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MORAL RESPONSIBILITY AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY: A REFLECTION ON THE CONCEPT OF MORAL RESPONSIBILITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MARCEL'S INTERSUBJECTIVITY

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Abstract: In this paper, I shall attempt to understand a passage from Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* which raises the idea that we are responsible others. I shall begin with an examination of the main contemporary theories on moral responsibility and I shall argue that these theories fail to help us understand the Dostoyevsky passage. I shall then venture to suggest that Gabriel Marcel's idea of intersubjectivity may provide us with a key to understanding the passage. I believe that a reflection on the Dostoyevsky passage and Marcel's idea of intersubjectivity would greatly enrich our understanding of the concept of moral responsibility, along with the concept of self—I am convinced that how we see ourselves largely determines what we think we are responsible for. More specifically, I shall suggest that the idea of an "intersubjective self," as opposed to the idea of an "egoistic" or "monadistic self" that is prevalent in contemporary culture, may be more appropriate for understanding who we are and may shed light on our concept of moral responsibility.

Introduction

[L]ittle heart of mine, my joy, believe me, everyone is really responsible to all men for all men and for everything. I don't know how to explain it to you, but I feel it is so, painfully even. And how is it we went on then living, getting angry and not knowing?

Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*[1]

For some strange reason, when I first read this passage long ago from Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* something about it attracted me. The story goes that the brother of Father Zosima was rebellious and atheistic. However, he died young and, before he died, he underwent a sudden transformation. He suddenly became kind, joyous, and caring for all, despite his sickness. It was just before his death that he uttered the above words. Though I did not know how to prove it, I felt that these words contained something profound.

I put the book and my bafflement away for a long time. One day, by some coincidence, I came across Gabriel Marcel's idea of intersubjectivity. Roughly put, this idea states that the ontological structure of our being is such that we are all interconnected. According to this idea, the Cartesian self, a self that is enclosed and independent from its surroundings, is simply an illusion:

> We never climb [the dark hill of Destiny] alone, though we often seem to do so; belief in loneliness is the first illusion to dispel, the first obstacle to overcome.[2]

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[1] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, "The Russian Monk—Selection from *The Brothers Karamazov*," in Charles Guignon (ed.), *The Good Life* (Indianapolis, IN.: Hackett, 1999), pp.103-31.

[2] Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, trans. Katherine Farrer (La Vergne, TN.: Marcel Press, 2007), p.200.

> [The fundamental idea of intersubjectivity is that]...we are not alone, that whatever we do we are responsible for what happens to others.[3]

It seems to me that Marcel's idea of intersubjectivity and Dostoyevsky's passage cited at the beginning of this paper are derived from a similar kind of "insight" about the nature of the self, that they are nourished from the same soil. Therefore, I think that Marcel's idea of intersubjectivity can provide us with a key to understanding the above passage.

In this paper, I would like to argue that the passage cited at the outset of the essay can be appropriately understood through Marcel's idea of intersubjectivity and that such an understanding provides an opportunity to examine the concept of moral responsibility from a different perspective. In fact, I would like to suggest that a reflection on the above passage from the perspective of Marcel's idea of intersubjectivity shows us an entirely different dimension of moral responsibility, a dimension which has hitherto been largely neglected by contemporary philosophers. I believe that this shift of focus would greatly enrich our understanding of the concepts of moral responsibility, and of the meaning of the self.

In the first sections, I shall review some of the most prevalent contemporary views on moral responsibility and argue that, despite their complexity and ingenuity, they fail to help us make sense of the passage cited above. Then, I shall suggest that our concept of moral responsibility develops along with our concept of self. Therefore, an alternative conception of self may help us out of the impasse. I propose that Marcel's idea of an intersubjective self may be such an alternative. I will also briefly comment on whether the idea of intersubjectivity can be "proven" to be true, and whether intersubjectivity commits us to some form of supernaturalism.

It should be noted that this paper is not intended to be an exposition of Marcel's entire philosophy; instead, it merely strives to rethink the concept of moral responsibility from a different perspective—a perspective that the author believes to be indispensable for our full understanding of the concepts of moral responsibility and the self but which has been neglected by most contemporary philosophers. This paper does not attempt to provide anything resembling a complete historical survey of the development of the idea of intersubjectivity; therefore, a comparison between different philosophers' conceptions of intersubjectivity (such as that between Husserl and Marcel) will not be presented.

I. Some Contemporary Theories of Moral Responsibility

Why do we hold ourselves and others morally responsible? What are the conditions of moral responsibility? It is a fact that sometimes we hold ourselves morally responsible for what we do (or fail to do) and sometimes we hold others morally responsible for what they do (or fail to do).

