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THE WILL TO BELIEVE IN ONE'S TRUE BEING

Love and God for William James and Gabriel Marcel

John R. Shook

William James the spiritual pragmatist and Marcel the Christian existentialist never expected abstract arguments for God to conclude with a sure faith for anyone, including the faithless. Yet the faithful know intimately what unbelievers will not, living forever through an experiential unity with the eternal. Death isn't a doorway to enter immortality; what is undying would not wait upon an incidental event like bodily death. James and Marcel can agree that whatever it is about us that merits immortality is something that must have been essential for our formation from birth, and will be perpetuating onwards from death. Much of ourselves as individual personalities is temporal and temporary, unworthy of eternality, so only what is intrinsic to our personhood is enduring.

Our intrinsic personhood would not be inscrutable, fortunately, to those sensitized to their abiding values and devout commitments. In the hands of two of the most perceptive and discriminating investigators into the breadths and depths of lived experience, a phenomenological and psychological journey beckons. Both James and Marcel expect godliness to appear there, if anywhere. Despite Marcel's reluctance to tie his experiential philosophy of religion to anything in pragmatism, his methods of justifying faith in the eternal follow out James's pragmatist prescriptions for comprehending the personal self and ascertaining the validity of belief. "It is on the ground of immortality that the decisive metaphysical choice must be made" (Marcel 1950: 151) about the meaningfulness of life or the meaninglessness of existence. For both thinkers, the path to an acquaintance with God starts from the personal journey toward eternity.

1. Finding truth

Unlike typical philosophers of religion who acknowledge James and *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) in some respectful or at least dutiful way, it is difficult to locate any mention of James in Marcel's many books. Marcel surely encountered key Jamesian views, however muted or diluted, in the writings of American philosophers, especially Josiah Royce, William Hocking, and Henry Bugbee, that in turn influenced Marcel's own thought. Yet the profound originality of Marcel's thought cannot be tracked back to theses defended by those Americans, or to Henri Bergson's intuitionism that liberated Marcel from absolute idealism, or to any of the European phenomenologists or existentialists that he mentions, either.

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Behind all of the publications expressly cited in the pages of Marcel's works, a guiding spirit accounts for the kinship that Marcel felt with his allies. What kind of alluring mentality could account for this otherwise disparate assembly of voices reassuring Marcel as he made his intellectual journey? From Bergson and Royce, Hocking to Bugbee, there is only one philosopher remaining to serve as the common interlocutor behind them all: William James. William James (1842–1910) and Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973) were personalists, empiricists of a radical type, and psychological explorers into religious experience. Among all pragmatists, James interfaces best with Marcel's philosophical vision and message, along with convergences in philosophical psychology as well as psychology of religious experience, no matter whether James could have ever arrived at Marcel's Catholicism.

Marcel sensed the origins of his genealogical roots. At the outset of his William James Lectures at Harvard, published as *The Existential Background of Human Dignity*, he does not fail to mention a long-standing debt to James, Royce, and Hocking. James's insistence on experience's irreplaceable value for freshening thought's vigor was evidently passed on to Marcel (1963: 5). He offered one further glimpse into a connection with James's approach to philosophy. His 1960 article on "Contemporary Atheism and the Religious Mind" brings up pragmatism in one form popularized by James, as the "will to believe."

> Certainly the expression, "the will to believe," used by William James, is open to criticism, for it always risks being interpreted in a pragmatic sense which neither the metaphysician nor the believer can accept. But it is very doubtful that faith can be thought out without the intervention of a volitional aspect of subjectivity.
>
> (Marcel 1960: 255)

That "pragmatic sense" is due to James himself, from a takeaway slogan to the effect that "truth is what works," so often repeated by both advocates and critics. James's version of Peirce's pragmatic maxim, asking a clear idea of something to conceive its effects upon practical endeavors, seeks truth in the course of future events elicited by our practical actions taken from expectations about results. This view does not raise any complaint from Marcel. Letting truth depend on the power of prior belief, rather than letting belief depend on the consequential power of truth, arouses his complaint. Marcel rightly raises objections that should be considered, from either the objective or subjective side. Metaphysically, basing the truth of God's existence on benefits from God-belief is a reduction of divinity to desire, but realities can be quite dissatisfactory. Psychologically, facing the disappointments of troublesome life, not the good times, brings out the real power and proof of religious devotion. Marcel sets aside that crude "desire-belief" analysis of knowledge, just as James did for much the same reasons, in order to keep unified what should not be sundered: our capacity to pursue contacts with real things to yield verifications.

