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An Existential Proof of God

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For the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**

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AN EXISTENTIAL PROOF OF GOD

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty
of
Purdue University
by
Anthony Malagon

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy

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The following dissertation defends the view that one can have knowledge of God outside of what might be called the realm of objectivity, or objective thought, within which all traditional proofs of God lie. In other words, it will be argued that even if it is conceded that a conclusive proof of God is not possible, one can, nevertheless, be justified in one’s belief in God without recourse to the traditional vein of logical-objective proofs. To do so, I call upon the works of Soren Kierkegaard and Gabriel Marcel, both of whom reject the view that there are any conclusive objective proofs of God, yet, affirm the existence of God. This alternative path that they seem to uncover – towards an assurance of God – is what I seek to explore: I characterize this path as an existential proof of God.

In the first chapter, I shall investigate the possible incommensurability of their existential approaches, as suggested by Thomas Anderson, and end with a resolution of this tension by a reflection upon concrete experience. The second chapter will explore the notion of existential truth in such a way as to absolve both Kierkegaard and Marcel from the labels of irrationalism and subjectivism as they are sometimes imagined to be. It will be also shown how Marcel’s more phenomenologically robust approach provides a more
philosophically friendly method (in that it makes explicit some of the reasons for his method whereas Kierkegaard does not), which also allows for some clarification of Kierkegaard’s own philosophy. The third chapter provides a final reflection on the notion of an existential proof of God and its legitimacy, which can be found in the works of religious existentialists such as Kierkegaard and Marcel.

The conclusion of this dissertation is that Kierkegaard and Marcel have opened a space for the possibility of a kind of religious knowledge hitherto ignored, or rather, given scant attention in the literature. Furthermore, I have defended the view that this kind of religious knowledge amounts to what can be called an existential proof of God. In the end, this existential proof, admittedly, has the paradoxical nature of not being a conclusive proof of God (nor intending to be), but nevertheless justifying the individual’s belief in God in and through his/her own concrete life experiences and existential encounters.
PREFACE
Dear Aunt Helen:

It brings me such great joy to hear from you at this time that I can hardly contain it, let alone describe it. The excitement of receiving your letter at this particular time is so overwhelming that I could almost succumb to tears. I have so much to share with you that I cannot decide where to begin; so I guess I will just begin here, where I am: basking in the sheer joy of the timing of your letter.

It is not simply the amount of time that we have not spoken—six years to be exact—that brings me joy, but the circumstances under which I have received it. You see aunt Helen, I have recently been going through some profound changes and discoveries in my life, and as a result, I had actually begun drafting a letter for you, but I had not finished it. Instead, to my great surprise, you wrote to me! And not only had I begun to write a letter to you around the same time that your letter was on its way, but there were two other coincidences, which shocked me even more and challenged my understanding of existence to the core.

What first occurred was that, on the night before I received your letter, I had a vivid dream in which you sent me a message: a letter, in fact. And I simply thought it was a strange dream, and that it would be quite amusing if it were the case that you had in fact written; but I did not entertain this as an actually possibility. I thought it was quite unlikely and did not seriously consider it. But what happened next is what was most shocking.