Blame and Praise

Along with Strawson, many contemporary moral philosophers agree that moral responsibility is distinguished from other kinds of responsibility by "reactive attitudes"—attitudes such as blame, praise and guilt.[4] Someone is morally responsible for an action or the consequence of an action

[3] Gabriel Marcel, *A Gabriel Marcel Reader*, ed. Brendan Sweetman (South Bend, IN.: St. Augustine's Press, 2011), p.129.

[4] See P. F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," in Derek Pereboom (ed.), *Free Will* (Indianapolis, IN.: Hackett, 1997), pp.119-42.

only if we hold him or her blameworthy or praiseworthy for the action or the consequence.[5] But what makes someone a suitable candidate for our reactive attitudes? Some philosophers think that the agent's having the ability to do otherwise is essential for our praise or blame, while others think that the agent's having control of his or her action is required for moral appraisal.

Different Theories of Moral Responsibility: The Ability to Do Otherwise

Many philosophers agree that what distinguishes human beings from other creatures is a human person's ability to stand back from and evaluate his or her desires and then choose to act according to his or her deliberations.[6] Humans, unlike other creatures, do not necessarily act upon their instincts and immediate desires—humans have the ability to evaluate their desires and consider which courses of action to pursue. One way to understand this ability to step back from and evaluate one's desires before one's actions is to interpret it as the "ability to do otherwise." For some philosophers, it is this "ability to do otherwise" that constitutes moral responsibility.[7] But what is meant by the "ability to do otherwise?"

For philosophers such as Chisholm and O'Connor, the "ability to do otherwise" refers to a kind of freedom that is metaphysical in nature.[8] That is, in order for an agent to be morally responsible for an action, the action must originate from the agent himself or herself, without having been determined by external causes. This position seems to have originated from the intuitive belief that if X causes Y, then X is responsible for the occurrence of Y.[9]

Unlike Chisholm and O'Conner, another group of philosophers maintain that we have the ability to do otherwise as long as our actions issue from our desires, volitions, and deliberations; a free act, in this sense, is to be contrasted with a coerced or forced act. According to this view, an agent is morally responsible for his or her action as long as the action issue from his or her desire or volition, irrespective of the truth or falsity of determinism.[10]

Different Theories of Moral Responsibility: Having Control

Taking a different route, some philosophers question the assumption that moral responsibility requires the ability to do otherwise. Frankfurt, in his landmark essay, "Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," attempts to show the falsity of this assumption.

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[5] For a classification of different kinds of responsibility, see H. L. A. Hart, *Punishment and Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 2nd edition), pp.211-30.

[6] See, for example, Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," in *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.11-12; Hilary Bok, *Freedom and Responsibility* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1998), p.12; Thomas Nagel, "The Absurd," in E. D. Klemke and Steven M. Cahn (eds.), *The Meaning of Life: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.145-46; R. J. Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp.13-14.

[7] For an example of this view, see Anthony Kenny, *Freewill and Responsibility* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp.29-34.

[8] Roderick Chisholm, "Human Freedom and the Self," in Gary Watson (ed.), *Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp.24-35; Timothy O'Connor, "The Agent as Cause," in Robert Kane (ed.), *Free Will,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp.196-205.

[9] It can be readily observed that this view implies the falsity of determinism—the thesis that everything, including human behaviors and thought processes, is determined by natural laws and antecedent states of affairs that are beyond our control. For an argument for the incompatibility of determinism and the ability to do otherwise, see Van Inwagen's so-called "consequence argument" in Peter Van Inwagen, "The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism," in Gary Watson (ed.), *Free Will*, pp.46-58.

[10] For a statement of this position, see Kai Nielsen, "The Compatibility of Freedom and Determinism," in Robert Kane (ed.), *Free Will*, pp.39-46.

In his paper, Frankfurt devises a series of examples attempting to show that moral responsibility does not require our ability to do or choose otherwise. The Frankfurt-style examples are unique for having the following features: 1) the agent S does something X; 2) S does X out of his or her own will and choice; 3) unknown to S, there is a certain mechanism M that will ensure S does X even if S decides not to do X; 4) since S does X out of his or her own will and choice, mechanism M does not in fact operate.[11] In this kind of example, it is evident that the agent cannot do otherwise, since if he or she decides to do otherwise, the mechanism will intervene and make it impossible for him or her to do otherwise. But as things turn out, the mechanism does not intervene, since the agent decided to do the action out of his or her own will or choice. Many philosophers are convinced that the Frankfurt-style examples have shown that moral responsibility does not require the ability to do otherwise.[12] But if moral responsibility does not require the ability to do otherwise, then what does it require? What is the kind of freedom that is relevant to moral responsibility?

Some philosophers argue that what moral responsibility requires is not our ability to do otherwise, but our having control. According to Fischer and Ravizza, though it is true that in most cases our having the ability to do otherwise is associated with our having control, the Frankfurt-style examples have shown that these two can be separated and having control is not equivalent to having the ability to do otherwise.[13] Fischer and Ravizza maintain that it is our having control of our action (and *not* our having the ability to do otherwise) that makes us responsible for our action. But how are we to understand the idea of having control, if not in terms of having the ability to do otherwise?