James did expect verifiable ideas to enrich human experience. Being religious, like being scientific, cannot be, and should not be, more a matter of dogmatic conformity than experiential receptivity. That openness and receptivity supplies pragmatism's advantage, as James avows in his 1907 book *Pragmatism*:

> Pragmatism is willing to take anything, to follow either logic or the senses, and to count the humblest and most personal experiences. She will count mystical experiences if they have practical consequences. She will take a God who lives in the very dirt of private fact – if that should seem a likely place to find him.
>
> (P: 44)

Marcel, as we shall see, has similar reservations about limitations inherent to reasoning and observation. James trusts the full breadth of lived experience when taken in an experimental spirit: the credibility to a belief depends on how much of life prospers from acting upon it, and not upon how much one already wants to believe. Marcel does not quote from James's *Pragmatism*, but this passage illustrates how James had far more in mind about truth than just individual desire:

> [Pragmatism's] only test of probable truth is what works best in the way of leading us, what fits every part of life best and combines with the collectivity of experience's demands, nothing being omitted. If theological ideas should do this, if the notion of God, in particular, should prove to do it, how could pragmatism possibly deny God's existence? (P: 44)

Veritable and verifiable truths are those leading all of us toward more fulfilling lives. This is a collectivist view, not an individualist view, of cumulative verification. These social and temporal factors deflect the oft-heard criticism that James's idea of truth endorses a belief in anything from enough prior conviction. James insisted that truth's realization must appear in personal experience, while bearing a value beyond any individual's achievement alone. Subjectivity, to the extent that it may carry cognitive import, cannot be lonely or solipsistic. This tenet resounds through the founders of pragmatism, Charles Peirce and William James, in their colleagues and students such as Josiah Royce and William Hocking, and further on with John Dewey and George Mead.

2. Social selves

Both James and Marcel start from a view of lived experience as thoroughly embodied and enactive experience. Our conscious awareness is embedded within an enfolding world to be actively experienced. Marcel challenges empiricism to be fully empirical toward experience itself: "After all, the error of empiricism consists only in ignoring the part of invention and even of creative initiative involved in any genuine experience" (Marcel 1956: 128). Poor psychology and impoverished philosophy clung to that dualistic subjectivism, exemplified in Descartes, where one always experiences only consciousness itself. "Consciousness does not exist" was James's protest against subjectivism and its claim that only passing mental states and their contents are ever rightly had and truly known. As Marcel put it, "it is not possible to treat all experience as coming down in the end to a self's experience of its own states" (Marcel 1950: 51).

James abandoned Kant as well as Descartes. He asserted that the "I" is not an epistemological "subject" or "thought" accompanying all experiences. The consistencies of our mental life is bound up with the continuities of our bodily life. The "empirical self" was James's term for that widest sphere of lived experience resulting from an embodied existence within the world. Marcel similarly emphasized this embodied life as the ground for what it is always like to be a human being. We are experiencing our bodies engaging the world, not just experiencing our nervous systems or our brains. As embodied selves, we always share a common space of bodily activity and interaction with other bodily selves. The reality of other selves as responsive and caring agents (not just others as bodies mechanically moving through space and time) is immediately given, and nothing like an theoretical inference from phenomena. Other minds are already with us from birth to death. Marcel does not credit James with this view, although *The Principles of Psychology* could be cited. Hocking serves as Marcel's reliable resource.

> No philosophical text has impressed me more strongly than the one in which the American philosopher, W.E. Hocking, in his book *The Meaning of God in Human*

> *Experience*, has established that we cannot really conceive an apprehending of the other which is not truly an apprehending of ourselves and which confers on our experience its human weight.
>
> (Marcel 1967: 26)

With Hocking's endorsement in mind, Marcel was well prepared to treat the presence of other selves as an essential part of a human being's shared environs, and hence nothing dualistic in principle could keep two minds from immediately sharing experiences, however infrequent or causal that may be. He wrote about "the essentially anti-cartesian character of the metaphysic to which we shall have to direct ourselves. It is not enough to say that it is a metaphysic of being; it is a metaphysic of *we are* as opposed to a metaphysic of *I think*" (Marcel 1951: 9). This is not about telepathy or mind-reading – the event of mind-sharing would actually be among the most ordinary episodes, but characterized by a common intent and intentionality about close cooperation together. This shared mentality gets displayed among the well-practiced members of a musical group or a dancing troupe, or a small team of artisans minding how their skills must seamlessly blend together in the craft, or a moment of closest intimacy of mutual caring between two people. The self need never be truly alone when devoted attention to another melds minds.

James and Marcel sought human nature in the sociality of the self, a mentality characterized by fidelity rather than logicality. We understand ourselves, and become our better selves, through sincere commitment and moral responsibility. Recognition, beyond cognition, allows caring *for* others rather than just *using* others, attaining a level of concern that is intrinsically motivating and fulfilling. Complete concern for another person makes us persons, too.

Mentality in humanity must essentially be sentimentality. Sentimentality isn't a childish affectation; social cognition about making and fulfilling our commitments constitutes the highest stage of mental development for our "super-social" species. James and Marcel both suspect that durable sentimentality forges the interpersonal bonds required for everything else we admire about humanity. The "subject-object" intentionality spanning the chasm between thought and things gets surpassed with the "self-to-self" communality where no ontic gap is experienced. Marcel writes, "The more I raise myself to a really concrete perception of my own experience, the more, by that very act, shall I be attuned to an effective understanding of others, of the experience of others" (Marcel 1951: 5–6).