After I awoke from my bed, while I was on the way to pick up my mail some distance from my cabin, I saw one of your favorite creatures: A Japanese Beetle! It stopped in the middle of my path as to make sure that I see it. It appeared to stare at
me, moving its wings as if to communicate a message, and in that moment it was as if something inside me shifted. I felt that something quite unique was happening. So I stood there, silently contemplating, waiting to process the moment and receive the full impact of what it seemed was being communicated or revealed to me; for indeed, I felt as if these “coincidences” had some greater significance than the status of mere chance occurrences normally given to them. A few moments later, I felt as if you had just visited me—I felt you present, as if you were actually with me. I recalled that you mentioned to me that you had often dreamt of such creatures and that you felt some deep connection to them: that one day, after having a dream with them one night, one of these marvelous creatures sneaked into your car and settled upon your lap, staying there with you the entirety of your trip to work, making you feel as if it had flown out of your dreams and into your life. So, as you can imagine, when I saw this creature—which, incredibly, I was also seeing for the first time in my life—in this unlikely part of the country—it was like one of these creatures had flown out of your dreams and into my life and path, in order to convey the message that you were indeed with me, that I was not alone, and that you had in fact written me a letter as my own dream seemed to foretell! At that moment, without effort, a certainty came over me that I cannot describe but only affirm, as if it were an immediate knowledge that had just been graced upon me, for I did not consciously choose it. And when this silvery-green creature finally flew away, appearing to know it had accomplished its purpose, I eagerly ran to check my mail and confirm what I had felt within me with the greatest of certainty. To the immense surprise of my eyes, though not of my heart, there it was, your letter!
This experience in fact was the height of a month filled with what I would call gentle assurances from God! As you know, I had always struggled with God. I often despaired of not having any conclusive proof that would appease my reasoning mind, and thus my belief in God was frequently shaken. But with immense joy I share with you that with such assurances as I have received—including these, of which I now speak—no one could ever doubt that there is such a Being of Love within which we all exist, and within whom we arise? For it has been as if a symphony of events has conspired to bring me toward this moment of utter fulfillment—as if God Himself had orchestrated all the events of my life in order assure me that this was His Universe, and that I should not be afraid. This is the great news that I have been so eager to share with you aunt Helen: that I finally believe in God again! Truly. And in a way that I would have never have imagined, or believed possible. That I’ve receive such grace as I’ve never experienced, and in such a way as to fill me with the most indescribable joy that I can hardly contain the tears as I write. Oh the joy! A joy that seems to come from beyond: a joy so unbounded as to make the worst suffering of this existence appear insignificant: a joy so indescribable as if to be a kiss from eternity, from the eternal joy that awaits us: a joy so profound that it seems to provide the hope that I shall never despair in this universe since it is the source of a God who is Love. And what is more, is that this light, which I can only conceive of as source of all things, has also been my guide through out my spiritual journey, for I have the sense that I have not been alone. I have many times felt as if I have been gently steered into

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1 This captures, or parallels, Marcel’s notion of hope, where hope is not conceived as believing that a particular outcome will not manifest (as that of friend dying of cancer for instance), but that one has an assurance that in the end all will turn out well: that there is a purpose to all, or that universe is in fact on our side and conspires for our ultimate good—though such a good may not be apparent in our current circumstances.
the things that I have discovered, like I’ve been guided by a higher principle than that of chance and toward the resting place in which I now reside in. And it brings me so much pleasure to be able to share this with you how I arrived at this new assurance of God’s grace and reality, and I excitedly await your thoughts on all that I’ve come to believe.