Philosophers who associate moral responsibility with control usually maintain that the idea of control is closely associated with our ability to reason.[14] In order for us to be moral agents, we must exhibit the ability to grasp "moral reasons" and translate these reasons into actions.[15] For Fischer and Ravizza, the kind of control that is associated with reason is called "guidance control," and it is guidance control that grounds moral responsibility.[16]

The development of contemporary theories of moral responsibility can best be described as a response to the challenge of determinism: how is moral responsibility possible if determinism is true? But it seems to me that contemporary moral theorists have focused exclusively on this aspect of moral responsibility and have neglected to explore other aspects. This is why I think it is difficult to understand the Dostoyevsky passage with the conceptual framework established by contemporary moral theorists. In fact, I suggest that contemporary moral theories, as intriguing as they are, fail to illuminate our understanding of the Dostoyevsky passage.

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[11] Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," in Derek Pereboom (ed.), *Free Will*, pp.156-66.

[12] For a different argument against the so-called "Principle of Alternative Possibilities," see Daniel Dennett, "I Could Not Have Done Otherwise—So What?" in Robert Kane (ed.), *Free Will*, pp.83-94.

[13] John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.30-31.

[14] See, for example, Susan Wolf, *Freedom Within Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); R. Jay Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*; John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control*.

[15] "Moral reasons" are to be distinguished from "prudential reasons." The latter concern the agent's own interests, whereas the former issue from the balancing of the agent's own interests with the interests of others. *(Ibid.,* p.76.)

[16] *Ibid.,* pp.33, 54.

II. Moral Responsibility and Self

It is important at this stage of our discussion to assume that the Dostoyevsky passage is neither nonsensical nor incomprehensible. It is all too easy to simply brush the passage off as either being nonsensical or expressing an irrational religious impulse—both of which imply that further discussion on the matter will not be possible. If we hope to advance our understanding of the passage, the better approach, I think, is to assume for the moment that the passage is expressing a reasonable viewpoint. In the previous section, we have seen that contemporary moral theorists take either the idea of having the ability to do otherwise or the idea of having control to be central for moral responsibility. Can these theories help us make sense of the Dostoyevsky passage?

First of all, it does not require much thought to see that contemporary moral theorists are attempting to articulate the concept of moral responsibility on the basis of the causal relationship between the agent and his or her actions. Whether it is by focusing on the idea of having the ability to do otherwise or the idea of having control, contemporary moral theorists attempt to articulate the conditions that hold between the agent and his or her actions. In what sense can it be said that an action "issued" from the agent and that he or she is therefore morally responsible for the action or the consequence of the action?[17]

Now, since contemporary theories of moral responsibility are nearly entirely focused on this aspect of moral responsibility, it does not come as a surprise that contemporary theories of moral responsibility cannot illuminate our understanding of the Dostoyevsky passage. What is interesting about the Dostoyevsky passage is that the conception of moral responsibility implied is based on the relationship between myself and others. If we are to have a proper understanding of the passage, this relationship has to be further articulated. But it is precisely this relationship that is almost entirely neglected by contemporary moral theorists. What is the reason for this neglect? Perhaps the neglect comes from our intuitive belief that *one is only morally responsible for what one has done (or has failed to do)*. Now, this belief does seem intuitively plausible. It seems to go against our idea of fairness and justice to hold myself responsible for something that does not issue from myself and which I have no control over. For example, how could I be morally responsible for the murdering of innocent people by ISIS when I have no connection with the group whatsoever?

It is here we see the intuitive difficulty of making sense of the Dostoyevsky passage. It is a difficulty that only grows if our conception of moral responsibility is entirely focused on the causal relationship between the agent and his or her actions. Have we reached an intellectual stalemate past which no further discussion can be fruitful?

At this point it might be helpful to examine our concept of "self" and consider in what way this concept is related to our conception of ourselves as morally responsible agents. Let's first consider how our concept of "self" originates.

It is now widely acknowledged that an infant has no proper conception of self, that she makes no distinction between "myself," "others," "mine" and "not-mine." It is through experience, learning what is and is not under her control that she gradually develops the sense of "self."[18] And it is only *after* she can distinguish what is and is not under her control that the concept of moral responsibility becomes applicable to her. The purpose of moral education is to teach a child to distinguish morally praiseworthy actions from morally blameworthy actions, and to make her see

[17] In some instances we also hold people responsible for their inactions or the consequences of their inactions.