The being of being human is revealed in our creative activities with others, where we can best become our selves. To truly be is to be dynamic, creative, and responsive. These are capacities only realized with others, not insentient things, and unrealizable by any ego or a bare "I". To be is to have one's being in mutual relations of engagement. Along with the pragmatists, Marcel found that the realm of the social, where participation is everything, supplies an irreducible and indispensable category, in both an experiential and explanatory way.[1]

Inter-personal participation is where all superior values originate for us as part of humanity. Faithfulness to relationships for their own sake conveys intrinsic worth to these partnerings and communings, a worth unobtainable by any lone agent following one's own thoughts or conducting one's plans. One must find a way to regard oneself as an end, to be treated as an end in itself. That way proceeds through the lives of others. The ego cannot create, of and from itself, sustaining values. None of the pragmatists, and certainly not Marcel, was interested in reviving an ego-centric voluntarism in the mold of Fichte or Schopenhauer. No lone will can simply will into existence authentic sustaining values, of more lasting worth than mere satisfactions of passing desires.

3. Creating ethics

The role of voluntary activity is essential to any cognition. A classification of "functionalism" for pragmatism's treatment of ideas provides clarification to that general category of "voluntarism" asserting volition's key role in acquiring knowledge, including moral knowledge. Abandoning a correspondence notion of truth, avoiding a representational view of belief, and advocating a naturalism for both values and facts, pragmatism found knowledge where it serves life.

We hear this functionalism clearly in James's writings. The meaningfulness of an idea is intentional in a practical way, leading one's experience toward an effective engagement with the idea's object, confirming that idea's objectivity. It is that "leading onwards" as a suggestive means to further experience which constitutes cognitive meaning, not something intrinsic to the thought as it phenomenally occurs. The qualities of an episodic idea could be intensely feeling-laden and charged with emotion, while just as potentially cognitive for intelligent conduct as anything coldly propositional. Only the actual functioning of an idea, a belief, a judgment – whatever conveyance of conscious thought that might be named – bestows any cognitive meaning that matters for knowledge and truth. Even static images or propositional beliefs of representation are only relevant to truth because they are capable of leading toward a "re-presentation" and reacquaintance with the actual matter so represented.

This functionalism can be heard in the work of numerous philosophers and psychologists who studied with James or Royce at Harvard, including William Hocking, who affirmed the continuity between an idea as felt and then that idea as confirmed (Hocking 1912: 67–68) in a way that earned Marcel's admiration (1951: 41). Marcel also read in Hocking a pragmatist approach to faith that follows from this cognitive functionalism. Mere "willing-to-believe" starts just from capricious desire, as Marcel noted, and therefore has equally capricious destinations. Something more essential or fundamental to humanity should provide the ground of life-transformative faith.

Hocking, like James and Royce before him, points to our moral experience as social beings, and moral motives proceed from thoughts no less cognitive than emotive. Acting from moral motivation creates its characteristic results, affecting interpersonal relationships, yielding a kind of experiential knowledge about the social sphere of life. This social dimension, for idealism, can be extended indefinitely, to all-encompassing and even transcending levels. To be ethical in concert with reality therefore, on these presuppositions, amounts to participating in a relationship with God (Hocking 1912: 146–47). Hocking labels this commitment to the moral life as a "faith" to be fulfilled in its creation by moral persons:

> Faith is the loyal determination and resolve which sees the world as it is capable of becoming, and commits its fortunes to the effort to make real what it thus sees. The religious creed or world-view becomes a postulate rather than either an empirical discovery or a revelation to be obediently received.
>
> (Hocking 1912: 148)

Hocking goes further, claiming that immortality through living this ethical life is likewise a consequence of moral determination:

> I strongly doubt whether immortality is any such predetermined reality that it exists for any person apart from that person's will to make it real. The future life may well be such an object as my decision can make real or unreal, so far as my own experience is concerned.
>
> (Hocking 1912: 141–42)

Hocking is not trying to say that one is rewarded with immortality for good behavior according to divine judgment. Rather, living the ethical life creates immortality directly. From Marcel's appreciative remarks about Hocking, we might conclude that he found himself closely aligned with this creative view of faith's power.

Before the topics of immortality and God can be approached in Marcel's thought, the nature of moral experience must be examined. What is morality's place among the innumerable capacities and interests of people, in general? If a typical person's respect for moral values, virtues, and duties is at best occasional, incidental, or superficial, living an "ethical life" would be no more significant than living an "athletic life," an "artistic life," or a "culinary life." We all enjoy some physical activity, various entertainments, and good food. We like ourselves while doing the "good deed" once in a while. Only the few embark on singular lives devoted to idiosyncratic pursuits. Why would or should moralistic purity occupy a centrality for ordinary life? Those sorts of people do exist, standing out in their judgmental self-righteousness. As for the rest of us, sometimes we can be quite moral, sometimes not; deeper causes for our inconstancy must be largely amoral, not indicative of a moral nature able to make us consistently good. Let us grant, that whatever helps to compose human nature, morality is playing a role and perhaps a major role, but hardly a dominant role, and that may be all for the best, all things about humans considered. Pragmatism and its naturalist-leaning worldview is more hospitable to that measured estimate of humanity, than any romanticism or idealism.