As you know well, I have always had both a philosophical and spiritual inclination. As a result, you and I often spoke about religious and spiritual matters in my childhood even though many ignored my thoughts as the silly ponderings of a child. Yet, even though in most of my life I have had belief in God, in my adult life, I have gone through many struggles with my faith and belief—as you yourself predicted when you also prophesied that I would one day live alone for several years—I did not believe you at the time, but here we are. Anyhow, my journey has been a difficult one. I have gone from a naïve faith, to a fervent seeking of truth, to pure agnosticism and skepticism, even to the depth of atheism and despair. But now, I reside in a faith that I feel cannot be shaken; but also, in all honesty, with no clear way in which to communicate it, or convey it to others. For though I have found my own way to God and feel as though I have proven God to myself, so to speak, I have not done so in such a way as to be certain that I can convince others, or to make it known to the world with some logically valid argument or demonstrations. But without further delay, let me answer your specific question as to how I have been, and share with you my long and difficult journey: what I have learned, and how I have arrived at this new faith in God.
As you are aware, at least in part, it all started in my teenage years. I had been brought up Catholic, and though not very religious in the strictest sense, I had a strong belief in God. In fact, I often tried to convince my friends and came up with arguments for the existence of God. I found myself arguing for God or arguing against arguments that tried to disprove God. And after learning some philosophy from you and taking some logic courses, it soon became my task and greatest longing to prove God logically, and starting from any and every perspective imaginable; for, I was certain of God’s existence at the time, and wanted to prove it to everyone. I strongly believed in God and thought my belief to be rational and thus communicable and provable to all, at least in principle. And through the years I came up with many arguments that were convincing to me, though I could never convince any of my friends, or the people that I had debated against. In fact, such a task ended in total disillusionment one day, when, to my terror, I realized not only that I could never convince this particular acquaintance of mine of the reality of God, but that in all honesty, I could not answer any of the questions and objections he posed! They were honest, sharp, and intelligent. I had never encountered someone like him; and for the first time in my life, I could not come up with any answers! I felt utterly defeated and hopeless, though I did not let this show in front of my friend. I could not come up with any rational arguments against his views, nor could I come up with my own arguments in favor of God any longer, for he had objected successfully to all my attempts, and I could not come up with any more counter-arguments. Indeed, I thought I had succeeded against other people in the past, especially since I thought that I had succeeded in believing in God on a rational basis, as every philosopher desires, but this day was different: on this
day, I was defeated. On this day, against my own will, I became an atheist, an
unwilling atheist, … or one who could no longer believe in what he so desired: one
who could not believe in God.

Up to this point, I had considered myself to be a rational theist, and thus, I
believed that what I believed could be proved, at least in theory, and that what I
believed was unquestionably rational. But for this very reason, when I could not
defend myself rationally — when I could not find a rational basis for my belief — I had
no support, no way to hold on to my faith, and thus, I despaired. I could no longer
believe, and rest in the God of peace².

For months, and even years, I believe, I despaired. Quietly, I despaired,
longing to believe in a God that my intellect could grasp, or at least justify, but to no
avail. And how do you console a heart whose source of meaning and hope has been
stripped away with apparently no way out? I was devastated, and no one knew, for I
hid it in the depth of my being. My friends and girlfriend at the time had no idea and
thought all was well: but I was dying inside. I was starting to feel as if life had no
meaning and purpose and I often thought of suicide. If there is no God, I thought, then
there is no hope, no life, no meaning, and only death. All life seemed a perpetual
dying at best, or a continual torture of an existence that teases us with meaning and
purpose but leaves us empty-handed. So what is the point of being good, or even of
living, if all will simply end in death and destruction, in complete nothingness, or

² This is reminiscent of Saint Augustine: that the experience of rest he found in God was precisely
indicative of his Existence. This is also similar to Marcel’s notion of Ontological Exigence in which he
suggests that our unrest is indicative of misrelating to reality in some way, or to Being, which he also
equates with God; noting, moreover, that the filling experience in the proper awareness or relation to
Being is also indicative of its reality. It is interesting, furthermore, that Kierkegaard might be thought to
suggest something similar as well in his depiction of despair, where he states that the state of despair is
not properly relating to the power that established us, i.e. to God — See Sickness Unto death.
absolute non-existence! If all will be destroyed and return to nothing, then why should we care about anything at all? Why care for anything except the pleasures of the body that we can cling to as a distraction from the reality of a meaningless universe, a pointless existence? And so, that is what I did. I indulged in the distractions of my friends and the city: going to dance clubs, drinking, smoking, seeking women without thought or much consideration for the consequences. But all the while, even among these distractions, if I were honest, I secretly longed for more; I still longed for something more than the life I was living, for meaning, and value. I simply longed for something higher than the emptiness of a purely materialistic existence. As I now see it, my heart still longed for a God.

The more I engaged in this lifestyle, the emptier I felt. It was as if numbness was taking over my body and death slowly increasing within me. All this induced, strangely enough, by a desperate longing for a God that I could not believe in, that I could not relate to, since I could no longer prove Him to exist.