[18] For an example of how an infant develops her sense of "self", see Melanie Klein's Object Relations Theory. (Melanie Klein, *The Selected Melanie Klein,* ed. Juliet Mitchell [New York: Free Press, 1987].)

that as an agent—in the sense that she is the originator of certain actions—she is morally responsible for her actions.[19]

A child at an early age may fail to recognize the moral significance of her actions; nonetheless, she will be able, through punishments and rewards, to distinguish acceptable actions from unacceptable actions. It is only at a later age that the child will be able to grasp the significance of abstract moral principles.[20]

If our sketch of the moral development of a person is largely correct, then it can be reasonably suggested that *how we see ourselves as morally responsible agents is largely dependent on our concept of self.* It is this association between the concept of moral responsibility and the concept of self that I believe is underexplored in contemporary philosophical literature.

If this thesis is correct, then the questions worth asking are: 1) What is the conception of self that is presupposed by contemporary theories on moral responsibility? 2) Are there other conceptions of self that might be equally, if not more, adequate?

The first question is easy to answer. The conception of self presupposed by the contemporary philosophical literature on moral responsibility—or, to be more accurate, a conception of self that is ingrained in our contemporary culture—is of a self that is independent and autonomous, a self that relies solely on himself or herself, a self that is capable of making judgments and performing actions independently of others, a self that is only responsible for his or her own (in)actions. This conception of self is so prevalent in our culture that it is easy to forget that it is, after all, a *hypothesis* and not a fact about what we are.[21]

The second question. Are there other conceptions of self that are equally or more adequate than the conception of self that is ingrained in our culture? That is, are there other conceptions of self that express better what we really are, our true nature as individual selves?

III. Marcel's Intersubjectivity

A general survey of different cultures reveals that the conception of self as autonomous, independent, and individualistic is not universally shared by all cultures. Asian cultures, for example, place much greater emphasis on the values that affect the entire family. A man cannot be truly good or virtuous unless he also obeys his parents and looks after his children.[22] Accordingly, the conception of self in such cultures will be a self that is defined by its roles in the web of relationships. This simple observation is enough to show that the conception of self as independent,

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[19] For a brief discussion about becoming a moral agent, see John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control,* pp.208-17.

[20] Though Kohlberg's theory of the stages of moral development may be a bit dated, the basic idea is still illuminating; see Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

[21] This contemporary conception of self is largely influenced by Descartes, Mill, Sartre and Rawls, among others. Descartes greatly emphasized the epistemic independence of being; his "Cartesian Self" has turned "self" into an "epistemic monad" (Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy," in Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross [trans.], *The Philosophical Works of Descartes* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931], pp.131-200). Sartre, on the other hand, greatly emphasized the ideas of personal freedom, personal choice and responsibility. (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* [New York: Citadel Press, 1987].) For Mill, the preservation of individual liberties was not only primary but also constituted the basis of his ethical system. (John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Utilitarianism* [New York: Bantam Books, 1993].) Like Mill, Rawls also stressed the primacy of individual liberties and rights; he attempted to justify the priority of basic individual liberties and rights in a constitutional democracy by the idea of the "original position" (John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* [Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press, 1999, 2nd edition]).

[22] The Confucian virtue of filial piety still plays an important role in most Chinese families.

autonomous, and individualistic is *not* a matter of fact and that there are other alternatives. So, are there alternative conceptions of self that may provide a key to understand the Dostoyevsky passage? A conception of self that helps us make sense of the idea that we are *somehow* responsible for all others?

I would like to suggest that Gabriel Marcel's idea of intersubjectivity provides such a key. In his works, Marcel is strongly opposed to the idea of a "monadistic self"—a self that is individualistic and self-contained.[23] This is an egoistic kind of self, the kind of self that is only concerned with its own interests and welfare. Due to its egocentrism, such a self creates a barrier between itself and others.[24] Even should it interact with others, others appear to it either as threats or as something from which some advantages can be appropriated, or as a self that I interact with from the point of view of putting my self first. Such a self, argues Marcel, is incapable of forming genuine community—the community of love and friendship—with others.[25] As a consequence, this self suffers unbearable alienation, anguish, and despair.[26] For Marcel, this is not just a theoretical possibility, but the actual state of our contemporary world.[27]

Against this monadistic conception of self, Marcel argues for an intersubjective conception of self. The intrinsic structure of subjectivity or self, Marcel tells us, is already intersubjective.[28] What this means is that the nature of being is such that it is opened towards others.[29] The being, in its very structure, is not an enclosed monad, but an "openness" that reaches out to others and allows others to enter. It is by reaching out to others and allowing others to enter that the being reaches its fulfillment. The more we include others in our existence, Marcel tells us, the more we *are.*[30] It is therefore appropriate to speak of the "We-subject"[31] instead of the "I-subject" (which emphasizes the dichotomy between "I" and "others"). It is also from this metaphysics of *we are*[32] that Marcel talks about fulfillment and joy. The basis for a fullness of life must be intersubjectivity[33] and Marcel tells us that joy is "fundamentally bound up with a consciousness of being *all together.*"[34]

But despite what Marcel maintains, can the intersubjective structure of being or self be verified, proved or demonstrated in some empirical sense? It is important to point out that Marcel distinguishes "verification" from "acknowledgement." Something is verifiable only if it is something that can be placed before me, something that I can examine objectively. But existence is not something that is before me. Existence is "something I can be, not something I can see and know."[35] What this means is that, for Marcel, the intersubjective structure of our being or self, though it cannot be *verified,* can nonetheless be *acknowledged.*[36]

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[23] Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being. Vol. I: Reflection and Mystery,* trans. G. S. Fraser (South Bend, IN.: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), p.139.