However, the pragmatists are voluntarists and functionalists as well: the point of sustaining social relationships in a moral manner lies in the future, for developing the kind of society we will inhabit. Human intelligence is not about a fixation upon the rigidly dead past, either. Morality can seem ready-made and set in stone to unthinking people, functioning well where unhesitant conformity is best. Nevertheless, moral thinking is assuredly cognitive and capable of confirmation when conducted properly, oriented toward experiential knowledge about improving lives. As anyone can observe, being more moral than "average" by ordinary expectations will call for extra attention and effort. That is precisely the needed opportunity for thoughtful moral judgment and action – which is what ethics means and does.

The "ethical life" sought by pragmatism and idealism wouldn't be determined by our natural genealogy, or our instructed conformity. The ethical life has to be intentional, volitional, and consequential. Hocking astutely labeled his view as pragmatic idealism in *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*. For James and Hocking (along with Royce and Dewey), the ethical life has to be created and a better society must be constructed. James, among all the pragmatists, was as prepared as Marcel to regard religiosity as a matter of ethical transformation to be effected in the social world.

4. Lasting love

As a voluntarist, Marcel seeks the core motivation for moral conduct, and finds it in love. He proceeds to explore a phenomenology of experiencing the deepest loving between people. That maximal caring in loving can attain a special state of mentality where constancy, not contingency, lies in unquestioning trust and hope. That appreciable constancy, so characteristic of loving, is a direct experience of something profoundly central to being a personal self. Although each person is always a particular self, what it means to be a self is bound up with what it means to be devoted to another. I have to have concerns about myself since my own continuation is necessary for meeting the passing demands of earthly survival. My concerns for others as means

to my own ends can also sustain our mutual comforts when practical. These are contingent relationships. However, the self-to-self relationship can also become far more intimate where my own needs and the needs of another somehow merge together so completely that no contingencies can matter anymore.

Marcel sharply distinguishes the drive for self-preservation from devout piety:

> If I inspire another being with love which I value and to which I respond, that will be enough to create this spiritual interconnection. The fact of the reciprocal love, the communion, will be enough to bring about a deep transformation in the nature of the bond which unites me to myself.
>
> (Marcel 1962: 49)

Spirituality in generally does not need to be conceived as entirely other-worldly, or something to be awaited after one's death. The life of the spirit consists of the activity of living spiritually, with and through that same spirited devotion of others in accord. The precise character of that mutual devotion, aloof from the vicissitudes and contingencies of daily practicalities, deserves explicit and accurate description. Inaccurate descriptions can be excluded. Marcel cannot find anything but durability to that level of devotion to another in communion. What could be perishing, for the spiritual bonds of loving?

> When we are dealing with an individual being, apprehended in its quality of being loved, that is to say, for such a description cannot be divorced from the act of loving – then the meaning of the word "perish" is by no means clear. We can go further: there are very cogent reasons for thinking that the verb "perish" can by no means be used in this context, if it signifies what happens when a cloud disperses or a flame is extinguished. Those are physical processes, and they can be described in the language of objective knowledge; but if, as we have constantly insisted, it is true that ontology is bound up with intersubjectivity, then those processes can find no place in the ontological order.
>
> (Marcel 1951: 60)

Intersubjectivity, that shared mentality of unity among selves, deserves ontological status no less than thoughts or things. To deny an ontological reality to the spirited sphere of mutual caring and cooperation is to relapse back into the dualisms of materialism or Cartesianism, or solipsistic idealism.

Our selves, as members of humanity, are thoroughly social. For us, for our very being as living persons, our communal order consists of a social ontology no less fundamental than any other reasonable order for mere bodies or objects. As an ontology where undeniable durability rather than contingent instability has a prevalent place, this spirituality cannot be reduced to categories (such as "perishable") that better apply elsewhere in our experience.

The vital processes characterizing the spiritual realm of devoted sociality display a degree of permanence not found in our mental musings by ourselves, practical activities with others, or instrumental dealings with objects. Kantianism sought necessities in the innermost framings of mind; materialism expected necessities in the outermost laws of nature. Marcel found relief from impermanence in the interpersonal sphere of communing, vitally and experientially – and undeniably real for those participating.

5. Loving eternally

The experience of unconditional love for others, according to Marcel, is simultaneously an act of faith and an experience of being eternal. This experience of unconditioned eternality can also be rightly labeled as being immortal.

> Our analysis of the problems of existing and ceasing to exist has, in fact, led us to recognize that the bond between the two cannot be broken. "To say that one loves a being," says one of my characters, means, "Thou, at least, thou shalt not die." But the only reason, we must emphatically repeat, why such a statement can have any meaning is that love is not something which can be grafted on the affirmation of being. Moreover, we must have a more precise idea of what we mean by the perennial. In this context can perenniality be looked at as a simple perpetual continuation?
>
> (Marcel 1951: 61)

Marcel's answer to that question, is loving merely perpetual through ordinary time, or perennial throughout all time, proposes that eternality is present in faithful loving. How else could such unconditional fidelity function in a person's life?