After reaching a certain low point of inner turmoil and strife, for I could not even sustain a stable relationship with a woman at the time, I began searching for inner peace in different spiritual traditions. I searched all kinds of religions and spiritual texts including Buddhism and Hinduism, and even within philosophy for some sort release from my despair. And although I found some comfort in the Buddhist de-centering of the self, it was only temporary. I found that there was a kind of dishonesty, or in-authenticity, in Buddhism’ depersonalizing of all existence, so to speak, in order to be rid of suffering; I found this to be dissatisfying as a solution to my situation. And though I embraced Hinduism for a while because of its more
philosophical approach to religiousness, I also found it wanting, and ultimately dissatisfying—I did not find their notion of the relation between God and the world rationally satisfying; it appeared incoherent.

It was not until I read the Spanish existentialist Miguel de Unamuno that I began to regain my sense of the religiousness, and positive longing for God. At some point, I had recalled all the existentialists that you had once told me about: Unamuno, Kierkegaard, Marcel, Buber, Heidegger, and so on. I decided to begin with Unamuno, and my life was completely changed!

It was not that I fully agreed with all that he espoused, but through my encounter with him, he filled me a courage that I had never fathomed before: the courage to believe! He gave me the courage through his infinite passion to believe beyond my understanding: beyond the limits of my thought and reason. He broke the shackles of my thought, of my rational mind, and my heart and mind were finally free and able to be reconciled with each other, and I then found myself in great joy and peace, for the first time in years. Because of him, I could believe in God in again! The God that I had lost on account of reason and logic: the God that I had longed to believe in but could not bring myself to it: the God whom I attempted to reach through the finite steps of logic and abstraction. I realized that therein laid my mistake. I had striven toward the infinite with the meager steps of the finite, which now seems obviously absurd to me, for it is a false start, a confusion in terms—since the difference spoken of here is of quality, not of quantity. That is what Kierkegaard and Unamuno perceived so well and tried to show us: that only within the infinite passion of a man can the eternal, God, ever be encountered, or known.
It was at this point, aunt Helen, that my life was completely transformed. It was not, of course, that I had agreed with all that he espoused, but he provided the catalyst for what is perhaps the greatest realization of my life. For truly, as I finished one reading day one his chapter from his greatest philosophical work, it was as if a light had shone upon me, and a new principle of truth had been revealed to me and confirmed within my being. For, as you know already, I struggled with not being able to rationally or logically prove God, for years, and yet, while Unamuno found in himself the same conflict between his mind and his heart, he did not hesitate in calling himself an irrationalist and chose to believe in God! He claimed that even though his intellect actually convinces him that there is no God, his heart and deepest passion as a man of blood and bone was that there be a God, and solely upon this basis did he assent to the belief in God! Against his reason he chose to believe. What courage! And the impact of his words was so powerful that it caused me to stop reading in order to contemplate his words. In a flash I realized that although I struggled with doubt and despair of not having objective proof or evidence of God, I could not deny that I wanted God to exist, that I deeply wanted to believe. Then, I questioned, why should I long for God as much as I do, as I have throughout my life? This brought me to the sense that this experience itself was of the utmost importance, that it was indicative of something. And I continued to reason that certain experiences must be valuable and irrefutable in what they show in themselves. As this thought seeped into me, I began to wonder, why could this not be the proof! And, this thought did not come as a question but with a kind of certainty I had not felt before. Indeed, it became clear to me that my very desire for God was in fact the proof I was longing for, the very proof of God’s
presence. From that moment on, my doubts have melted away! It was as if something in my inner being communicated with me and revealed this truth to me, which I could not deny; and reason simply lost its place as the ultimate arbiter of truth, becoming subservient to a higher principle, which it now serves. And as I now see it, it is as if it has now been put in its proper place.