[24] Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being. Vol. II: Faith and Reality,* trans. G. S. Fraser (South Bend, IN.: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), p.7; Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existence,* trans. Manya Harari (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), p.27.

[25] Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existence,* p.53.

[26] Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being. Vol. I,* p.22; Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existence*, p.28.

[27] Marcel tells us that we live in a "broken world," a world full of grief and anguish, a world where the words "with" and "togetherness" lose their meaning. (See Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, Vol. I,* pp.21-28.)

[28] Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, Vol. I,* pp.182-83.

[29] Gabriel Marcel, *A Gabriel Marcel Reader,* p.116.

[30] Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, Vol. II,* p.33.

[31] Gabriel Marcel, *A Gabriel Marcel Reader,* p.84, 135.

[32] Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, Vol. II,* p.9.

[33] *Ibid*., p.8.

[34] *Ibid*., p.119.

[35] Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, trans. Robert Rosthal (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), p.227.

[36] Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, Vol. II,* pp.10, 107.

For Marcel, in acknowledging something, the subject has to rely on his or her subjective conditions and personal experiences. For example, a musician may acknowledge the beauty and order contained in Beethoven's fifth symphony, while a layperson may simply regard Beethoven's fifth symphony as a mediocre work. Now, in this example, the musician relies on his subjective conditions and personal experiences to make this acknowledgement. Do we want to say that the musician's acknowledgment is invalid? That he is in no position to acknowledge something based on his subjective conditions and experiences alone? Do we want to instead say that everyone's opinion is equally valid so that everything is just a matter of personal taste and preference? Certainly not. Though there might be cases that such a "relativistic" attitude applies, it is certainly a mistake to think that everything is relative and that every opinion is equally valid. In the case of aesthetic works, which Marcel is fond of using as examples, it is more appropriate to say that certain people are prevented from perceiving the beauty and order contained in artistic works; they are—due to their own shortcomings—shut off from "certain realities."[37]

For Marcel, just like our experiences of artistic works, we must be in the appropriate mentality in order to experience and acknowledge the intersubjective structure of our being. So what is the "appropriate mentality" for experiencing intersubjectivity? It is the mentality of non-self-obsession—the mentality of not focusing exclusively on one's concerns, fears, and interests. It may be that human beings tend, by nature, to be self-obsessed—we may be obsessed with our achievements, interests, and superiority, or we may be obsessed with our fears and inferiority. Either way, it may be that we tend to be self-centered. But Marcel points out that there are times when we cease to be self-centered and have a glimpse of the intersubjective structure of being. Consider a shy young man at a party, who is extremely nervous and worries about whether others will think favorably of him.[38] His consciousness is centered on himself. Suppose another man comes to him and talks to him, and then tells the young man that he once knew his parents. We can imagine that the young man will feel a sense of relief and start opening up to the man. Marcel tells us that this is an instance of intersubjectivity—the young man ceases to focus exclusively on himself and starts to form a bond with the man. But this certainly doesn't mean that we must wait passively for others to engage us and form a bond with us. In fact, Marcel stresses that we must learn to see things through others' eyes[39] and open ourselves toward others. We must make room for others in ourselves.[40]

But if, by nature, we tend to be self-centered, how is it possible that we cease to take ourselves as the center of concern? It is at this point that Marcel stresses the importance of the metaphysical freedom that we all possess—we are aware of our own freedom, and it is up to us to choose to open ourselves up for others or shut ourselves within our own world.[41] In the end, the choice is ours.[42]

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[37] Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, Vol. I,* pp.61-62.

[38] *Ibid.,* pp.176-78.

[39] Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity,* p.51.

[40] *Ibid.,* p.88.

[41] Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, Vol. II,* pp.107, 181; Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity,* p.227.