That individual life, living for another, loves wholly with one's own being, where no merely contingent passion or promise could find hold and root. Such fidelity is about an unconditional vow, an absolute commitment with the other person. In Marcel's words, "love, in the fullest and most concrete sense of the word, namely, the love of one being for another, seems to rest on the unconditional: *I shall continue to love you no matter what happens*" (Marcel 1963: 74). A fine distinction may be drawn between perenniality and eternality for theological purposes, but Marcel's intent is to accurately describe the phenomenology of loving experience.

> For my part, I should rather be inclined to give a negative definition of perenniality: the real meaning of 'to say that one loves a being is to say, "Thou, at least, thou shalt not die" is rather "Because I love you, because I affirm you as being, there is something in you which can bridge the abyss that I vaguely call 'Death.'"
>
> (Marcel 1951: 61–62)

What is it like to realize how one is experiencing another's self as deathless? It impossible to experience oneself as dead, or to conceive oneself as lacking existence, but it is easy to think of oneself as nonetheless having a finite duration. Death and dissolution as events happening to physical bodies is very real. Surely one can desire to avoid death simply by never dying, but that seems to be an impractical goal. Whether that comes from a primitive survival instinct, or a manifestation of fixated self-love, there is little significance for the fundamental nature, the ontology, of the human being. But Marcel is not inquiring into wishes or wish-fulfillment. He is investigating the real ground for of hope against all hope placed in the absolute worth of the other beloved.

That absolute worth of the beloved is the opportunity to identify with the beloved. People can and sometimes do give up their lives in sacrifice for the sake of an idealized other, with a determination that cannot be labeled as suicidal. The point of suicide is to depart and leave nothing behind; the point of sacrifice is to unite and hold nothing back (Marcel 1964: 77). One's being is transcending the mundane world, since one's action from fidelity renders the contingent and mundane irrelevant. Communing with the deathless must mean an absorption with the deathless. Labeling this as a spiritual matter, as if this communion is only real "on the

other side," misses the key meaning of this existential bond of loving. Spirituality is already here for the willing soul, if it is anywhere. The corollary to connecting with the eternal is one's participation in eternality here and now, during a life of fidelity.

> It is not, I think, from the noumenal point of view that the indestructibility of the loved being can be affirmed: the indestructibility is much more that of a bond than that of an object. The prophetic assurance of which I spoke above might be expressed fairly enough as follows: whatever changes may intervene in what I see before me, you and I will persist as one: the event that has occurred, and which belongs to the order of accident, cannot nullify the promise of eternity which is enclosed in our love, in our mutual pledge. . . . Even if it is agreed that the act by which beings who love one another are united by a common bond implies within itself the inherent need for eternity (*Ewigkeitsforderung*), what enables us to say that this need is met in some substratum of reality which eludes our sight? . . . what we have to deal with here is in reality the metaphysical status of hope, of hope taken in its specific character, as opposed to desire.
>
> (Marcel 1951: 154–55)

Recalling the intrinsic sociality of every self, the abiding bonds of love and fidelity ground the ontology of being human. The alternative to taking each lone self as ontologically ultimate – a crudely solipsistic personalism – is to understand selves as together communally ultimate. To say that the human person possesses supreme worth does not mean that each individual human bears ultimate value by oneself. For Marcel, the full knowledge of what has superior status only comes from recognizing co-dependencies among loving selves, making them all persons at a "deeper level" of reality (Marcel 1949: 167). That reality is not hidden from experience, not matter how much the self-centered ego can ignore it. Selves are created from loving hopes, placed in us from birth until death, offered in caring, confidence, guidance, instruction, comfort, and sympathy. Persons create, and what they create best is more persons.

> First, I have to remind myself that the departed being of whom they now want me to believe that there is nothing left but a past, who is altogether past, was at the beginning nothing but a future. A loving conspiracy had at first to be formed around him, at a time when nothing was as yet known of what he would or could be. The essence of this being was still only the prophetic hopes he awakened in his relatives. And I have to ask myself in the presence of this death, which is perhaps only a birth or an ascension, if the conspiracy is not to be reproduced on a higher plane. This time it is round a sleep that the conspiracy must be centred – a sleep which must not be disturbed by intruders. But against what intrusion except that of infidelity and negation have we to guard?
>
> (Marcel 1962: 149)

Infidelity to others at bottom is an infidelity and negation of one's own being. Death threatens; why allow oneself to be vulnerable? People aren't compelled to be concerned with surviving death, but that is a self-fulfilling decision. Loving care for others installs what is good about you into their spirits, so yours does carry on, just as those who nourished your spirit live on within you.