So what is the significance of all this? Well, though these explanations are a bit abstract, aunt Helen, I share these with you primarily because I know that if anyone can understand them and their existential significance, it is you. For, what has been illuminated for me is that our experience is in fact the most valuable and fundamental element in any true metaphysics, or in our exploration of Being, or more specifically in my case, in seeking knowledge of God. I have come to believe that we are primarily immersed within Being and participate in it, and thus that our primary access to it should be, or can only be, through experience itself, through our encounter(s) within it! This of course would validate and show the significance of some of our most profound feelings, or experiences, in our concrete life: that indeed our existence in the world is our most fundamental means to access reality and truth! And therefore, that our experience of God cannot be mediated through any rational proof, or more pointedly, that any rational proof could not give us knowledge of God or Being, but only of concepts and their relation, since the proof would have to be undertaken after our severance from Being, from reality, thus, remaining in pure abstraction. And if this is the case, it is clear that God cannot be known through these means because God could only be known within reality itself—i.e. through some kind of direct encounter—for if we detach ourselves from reality in order to reason “objectively,”
then we would have removed ourselves from contact with that which we are attempting to know, thus condemning ourselves to remain in the darkness that results from such an arbitrary detachment. It now seems undeniable to me that such a connection to reality is the necessary pre-requisite for any true knowledge of God. And this is most essentially what I have come realize aunt Helen, and the resultant peace and joy that fills me cannot be compared.

You see, after these insights and realization that appeared to take place within the depth of my being, it seems as if God wanted to confirm that my thoughts were correct by surrounding me with such amazing occurrences that I am almost tempted to call all of them miracles. I began to experience coincidences that reflected my inner thoughts and concerns, such that it sometimes appeared that God was answering my every question, so that now, though in the past I longed for proofs, the evidence seemed to more than abound—perhaps because I am now looking at the world with new eyes! I suppose you are not now as shocked with such experiences as these since you have always spoken to me of such apparent encounters with God, but there were many days and instances in which I began to pray, and, while in prayer, a question would arise within me, and when I opened my eyes and went to the nearest book, I would open up onto the pages that were addressing the very question I was asking in prayer. This happened to me both with scriptures, as well as other books. And though some could try to dismiss it as mere chance, the number of times this happened to me repeatedly, day after day, was incredible. There were even times that I would think of a particular passage, like the moment of conversion of St. Augustine in his confessions, and when I went to open the book, I would open it to the exact pages and
my eyes would fall upon the exact words that I had in mind. And truly, though someone could somehow bring themselves to see this from the outside as some random coincidence, in the context of my life—what I had just gone through in my search for God, my realizations, my inner experience coupled with the external occurrences, and so on—I experienced it as if I were being communicated to. And indeed, it seems to me that there was a higher principle involved in all these occurrences, and which I can only conceive of as calling God.

So finally, aunt Helen, it was after my realization/conversion and all the subsequent experiences with God I just briefly described that I decided to write to you. And as I mentioned at the beginning of this letter, to my great shock, you had written me! It is for this reason that I was so amazed and overwhelmed with emotion that my heart almost felt as if it were going to burst. I cannot describe it otherwise, though I know that someone reading this who has not had similar experiences may find the expression awkward and strange, or difficult to understand, nevertheless, it is so. Now you understand, my dearest aunt, why I found your letter to be such a culmination to my spiritual journey, experience, or whatever one might call it. For it seemed to confirm even more firmly all that I had already begun to realize: That there was something about the nature of existence that was not indifferent to us, that there is truly a God, and that this universe, being His creation, is for us in some ultimate sense, though we may not always perceive its final purpose. And that we can trust that there are other ways of knowing than that of logical argument or analysis is evident to me now. I am as certain of this as I am of my own existence. My experience with you, aunt Helen, confirms it for me beyond a shadow of a doubt. The context of your letter,
the revelation of it in a dream, the coincidence of the creatures from your dreams, and my inner certainty as I approached the mailbox which contained your letter, all confirm that there are truths that can be known outside the realm of objective thought, but that are no less real, or certain. And that we are within Being itself, and that this Being is the God who is Love, is now true for me beyond all doubt. And to thank for this I have you, my dear aunt, and our God.