[42] It must be stressed that the concept of metaphysical freedom cannot be verified in the technical sense of the term. We are *aware* of our own freedom, but we cannot verify it. But, contrary to what Marcel thinks, isn't it the case that contemporary thought tends toward the deterministic mode of thinking? That is, since the laws of nature are regarded as universal, they are interpreted by some to apply in the area of human choices and actions as well, and so human actions are regarded as determined by prior causes. If this interpretation is correct, it would follow that freedom in its metaphysical or absolute sense would be an illusion. The problem of metaphysical freedom is certainly one of the most perplexing problems in philosophy, at least from a materialistic viewpoint. What can be said here is that, for Marcel, the thesis of determinism is the result of the objective mode of thinking—the kind of thinking that is tempted to regard all of reality as physical or material and which can be understood through the application of scientific laws,

We have already mentioned that intersubjectivity starts with the "We-subject" instead of the "I-subject." Putting it slightly differently, intersubjectivity stresses the *bond* between myself and others. For Marcel, the idea of a bond is very different from the idea of being beside something. Something can be beside me without my noticing and caring for it and, as such, it has no effect on me. For example, while I am at the bus stop, there are people beside me. Yet, I neither know nor care about them; they have no effect on me. But in the case of my loved ones, even if they are not beside me, that does not prevent me from loving and caring for them. There exists a *bond* between us—the bond of love and friendship.[43] It is this bond of love and friendship that frees me from self-obsession and transforms my consciousness from being an "I-subject" to a "We-subject."

For Marcel, the bond between myself and others is formed by our sharing the same experience or "secret."[44] A unity between myself and another being emerges from the experience we share. By sharing a secret with another being, the "I" develops into a "We." This is the basis of Marcel's understanding of intersubjectivity. But most important of all, there is a secret shared by all human beings: the commonality of human suffering.[45] All of us, despite our differences in religious beliefs, political opinions, personal tastes, intelligence, physique, etc., are destined to face life's hardships, get sick, grow old, and eventually die. It is by recognizing these hardships that we are able to understand the true meaning of "brotherhood" or "friendship." In the last analysis, Marcel's metaphysics of *we are* is nothing short of the universal love that binds all human beings together.

IV. Intersubjectivity and Moral Responsibility

If it is true that how we perceive ourselves as morally responsible agents is largely dependent on our concept of self and if we start from an intersubjective self (a "We-subject") instead of an atomic and individualistic self, what will this imply for the concept of moral responsibility?

Let us examine more closely the various instances of being responsible. As can be seen from our previous discussion on contemporary theories of moral responsibility, the causal relationship plays a crucial role in our ascription of moral responsibility—if someone is morally responsible for something, he or she must at least be part of the cause. For example, I might be held responsible for failing to take good care of my pets, since I am *the cause* of my pets' living in poor conditions. But our ascription of moral responsibility based on the cause and effect relationship is not restricted to individuals and individual actions. It may extend further. Sometimes an individual, simply by being a member of a certain group and submitting to certain practices, might be held responsible for something that has been collectively done. For example, even though I might disapprove of the slaughtering of innocent animals, by being a meat eater, I contribute to this practice.[46] Though I

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at least in principle. It is precisely this objective mode of thinking that Marcel rejects. He clearly states that there are human experiences that cannot be objectified, and that are not subject to a materialist explanation. (See Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, p.6.)

[43] Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existence,* p.53.

[44] Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity,* p.33.

[45] Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, Vol. I,* p. 181; Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity,* p.8.

[46] There are those who disapprove of the abuse of animals in food preparation (e.g., in factory farming) but who nonetheless regard it as acceptable to eat animals that are "mercifully slaughtered," and there are those who disapprove of the eating of meat regardless of whether or not the animals are mercifully slaughtered. (I am grateful to the editor for pointing out this distinction.) I personally find Peter Singer's argument against the practice of eating meat persuasive. According to Singer, although there is no logical contradiction in holding that (a) inflicting suffering on innocent animals is wrong and that (b) painless killing of animals is acceptable, "practically and psychologically it is

am not *the direct cause* of the slaughtering of innocent animals (since I do not work in a slaughter house), I am nonetheless *the indirect cause* of the slaughtering of innocent animals. In this sense, all the meat lovers, including myself, are "collectively responsible" for the continued existence of the practice of slaughtering innocent animals in our culture.[47]

Now, if the only way to understand the concept of moral responsibility is through the cause and effect relationship, then it will appear that the Dostoyevsky passage is inexplicable. How can I be responsible for the starvation of young children in Africa or for the extinction of a certain species of bird when I stand in no obvious causal relationship to them?

However, I would venture to suggest that there might be a sense of responsibility that "precedes" the cause and effect relationship. It is this sense of responsibility that seems to be intimately attached to Marcel's thesis of intersubjectivity and that allows us to appropriately understand the Dostoyevsky passage. Let us consider a concrete example. A loving father cares for the well-being of his son. His caring is independent of what effect his actions might have on his son or whether his actions have any effect at all.[48] Even if the father is put in jail and has no means to get in touch with his son, this does not prevent him from caring for his son. To put it differently, the father's caring for the son "precedes" or is independent of the cause and effect relationship. Even if the father and the son are never to see each other again (so that their actions will have no influence on one another), the caring does not stop. Just like the father in the example, our *caring* for someone (or something) has this special "property"—it is not constrained by the cause and effect relationship. Even if we do not stand in any kind of causal relationship to someone or something, this does not prevent us from caring for him, her, or it.