> The ontological counter-balance of death is the presence in me of those who have a part in me, who have made me what I am and continue to make me. The veneration

> of the dead necessarily implies without doubt an analogous presence. When we speak here of remembering, it is the lack of metaphysical equipment which would permit giving an account of the experience which we want, not only to translate, but to consecrate.
>
> (Marcel 1967: 122)

Looking back in respect, one's attitude should be veneration.[2] Looking forward in hope, one's attitude should be fidelity. Our own true being, revealed in devotion to others both ahead and behind our own time, has already surmounted death, as far as Marcel can see.

Fidelity, Marcel says, is "the only means we have of effectively vanquishing time" (1964: 152). But we mustn't imagine that time is the enemy. Temporality is far from incidental to human existence; everything we will ever accomplish has to happen in due time. Our deeds reveal our true self, but their worth is measured by a higher standard than mundane consequences. Constancy amidst fluidity characterizes the human condition, in that endless striving for humanity. Becoming really human is the telos and purpose of a human being. Just a birth is needed to introduce a human being into the world; the genuine being of being human conducts one into humanity. Humanity therefore deserves our veneration, and that veneration of our origins as persons motivates our devotion to creating a more human and humane world.

6. Eternal being

Immortality for Marcel is an identity with having true being, but being human is about chosen activity, not inert passivity. The stabilities of our inner being allow us to create and live out bonds of caring fidelity, where spirited humanity has its higher being. True human *being* is participatory, not static or solitary. To be substantial within the world of humanity, one must commit to being consequential in that spiritual realm, where other persons have their life too. Merely impacting others on the mundane plane and getting impacted in turn cannot nourish anything spiritual, as no growth of humanity would result. Living the committed life of devotion to what is best for others is the way to participate in a mode of being that is both immanent and transcendent. Immanent, since a person's fidelities are intimately present for self-awareness. Transcendent, because personhood is irreducible to bodies in motion or interaction, and insusceptible to the fate of mere individuality or personality.

If there is a justification for this view upon the human grounds to eternality, perhaps it should be grasped as an existential exposition rather than a logical argument. The premises do not need to be veridically known, so much as they must be admittedly lived. One cannot be entirely unaware of one's faithful loving commitments, although one can easily be blind to the loving cares bestowed on oneself. A philosophical exposition of the prevailing conditions permitting one's flourishing as a person could not omit caring love. The most profound loves are undying intimations and destinations of immortality.

If a sequencing to Marcel's assembled exposition could convey some plausibility despite condensation, several points have key roles:

- Special kinds of genuine love are faithful connections that are entirely unconditional. Nothing the other person does could affect such a hopeful loving bond, including abandonment, disappearance, and death.
- When people say, "I still feel the other beloved person within me and beside me," their feelings are not simply memory, imagination, or wishful thinking; this is about the transcendent fully immanent within themselves.

This direct experience of loving with complete faith and hope is an experience of the other person as immortal, since physicality and bodily death fails to be relevant to that loving bond.

Our true being exists in this pure total love, so the essential nature of our soul must be immortal through this mutual loving.

The faithful lovers are immortal, because their true being has eternality in and through each other.

Only lovingly developed selves could aspire to immortality, but "the self" is no unitary matter for Marcel, or for James. The personal self as a whole does not prove to be a candidate for immortality on Marcel's existential account of love. James would have to concur, given his theory of multiple relational selves.

Loving with one's whole heart expresses constant fidelity, but the permanency of one's entire being is another matter. Love is a condition of mutual dependency, not a posture taken from a position of independence. Loving of the sort articulated by Marcel is both relational between, and intrinsic to, the loving selves. They share a part of each other, and that shared being is the crux of Marcel's focus. Two beings in that living, organic relationship cannot be the same apart. No positivistic or mechanistic analysis of being – dichotomizing what is essential apart from what is relational – does justice to vibrant life, or love. In the organic world, how something relates provides its essence. There is little that can be merely accidental there; only what proves indispensable will be lasting. Marcel sets aside the occasional loves, the situational loves, just affecting one's self. The most deliberate of loving forges a unity, and that unity between two is the bridge that bears eternality, anchored in their capacity for steadfast fidelity.

Individuals can join the eternal only by bonding with others. To think of a single individual's eternality through loving is to have an incomplete and misleading thought. To expect immortality for oneself without giving thought to others is quite mistaken. Just as mistaken is to assume that one's entire self merits immortality. Merit rests on commitment, from an inner place where it is the purest. It is said that rapturous love is able to consume someone. Romantic indeed, but subjective, and self-indulgent. Committed loving has an object larger than any single self, while anchored deep within selves. All the rest about an individual that stays untouched and unchanged by love – everything inessential to personhood – must eventually perish. Individuality per se does not join the eternal. Marcel's existential exposition at most encourages ethical immortality – the perpetuation of goodness among selves, but not entire selves as well.

