as we saw lies at the very heart of response and the *fiat* for Hildebrand. It is analogous to Hildebrand's reverence, a general attitude of openness and receptivity, but here directed primarily to another person. Indeed, *disponibilité* is the very core of Hildebrand's reverence. We can see here the remarkable parallels between Hildebrand's conception of freedom and the one Marcel is building for us. For both, freedom is grounded in givenness. Marcel, perhaps with even greater insistence than Hildebrand, sees our highest actualization of freedom as requiring receptivity. This receptivity, for both, is a fundamental attitude, a defining part of our character, and yet also a free choice. We will not be able to respond or even properly recognize values unless we freely open ourselves to them. Anderson notes that opening ourselves to one person as valuable simultaneously implicitly opens us to an absolute Thou, and he concisely reprises Marcel's logic:

> Only if we experience an absolute Thou can we make sense of our feeling that something of imperishable value, something deserving our total, unconditional love and fidelity is present in our fellow human beings and in the causes to which we commit ourselves.[23]

Disponibilité is or ought to be unbounded and unlimited. If it is self-donation to another, a thou, then it is also self-donation to an ultimate, infinite Thou, even if this is not recognized by the person (or even expressly verbally denied by that person). Only the experience of an absolute Thou can support the total devotion we feel called to give. Thus, in the experience of this devotion there is co-given an implicit experience of God, who is presupposed by that experience of devotion. Like with Hildebrand's "breakthrough," recognizing and opening ourselves to one person, one value at least implicitly orients us in the direction of God.

Disponibilité is tied directly to what Marcel calls creative fidelity. Fidelity, as opposed to mere constancy, involves the heart. If I go to visit my sick cousin but do so reluctantly, without my heart into it, then I may be exhibiting constancy but not fidelity (*CF*, 160). Fidelity requires that I receive the other as a presence, which, as seen above, involves a gift of myself. This is a gift of myself that is not merely a gift of my will, of my actions, but of my affections, of the heart. Yet, when fidelity is given by one finite person to another finite person, this fidelity is open to doubt (*CF*, 160-162). How, given the affective dimension of fidelity that is outside of my control, can I be sure that I will always be faithful? How can I be sure that what I am being faithful to is the other person and not my idea of the other person? Finally, the other too can change just as I can change, and this can threaten fidelity since the other person no longer seems to be the same person as before. How can I promise fidelity, when it cannot ensure that the proper affections will endure or even that I or the other will be the same as before?

Marcel's answer is twofold. First, "when I commit myself, I grant in principle that the commitment will not again be put into question" (*CF*, 162) This, Marcel notes, is to say that fidelity is creative, in the sense that it creates the self, who is now given to the other. Indeed, Marcel notes that "I belong to myself only insofar as I create myself" (*CF*, 96). As we have seen before freedom, self-creation, is a decision, but this decision is only made possible by the appeal of the other which evokes my response, which I can betray. Here, indeed, we see an extension of

[23] *Ibid*., p. 154.

cooperative freedom over time. We saw that for Hildebrand in his *Sittlichkeit* cooperative freedom extends to the basic attitudes at the heart of the moral life. This is now revealed by Marcel to be self-creation. When I commit myself, I create myself. I will do everything in my power to continue this affective fidelity over time. Yet, the doubts just mentioned still retain a certain validity. A great tragedy, a stunning betrayal, a traumatic experience I could not have anticipated may harden my heart. As finite beings, who cannot directly "engender," to use Hildebrand's term, their affectivity, fidelity remains always in doubt. This brings us to Marcel's second answer: the wellspring of creative fidelity is found in hope (*CF*, 166–167).

Hope in Marcel and Hildebrand

In his *Homo Viator*, hope for Marcel exists in the context of a trial which we are somehow identified with, and yet which we trust will be dissolved by a creative process.[24] Indeed for Marcel, hope is only possible when the temptation to despair is present (*HV*, 30). To despair is both to "pronounce my own sentence" and "to go to pieces under this sentence" (*HV*, 31–32). Michael Healy has noted that there is always a note of defiance and selfishness in despair for Marcel, because I cannot have *this* thing I desire, I will go to pieces.[25] Nor is hope the attitude of the stoic who calmly accepts every trial and refuses to go to pieces under them, for this attitude is still egocentric (*HV*, 32). Hope is not optimism, which is based on temperament and has an element of self-delusion (*HV*, 27-28). Instead, Marcel assures us that, much like Hildebrand's reverence, hope forbids that "the other person be treated as if he lacked an autonomous rhythm, and could accordingly be forced or bent to suit us" (*HV*, 34). Hope forgoes any note of defiance (*HV*, 27). In *The Philosophy of Existentialism* Marcel gives not a definition but a rich description of hope:

> Hope consists in asserting that there is at the heart of being…a mysterious principle which is in connivance with me, which cannot but will that which I will, if what I will deserves to be willed.[26]

A mother who hopes that her sick child will recover will not be dissuaded by previous cases where mothers hoping for such cures were disappointed. Rather "beyond all experience, all probability…I assert that a given order shall be re-established, that reality is on my side in willing it to be so" (*PE*, 28). To hope is at one with the ultimate fidelity. Such a hope implicitly refers to a Presence which Marcel came to believe is God, nonetheless he is not deriving this hope from the data of any religion (*CF*, 168). In hope, then, I appeal for the strength that will allow me to be faithful. Fidelity, which can seem so precarious when based on my own resources, can be based on hope. This hope is "not, to be sure, [based] on a distinct apprehension

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[24] See Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to the Metaphysics of Hope*, trans. Emma Craufurd and Paul Seaton (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine Press, 2010), p. 33 (hereinafter *HV*).

[25] Michael Healy, "Hope and Despair in Marcel: Images and Underlying Attitudes" (Presentation at the 2023 American Catholic Philosophical Association Annual Meeting, Houston, TX, Nov 17, 2023).

[26] Gabriel Marcel *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, translated by Manya Harari (New York: The Citadel Press, 1964), p. 28 (hereinafter *PE*.).

of God as someone other," but instead is "a certain appeal delivered from the depths of my own insufficiency *ad summan altitudinem*" (*CF*, 167).

What if, however, the child dies anyway? Has hope been thwarted? No. For Marcel the purest form of hope is not a hope that some state of affairs will result, but a hope in Reality. This is an unconditional absolute hope born of love. It is hope that what has been given in love cannot be dissolved even by death, and this means that the beloved endures, and our love endures even beyond the grave. To despair or doubt would be to betray this love (*HV*, 36, 54). Hope is not mere expectation, it contains a given, to which we respond (*HV*, 54). For in love I receive a certain indefinable credit, a mysterious given, which is the evidence of things not yet seen. "'I hope in thee for us;' such is perhaps the most adequate and the most elaborate expression of the act which the verb 'to hope' suggests" (*HV*, 54). It is this unlimited, unrestricted hope that is the ultimate rock on which fidelity can be built. This unrestricted hope confirms and is an unrestricted *disponibilité*. This is not, Marcel himself is very careful to affirm, to say that hope and fidelity are beyond the reach of the non-believer. Even if our mother above is not a believer in God she may still find this unconquerable hope welling up within her.

In his *Jaws of Death, Gate of Heaven*, Hildebrand directly picks up this thread from Marcel (*JDGH*, 6–7, 13). Hildebrand takes Marcel to be expressing, beautifully, the reality of what Hildebrand calls "natural hope" (*JDGH*, 70). This natural hope is born of love. As some Marcel scholars have noted, including Hildebrand himself, Marcel bases his philosophical insight into the immortality of the soul not on the immortality of my own soul but of the soul of my beloved.[27] As Hildebrand puts it, directly quoting Marcel, "it is in fact my own strong love that cries out 'You shall not die.'" (*JDGH*, 7, Hildebrand omits a citation) As does Marcel, Hildebrand expressly admits that this natural hope is available to non-believers, though they are unaware of its ultimate reference, God (*JDGH*, 70).

For Hildebrand, "hope is one of those basic attitudes without which human life would be unendurable, even impossible (*JDGH*, 69)." It is "one of those basic human attitudes in which we see our primordial link with God – our undeniable metaphysical situation" (*JDGH*, 70). Thus, Hildebrand identifies hope as being, like reverence and fidelity, a "basic attitude." It combines volitional, affective, and theoretical responses, though he asserts that because hope contains conviction "in this sense hope belongs more to the class of theoretical responses than to the class of affective responses" (*JDGH*, 112–113). I do not merely wish that my friend will be cured or is immortal, in hope I am *convinced* this is and will be the case. For Hildebrand, hope is based on a value response to the infinite goodness of God, even if God is only implicitly presupposed by this hope (*JDGH*, 71). Yet the "formal object" of hope always includes some objective good for myself and/or the beloved, be my beloved human or divine (*JDGH*, 114–116). Unlike love and reverence, hope is directed to the future (*JDGH*, 112). Expectation and wishing are not necessarily value responses, but hope is always based on a value response (*JDGH*, 71). Unlike desire and willing, which is based on my own intervention to make some state of affairs real, hope depends on the intervention of a deeper Reality, not myself, but God (*JDGH*, 112). He is keen also to distinguish hope from deceptive optimism. Optimism is based on mere temperament rather than being a deep basic attitude (*JDGH*, 70–71). Optimism is blind to our metaphysical