Let us probe a bit deeper. Since our caring is not constrained by the causal relationship—we can still care for something even if we do not stand in any obvious causal relationship to it—and since the causal relationship is situated within the framework of space and time,[49] this seems to imply that our caring transcends space and time. Now, here is the important point: *caring brings its own responsibility*. By caring for someone or something, we feel responsible for his, her, or its well-being. This sense of responsibility is very different from the kind of moral responsibility that is entirely based on the causal relationship and that is assumed in our contemporary moral theories.

So how are we to understand the concept of caring? What is its basis? To put it very crudely, to care for something is to extend a part of one's self to that thing. If I genuinely care for someone or something, I regard it as a part of my-self, and I will take necessary measures to ensure his, her, or its well-being.[50] Now, I don't want to go so far as to identify this concept of caring with Marcel's intersubjectivity, but it can be readily observed that there are similarities. By caring for something, I pull myself out of the egocentric mindset and form a bond with whatever it is that I care about.[51] This interpretation of caring seems to be consistent with Marcel's intersubjectivity.

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impossible to be consistent in one's concern for nonhuman animals while continuing to dine on them" (Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* [New York, NY.: Harper Perennial, 2009], p.159). If one accepts the principle that it is wrong to cause suffering to another innocent and sentient being—whether it be a human or a nonhuman being—it seems appropriate to follow one's logic and stop eating meat altogether.

[47] For an interesting discussion of the difference between collective responsibility and shared responsibility, see Larry May, *Sharing Responsibility* (Chicago, IL.: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp.36-54.

[48] Of course, he might hope that his actions can influence his son. But even if they don't, his caring doesn't stop.

[49] Or, to put it differently, the concept of cause and effect cannot be understood apart from the framework of space and time, which is the framework in which we recognize and situate facts and things.

[50] It is interesting to note that sometimes a person may regard the well-being of what he or she cares about as more important than his or her own well-being.

[51] There are also cases of manipulation disguised as a form of caring. For example, a dominating mother might insist her child pursue a certain career under the pretext of caring. But the reality might be that she just wants to manipulate her child to gratify her own vanity.

Perhaps we can go a step further and say that the genuine form of caring has its root in intersubjectivity.

The next point I would like to suggest is: *caring brings its own responsibility*. By caring for someone or something, we feel responsible to take necessary measures to ensure his, her, or its well-being. For example, someone who truly loves and cares for dogs will take good care of not only her own dogs but also other stray and abandoned dogs. She feels responsible for the well-being of other stray and abandoned dogs not because she is causally responsible for their poor conditions, but because she cares for them. This is the responsibility that has its origin in caring, or, to use Marcel's vocabulary, intersubjectivity. In fact, examples such as this one are so commonplace that sometimes it is surprising how contemporary moral theorists tend to forget them and base their idea of moral responsibility entirely on the concepts of control and causal relationship.

If what I have argued is correct, then there is a form of responsibility that derives from our caring for someone or something, or, to put it differently, that has its basis in intersubjectivity, which is an objective feature of the structure of human beings. This is just another way of saying that if we perceive our self as intersubjective instead of atomic and individualistic, we will think differently of that for which we are responsible. I believe that it is too restricted a view to base our idea of moral responsibility entirely on the concepts of control and causal relationship. Furthermore, I believe it is the "intersubjective form of responsibility"—the kind of responsibility that has its origin in intersubjectivity—that makes it possible for us to interpret the Dostoyevsky passage appropriately.[52]

V. Further Considerations

I would like to end this paper with two further considerations:

1. Even if Marcel's philosophy of intersubjectivity may help us understand the Dostoyevsky passage, why should we accept a philosophy of intersubjectivity? That is, why are we not only responsible for what issues from ourselves?

Strictly speaking, I think the thesis of intersubjectivity cannot be "proven" to be true—since, as Marcel has pointed out, intersubjectivity is not something to be seen or known but something to *be*. If we understand the idea of proof in its "objective" or "scientific" sense, and since intersubjectivity is *not* a fact that can be seen, observed, and verified, the thesis of intersubjectivity can never be proven to be true.

As a second point, if Marcel's intersubjectivity cannot be "proven" to be true and if humans are by nature prone to be selfish and egoistic—as many philosophers and psychologists have tried to convince us—what ground is there to argue for the view that we are responsible for others in need? Perhaps we can argue along these lines: since we all need other people's help from time to time, it is in our best interest if we can ensure that others will help us in times of need. According to the principle of reciprocity, our best bet that others will help us in times of need is that we offer our help to them should they need it. So, for pragmatic or selfish reasons, we should help those in need. But this argument is not very convincing. Our idea of responsibility seems to be incompatible with the ideas of self interests and egoistic desires. It is therefore questionable to defend our responsibility to help others on the grounds of self interests and egoistic desires.