Shall we agree with Marcel that loving care for another demarcates the moral life from the rest of life's treatment of others as mere practicalities and conveniences? Then let us further agree that the scope of the moral life determines the extent of personal immortality. Why would simply everything about a human being deserve to last past death? Personhood, not our inconstant personality, attains moral status. Quests for an immortality of personality cannot rise to the ethical level. The spirit survives, not the body, and only what is worthy about us exists in spirit. The moral life opens up the spiritual life. Death could not be any great transition or transformation of spirit; what is worthily spiritual simply remains so, while anything unworthy keeps its material appointment with dissolution.

It may seem that Marcel's existential exposition merely presumes, rather than first proves, that materiality cannot dictate terms to the conduct and course of spirituality. Neither Marcel nor James charts his metaphysical explorations in search of the external world; it is already empirically here for practical experience or it is nowhere important. Existentially, they instead explore the internal world in order to understand the nature of one's own being. How can one's manner of being human become accessible to self-understanding, so the fullest import of this

humanly life continues to serve life? What would be a pragmatic conception of a 'self', if a self is actually real, and the self is at all knowable? A functionalist and pragmatist is surely more recommended than appeals to intuition. This is not a self-evident issue, unless a self is described in an entirely phenomenal way, leaving it adrift and incohesive, doomed to insignificance.

For James the voluntarist and pragmatist, my real being is my doing. A pragmatist conception of a self answers to the same pragmatic maxim for clearly conceiving something in its reality. James expressed Peirce's principle in his book in this manner:

> To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve – what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all.
>
> (P: 29)

Conceiving any "self" has to consist of the evident effects of its activities. Conceiving of the reality of one's own self must be based on those same accessible empirical grounds. Pragmatism is only marginally intrigued by psychological "self-conceptions" that we like to maintain about ourselves, mostly taking the form of rationalizations and other excuses. Whatever authentic reality could be possessed by a self cannot be based on just self-deception or self-congratulation. I truly know myself to the extent of my appreciation for what I am evidently capable of doing. And I can evaluate my self-activity as I observe how my intended deeds and their ends do in fact proceed and prosper (or not). I have the opportunity to appreciate the intentionality, and hence the actuality, of my true self by honestly observing what I am committed to doing. My firmest commitments are my fidelities, that stability amidst my fluctuating mentality that takes up hourly and daily living. Mentality attends to matters with varying durations and intensities. Constancy is the sign of actuality. Among constancies, reliability is the mark of spirituality. And among reliabilities, fidelity is the manifestation of eternality.

What makes all fidelity possible? For Marcel, devoted faith placed in unconditioned and unconditional loving constitutes a creative participation in absolute love. Again, this is no happenstance matter. The real being of a self is participating in the eternal, and hence partakes of the eternal, where love abides. Hence, as an empirical and pragmatic matter, it is possible to directly experience that transcending of conditioned and finite existence, a material existence always verging on dissolution and meaninglessness. This existential exposition offered by Marcel amounts to a philosophical explanation for this indubitable verity of self-being in immortality.

7. Loving with God

James and Marcel both sketched out an approach, or an apology, for faith in God, proceeding from the deliberate exercise of personal conviction. Their philosophies did not contest reasoned arguments procuring conclusions that God must exist, as if the matter should be determined intellectually rather than experientially. Only a person's vital experience could legitimate belief in a transcending living presence within one's own life (Marcel 1950: 46, 1951: 73, 131). In Marcel's words – words that could have been those of James – religious experience is personal first and foremost, if it is intimate with God, and no philosophy earns veto power over its validity (Marcel 1951: 4)

Neither philosopher would ask anyone for convictions about matters beyond the reach of possible experience, especially matters so transformative for one's innermost character. That

self-transformation, occurring at an ethical level, supplies the sure evidence and the fair test for an adequate idea of God.[3] James and Marcel turn Kant's transcendental idealism completely around. The fundamental philosophical issue is not about an absolute Self binding together a chaotic world of phenomena in a demonstration of its transcending cosmic activity. Instead, empirical philosophy exposes an eternal absolute preventing the disintegration of the personal self through love's transcending responsibility.

Transcendence is not immune to a pragmatic conception, for any sort of real deity. Unlike natural theology, expecting God to account for the known material world, an existentially pragmatic theology expects religious people to be accountable for changing the human world. In his essay "The Will to Believe," James recounts the effects for us of a world with God in it.

> The whole defence of religious faith hinges upon action. If the action required or inspired by the religious hypothesis is in no way different from that dictated by the naturalistic hypothesis, then religious faith is a pure superfluity, better pruned away, and controversy about its legitimacy is a piece of idle trifling, unworthy of serious minds. I myself believe, of course, that the religious hypothesis gives to the world an expression which specifically determines our reactions, and makes them in a large part unlike what they may be on a purely naturalistic scheme of belief.
>
> (WB: 32, fn. 32)

God is not testable, not due to inconceivability, but because a clear conception of a real God is about divine transformations of people religiously inspired to make real differences to life (Fontinell 2000). A pragmatic conception of God would not reduce it to mystical or perceptual phenomena. Nor must a pragmatic conception of God be delimited to hidden powers causing favorable or unfavorable events. A God immanent within people could be pragmatically conceived in terms of practical consequences they realize in their lives. A moral God immanently motivating people should be pragmatically conceived in terms of the ethical growth they elicit in humanity.