With the most sincere joy and affection,

Your Nephew,

Antonio Busca

P.S. I look forward to hearing from you and of your thoughts on all I that I have shared.
INTRODUCTION
General Orientation

Philosophers have pondered and debated the question of the existence of God with innumerable arguments for and against it. Indeed, there is perhaps no other topic over which more ink has been spilt. Nevertheless, within this immense body of literature, within all the variety of arguments presented for the existence of God, proofs have been developed which generally fall into three major categories. The considerable majority of arguments for the existence of God can be thought of as some variation of what might properly be called the traditional proofs of God: the Ontological Argument, the Teleological (or Design) Argument, and the Cosmological Argument.3 A study of these arguments would reveal that all of them proceed from the observation of some objective fact(s), whether purely conceptual or of our sense experience of the world. From these objective facts, certain premises are stated and a conclusion logically derived.4 In light of this, it is evident that the traditional proofs of God mentioned here have largely fallen within the domain of what we commonly call the analytic tradition. It is the goal of this dissertation, however, to explore the resources of the continental tradition in order to flesh out a contribution to this field of inquiry, which is typically approached analytically. More specifically, it will explore

3 Another argument that could be added to the list is the Ethical Argument; roughly speaking, this argues from the fact that there are objective moral standards to the existence of God. This argument has become more popular only in recent times, which is why I do not include it as one of the traditional proofs of God, though to include it would be inconsequential to the concern of this dissertation.

4 I will refer to such demonstrations as logical-objective proofs.
some religious existentialist thinkers within the continental tradition in order to
unearth what might be called an existential proof of God, which has largely been
ignored within the philosophical tradition as whole.⁵

As a point of departure for such a goal, I will be drawing from the philosophers
of subjectivity, Soren Kierkegaard and Gabriel Marcel. It is my view that these
thinkers provided for the possibility of a kind of religious knowledge hitherto ignored
or, at the very least, given scant attention in the literature. Even though it can generally
be assumed that they rejected the possibility of any conclusive proof of God or that
such proofs are appropriate, they nevertheless strongly affirmed the existence of God
as an objective reality. I argue, however, that 1) they were neither irrational nor
subjectivist because of this and that 2) within their philosophies, one can, in fact, find
a space within which to talk about the knowledge of God without contradiction. It is
on this alternative path that they seem to have uncovered an assurance of God that I
seek to explore and which I call an existential proof of God. Consequently, this will
entail the task of showing that, within the well-spring of the work of these two
philosophers, we can find what would allow for the possibility of an existential truth
outside objectivity,⁶ thereby making possible a kind of religious knowledge. This also
entails, of course, demonstrating that both men had a deep affinity with each other.
Showing this will be a secondary purpose of this dissertation.

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⁵ Few philosophers have made mention of such a proof; Peter Kreeft is one of the few who has spoken
of it to some extent. An argument closely resembling that which will be attempted here is also found in
C. S. Lewis’s Mere Christianity: It is typically referred to as the argument from desire. One of the
differences of this argument, however, is that Lewis attempted to make it into a formal deductive
argument within the analytic tradition and thus, fails to go into the heart matter. He failed to go deep
enough to unearth the true existential significance of the phenomena to which he was referring.

⁶ This will be most directly addressed in Chapter Two of this dissertation.
Now, as can be surmised from the above, the arguments that follow attempt to bypass the traditional analytic methodology and attempt to provide a thoroughly existential approach to the question of the existence of God. As such, they face some peculiar difficulties, most of which I will attempt to address in this introduction (though some of these difficulties must inevitably be answered through the text itself). The most pressing of these is that, as an existential approach, the argument here does not allow for a conceptual point of departure from which a logical conclusion is progressively and systematically derived. This is especially the case given that the main text follows the spirit of many of the existentialist thinkers and is written in a literary, epistolary form. This, admittedly, can be a disorienting and frustrating endeavor both for the reader as well as for the writer; yet I find such an approach inevitable given the nature of the project itself or, rather, the nature of the “object.”