[27] Besides Hildebrand, consider Zachary Willcut, "Marcel and Augustine on Immortality: The Nothingness of the Self and the Exteriorization of Love as the Way to Eternity" *Marcel Studies* Vol. 5, no. 1. (2020), pp. 1–18; Geoffrey Karabin "Reflections on Gabriel Marcel's Belief in the Afterlife" in *Living Existentialism: Essays in Honor of Thomas W. Busch*, edited by Gregory Hoskins and J. C. Berendzen (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017), p. 47.

situation and rests on an illusion. By contrast, "through hope persons become more objective, they tower over the subjective world around them" (*JDGH*, 70).

Nonetheless, Hildebrand is keen to move beyond merely natural hope, which he holds Marcel describes so well, to explicit Christian hope, a supernatural, infused virtue. Even with natural hope, death retains a horrible aspect. We know not, without Revelation, where my beloved goes, in what state she will exist (*JDGH*, 7). Christian hope expressly knows of Heaven and aims at union with Jesus. The primary motive of this Christian hope is the value response, first, to the glory of God and, second, to the infinite value and tribute to that glory of God our own salvation and those of others would be. This hope is also indissolubly united with aiming for salvation as an objective good for ourselves and for others (*JDGH*, 71–74). Finally, for the Christian, hope is distinct from but united with every single willing the Christian does. For Christians are always conscious that even what we will to accomplish by our own power, cannot be done without the help and grace of God. "Upon God depends the successful outcome of all the things that they can and should achieve through their own power" (*JDGH*, 112).

Conclusion: Toward Hope and Faith in Love

I would like to conclude by noting that Hildebrand and Marcel, by identifying freedom with self-donation and fidelity, offer a perhaps surprising way to resurrect one of Kant's more contentious claims: that our freedom requires hope. To show this, I turn to an interpretation of Kant's *Religion* offered by Matthew Caswell.[28] My goal is not to endorse Caswell's interpretation of Kant. It is rather to show how any ethical outlook based on the givenness of what-is-good-in-itself will come to similar conclusions as the ones reached by Hildebrand and Marcel.

Kant declares throughout his critical corpus that morality and a religious belief in God and in personal immortality are indissolubly linked. This link is through his conception of the highest good, a future immortal life where everyone is constantly increasing in virtue and happy in perfect proportion to their virtue.[29] Caswell links this to Kant's notion of the *Gesinnung*, which, recall, is a basic orientation of the will, and to Kant's theory of radical evil.[30] Any act we will embodies a series of maxims. If I build a house then I am embodying the maxim to have shelter from the winter, which is under the maxim that it is good to preserve life. This implies in the moral sphere that there are two most general maxims, the maxim of self-love, which is to follow the inclinations, and the maxim of following the moral law. The *Gesinnung* is the most basic maxim that characterizes a person's life, the basic principle of moral (or immoral) acts (*R*, 6:20, 20). Human persons have both the evil and good *Gesinnung* in place. However, one must be subordinate to the other, either we follow the moral law and subordinate our self-love to the moral law, or we reverse the priority and follow the moral law only up to an arbitrary point where our self-love is infringed on, beyond that we cave or are at least tempted (*R*, 6:20, 20). Either the morally good or evil *Gesinnung* is established. Now if the morally good *Gesinnung* is established, then a person cannot be tempted to do evil. Clearly, we can be tempted to do evil.

[28] See Matthew Caswell, "Kant's Conception of the Highest Good, the *Gesinnung*, and the Theory of Radical Evil" *Kant Studien* 97 (2006), pp. 184–209.

[29] See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason* in *Practical Philosophy*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5:110–5:134, pp. 228–247.

[30] See Caswell, "Kant's Conception of the Highest Good," p. 190.

Thus, we are freely subject to radical evil, and require a kind of moral conversion to the good (*R*, 6:32, 35).