Could James's pragmatism arrive where Marcel's existentialism trends? For James, religious conviction makes the world a human stage for our willing participation, and

> whether a God exist, or whether no God exist . . . we form at any rate an ethical republic. . . . And the first reflection which this leads to is that ethics have as genuine and real a foothold in a universe where the highest consciousness is human, as in a universe where there is a God as well. "The religion of humanity" affords a basis for ethics as well as theism does.
>
> (WB: 150)

James sought a deity still co-creating a better world with humanity.

> God himself, in short, may draw vital strength and increase of very being from our fidelity. For my own part, I do not know what the sweat and blood and tragedy of this life mean, if they mean anything short of this. If this life be not a real fight, in which something is eternally gained for the universe by success, it is no better than a game of private theatricals from which one may withdraw at will. But it *feels* like a real fight – as if there were something really wild in the universe which we, with all our idealities and faithfulnesses, are needed to redeem.
>
> (WB: 55)

Now, James speaks of God without philosophical sophistications here. His religious readers would be forgiven for supposing that James's God is still the traditional theistic deity, if they cannot conceive of an immanent God co-creating a better world in cooperation with the better part of humanity.

Furthermore, an existentially pragmatist conception of God, along the lines of Marcel's apologetics, would not treat God as an independent person, for none of us is a person in any exclusionary or solitary sense. Love is about an intrinsic relation among true beings, capable of being loving among each other, and God is no exception. Deathless love among persons is a participation with absolute being (since conditioned being could never explain undying loving). For Marcel, this absolute being of unconditioned loving is what religion means by "God." Therefore, God is both presupposed by, and revealed experientially within, the personal experience of authentic love. Faith through love is faith in God. As Marcel says, "What we now presuppose is the active recognition, in God and through God, of the bond which constitutes all real love" (Marcel 1951: 97–98). Only this social and moral dimension of personhood, and not intellectual reasoning or empirical theorizing, can expose God to our understanding. However, this social view of God means that God is not a supreme person, but at most personal rather than "suprapersonal" (Marcel 1949: 121). Asking God to be more than just the community of persons is asking God to have little need for us or our faith.

As Marcel reaches his confessional crescendos, the more his words confirm that God's status as absolute being cannot be anything more than the perpetuity of spiritual humanity. He invites us to ponder

> the part played in this realm by the appeal to absolute transcendence. Is it possible to conceive of a real personal survival independently of this transcendence? I think that my reply would be as follows: there is no human love worthy of the name which does not represent for him who exercises it both a pledge and a seed of immortality: but, on the other hand, it is really not possible to exercise this love without discovering that it cannot constitute a closed system, that it passes beyond itself in every direction, that it really demands for its complete realisation a universal communion outside which it cannot be satisfied and is destined to be corrupted and lost in the end. Moreover, this universal communion itself can only be centred upon an absolute Thou.
>
> (Marcel 1962: 152)

That universality to personal communion is here with us, not adrift in unknowably noumenal realms. The more that unconditional love binds humanity together, the more that its collective nexus is simply humanity itself as the ideality of personhood. God is immanently real within humanity, or nowhere realizable at all.

Marcel's analogies cannot reach one of his much-desired judgments, that absolute being is constituted by a singular divine person. God is no more a "Thou" than any of the rest of us, and we can be treated as a Thou only through the mutual recognition of caring. God could not be personal if we are not faithful and loved faithfully in return. God is present in personhood itself, but personhood is essentially the sum of all that personal fidelity to loving others across the vastness of humanity. The reason why God confers existence to all of us is because we owe our lives as persons to Humanity which aspires to eternality and must seem immortal from any finite personal perspective (see Marcel 1951: 88). To say that one has faith in God is to proclaim that one bears fidelity to loving, which is to avow that one ethically communes with Humanity. To that spirit of Humanity we owe everything, including any opportunity for a meaningful existence and an eternal worth (Marcel 1962: 46–47).

Let Marcel's words supply our closing, where James's finitely creative God greets Marcel's creatively loving God:

> If belief in a living God is not to sink into mythology, it means, not exclusively but at least secondarily, that every approach to justice, for example, or to charity, in the person of my neighbour, is at the same time an approach to this God Himself; and this entails an entirely' concrete but quite mysterious relation between this living God and this creature who is my neighbour. If this were not admitted, what one maintained to be a living God would thereby be reduced to an idea which is of necessity unalterable and against which I cannot sin.
>
> (Marcel 1951: 134)

Notes

1 Participation may be the central idea of Marcel's metaphysics; consult Gallagher (1962).
2 Compare Marcel with Royce on the "cult of the dead" (Clendenning 1999: 380).
3 See Shook (2013) and Shook (2018). James approached God through ethicality, rather than immortality, yet loving devotion may bind them as Marcel urges. James tells us, "I have to confess that my own personal feeling about immortality has never been of the keenest order" (ERE: 78), and calls immortality "a secondary point" in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (VRE: 412).

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