[52] As noted earlier, Marcel expresses a similar idea by stating that "[the fundamental idea of intersubjectivity is that]...we are not alone, that whatever we do we are responsible for what happens to others" (Gabriel Marcel, *A Gabriel Marcel Reader,* p.129).

The key point is that we must recognize that what cannot be *proven* does not necessarily mean that it cannot be *acknowledged*. It is Marcel's view that while intersubjectivity cannot be proven, it can nonetheless be acknowledged by appealing to our own lived experience. Furthermore, for some people, to reject the thesis of intersubjectivity is to betray the best part of themselves—the part that makes them "humane." Therefore, for these people, to acknowledge and accept intersubjectivity is in fact to recognize the best part in themselves, and nourish it.

2. Gabriel Marcel is widely known as a Christian philosopher. In fact, he even states that he wants to bridge the gap between non-believers and the Christian faith.[53] In explicating his idea of intersubjectivity, Marcel does not merely stress the bond between human beings, but he also stresses the bond that exists between human beings and the transcendent.[54] He even states that "human beings can be linked to each other by a real bond only because, in another dimension, they are linked to something which transcends them and comprehends them in itself."[55] Now, the question is: *Must a philosophy of intersubjectivity be interpreted within a religious framework? Must it bring in the dimension of the transcendent in order for it to be tenable? Can someone accept the philosophy of intersubjectivity without being committed to any particular religion?*

First of all, it is important to distinguish "religious consciousness" from "a particular form of religion." "A particular form of religion" refers to any of the established world religions with formalistic rituals and specific doctrines, such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism. "Religious consciousness," on the other hand, refers to a state of consciousness—a consciousness that has become aware of the "spiritual" or the "transcendent" dimension of being.[56] A religious consciousness need not adhere to a particular form of religion. Though Marcel is fond of the Christian religion, he is explicit that his idea of intersubjectivity neither depends on nor presupposes Christian data[57] and that it can be recognized by someone unacquainted with any religion whatsoever.[58]

But this doesn't mean that the dimension of the transcendent can be omitted in Marcel's idea of intersubjectivity. In fact, for Marcel, a human person's bond with the transcendent is the most fundamental aspect of the intersubjective structure of being.[59] Hence, for Marcel, one can adhere to the philosophy of intersubjectivity without being committed to a particular form of religion, but one cannot do so while neglecting the transcendent dimension of being.

But, despite what Marcel states, is it not possible for someone to accept elements of intersubjectivity while entirely neglecting the transcendent aspect? *Prima facie*, it does seem plausible. For example, someone who is not aware of the transcendent aspect of being may nonetheless genuinely care for another being and therefore form a bond with him or her. He or she will then feel responsible for his or her well-being and take necessary measures to ensure his or her happiness and prosperity. But even if this position is possible (which I think it is), it is not Marcel's view of intersubjectivity.

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[53] Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity,* p.120; Marcel, *Being and Having,* pp.199-200.

[54] Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, Vol. I,* pp.163-64; Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity,* p.167; Gabriel Marcel, *Man Against Mass Society,* trans. G. S. Fraser (South Bend, IN.: St. Augustine's Press, 2008), p.16.

[55] Gabriel Marcel, *Man Against Mass Society,* p.194.

[56] It is an open question as to how the transcendent or the spiritual is to be interpreted.

[57] Gabriel Marcel, *A Gabriel Marcel Reader,* p.45.

[58] Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity,* p.80.

[59] Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, Vol. I,* pp.163-64; Gabriel Marcel, *Man Against Mass Society,* pp.16, 194.

So the next thing to inquire is the following: Why is it so important for Marcel to incorporate the transcendent into his system of intersubjectivity? I think there might be two main reasons. First, without the transcendent aspect, our bonds with and caring for others will tend to be capricious and parochial. We will tend to form bonds with and care for those who are close to us and give us pleasure. But this attitude is totally insufficient for us to fulfill the ideal of universal love and brotherhood, which seems to be implanted in our nature. Second, by incorporating the transcendent aspect of being into one's system of intersubjectivity, it opens up the possibility of transcending death. As it is widely known, death is a major theme in Marcel's work.[60] If the materialistic view of life is mistaken and death is not final, then we have hope that we may "transcend" death, the misunderstanding of which has caused all kinds of sufferings and perversions.[61] Third, one further important point can be made: it may be possible to *practice* the life of intersubjectivity but not to *justify* it philosophically *without* appeal to the transcendent.

[60] See Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond,* trans. Stephen Jolin and Peter McCormick (Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp.120-31; Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, Vol. II,* pp.146-65; Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to the Metaphysics of Hope,* trans. Emma Craufurd and Paul Seaton (South Bend, IN.: St. Augustine's Press, 2010), pp.282-96.

[61] Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator,* p.282.