Now to will also implies an end, "without any reference to a purpose, no determination of the will can take place at all in the human being" (*R*, 6:4, 2). The end of the morally evil *Gesinnung* is clearly personal happiness, which is the goal of self-love. The end of the morally good *Gesinnung* is the highest good, where rational self-love is both limited and universalized by the moral law, and I will that I and everyone have perfect happiness in proportion to perfect virtue. Therefore, one cannot convert from the morally evil *Gesinnung* and subordinate oneself to the good *Gesinnung* without simultaneously setting as one's end the highest good, including our own and other's happiness. Indeed, Caswell puts it "we cannot perform this subordination without willing happiness as our ultimate and supreme end."[31] Kant holds that only positing a benevolent God and personal immortality, a kind of rational faith and hope, makes the highest good possible. Since ought implies can, this faith and hope is practically necessary for people to adopt. However, it is crucial to note (and in my view Caswell does not do this), that this positing is only necessary for pure practical reason. I must posit God as a pure practical faith, but Kant does not require me to believe God actually exists, only that I assume the practical belief in God from the motives provided by pure practical reason.

Again, my focus in this paper is not to defend the interpretation of Kant above but to illustrate parallels with Hildebrand and Marcel. Clearly, Marcel and Hildebrand would not be signing on to Kant's rationalistic religion any time soon. Nonetheless, like Kant's *Gesinnung*, Hildebrand and Marcel both have a most basic attitude, a most basic orientation of the will (and the heart and the mind) at the center of their philosophies. This is not accidental, any philosophy that accepts a dichotomy between the good-in-itself and what is merely subjectively pursued by the individual, must posit at least two (for Hildebrand three) basic moral attitudes, a good attitude and an evil attitude involving rejection of the good. For Hildebrand, the good principle is reverence and for Marcel *disponibilité* exists in an analogous manner. For both, this principle is intrinsically linked to fidelity. Further, any assessment of human beings not blinded by some exuberant and unfounded optimism, must conclude that nearly all humans are freely subject to the evil principle(s), a kind of original sin.[32] For Hildebrand, this is pride and concupiscence, and for Marcel it is exhibited in *indisponibilité*. For all three, this evil threatens the fidelity that is itself crucial to the moral life, and this threat can only be fully countered by hope. For we require a universal openness to the good-in-itself, but this openness also gives fruit to our own happiness in and through a kind of hope. This hope is necessary in moral struggle, as it realigns our ends away from the self-serving and self-enclosure that is bound to despair and toward a union of happiness and virtue, based in union with an all-loving and good God.

However, Hildebrand and Marcel arrive at this hope very differently from Caswell's Kant. For both this hope is not some radical positing based on pure reason. It is instead grounded in a radical openness to reality. Hildebrand defines this openness, reverence, as a kind of phenomenological inversion of Kant's moral formalism, a reverence not for a law of pure

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[31] *Ibid*., p. 203.

[32] Kant, of course, diverges greatly from Hildebrand and Marcel in that he expressly rejects the traditional Christian notion of an inherited original sin, because he believes such a sin could not be a real sin in that we would not be individually responsible for a sin of our parents. Marcel and Hildebrand could counter that all of us clearly stand in a basic stance (evident even in jealous infants) that inclines each of us to commit many individual personal sins, and this is the phenomenological evidence for original sin. Nonetheless the fact remains that all three philosophers conclude humanity is subject to an evil "bent" of our will and of our nature that requires a kind of hope in response (*R*, 6:32, 43).

practical and autonomous reason but for the concrete reality and "autonomy" of beings and their value. Marcel similarly takes pains to emphasize the autonomy of others, not just in reason but in their very reality and being. This is because both Marcel and Hildebrand, as realist phenomenologists, base their philosophies on what is given to experience. This hope then springs from Reality itself, a mysterious intimation that, yes, in the face of contrary appearances, if we will what is right, this Reality is on our side. It is found in an unlimited, unconditional trust in a Presence that is itself the evidence of things not seen. Thus, for both Marcel and Hildebrand, the heart of freedom is a decision between *disponibilité* or *indisponibilité*, reverence or pride. In a world where freedom is based on response, where we hear appeals, it cannot be otherwise. To be faithful is at the heart of freedom, for only with it do we truly give a response that endures, and which corresponds to the appeals we have received. Yet, to be faithful, in the face of moral struggles and the fickleness of both ourselves and others, we require hope. This hope is not necessarily an explicitly theological hope, but it is hope nonetheless. It is this hope contained in faithfulness contained in self-donation, which is to say, love. It is a consecration that sets us free for freedom (*MBII*, 191; see also *Galatians* 5:1).