This could be especially disconcerting if the reader attempts to approach the text from the standpoint of an analytic methodology. Hence, it will prove useful to discuss in some detail this alternative methodology and delineate some its presuppositions in order to highlight the exact nature of what I am calling an existential proof of God.

Another of the difficulties that arises is found within the title itself, in my use of word proof in conjunction with the notion of existentialism. Clearly, anyone faintly familiar with existentialism would be tempted to call the juxtaposing of the word proof

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7 A full explanation for the need of this literary form is provided below in a section entitled Methodology. I will discuss the need of the indirect method as espoused by Kierkegaard and Marcel in that section.

8 I put the word object in quotations here because part of the need for the existential approach espoused here is that God is, in fact, not an object at all, but a subject and hence, cannot be treated as an object, whether conceptual or experiential.

9 This does not mean, however, that some presuppositions or assumptions are not made and argued for; surely, I will attempt to ground the concrete-existential approach I have adopted in this introduction.
with the term existentialism an oxymoron. I am fully aware of this, for anything with
the word “proof” smells too much of the spirit of abstraction from which
existentialists have famously and vehemently revolted. The first point of clarification
to be made here is that the term “existential” is precisely meant to indicate a shift in
the use of the word “proof.” Indeed, the word is used as a qualifying term; that is, the
term “existential” is meant to give a new color to the word “proof.” In typical
Marcelian style this will allow us to re-evaluate these terms freshly, which will
perhaps yield new insights to us.\textsuperscript{10} Hence, it is evident that I will be using the term
“proof” in a qualified sense which shall become clearer later. This issue, however, will
be most appropriately addressed by the content of the work itself, for it is precisely
one of the issues with which this dissertation attempts to grapple.

Finally, before proceeding to clarify the nature of my approach, it will be
useful to be as clear as possible with respect to my intended goal. Most succinctly, it is
the central concern of this dissertation to elucidate and explore how one might
approach the question of God’s reality without recourse to the traditional objective
approaches, that is, analytic proofs or demonstrations. I am attempting to explore the
possibility of a kind of knowledge of God that is outside of what I will call objective
knowledge, the realm of objectivity. This will thus entail a re-valuation of the notion
of proof itself (as already mentioned), for, as has been made clear, my use of the term
will transcend that of convention.

\textbf{Origin and Significance}

\textsuperscript{10} Granted, there may still remain some tension between the notion of knowledge and proof and an
existential approach, but I take this very tension to be useful to my goal.
In order to distinguish clearly the existential approach in this dissertation from an analytic one, it will be useful to consider the origin of this project, for its beginning, like the work of many existentialists, was spawned in response to an analytic methodology as a revolt against what has been called “the spirit of abstraction.”11 That is, the idea for this project arose out the awareness of a kind of inadequacy of an analytic approach to the existence of God as exemplified in the book *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, by J. L. Schellenberg.12

In his book, Schellenberg argued against the existence of God in typical analytic fashion. A brief reconstruction of his argument goes as follows:

1) If there is God, He must be a perfectly loving13 God.

2) If a loving God exists, then reasonable non-belief should not occur.

3) But there is reasonable non-belief in the world.

4) Therefore, God must not exist.14

His view was essentially that the lack of evidence for God “is not a sign that God is hidden, it is a revelation that God does not exist.”15 Although many attempts have been made to respond to this argument, few have tapped into the vast resources of the

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12 I have had the privilege of taking a course in the Philosophy of Religion with William Rowe at Purdue University. It was here that Schellenberger’s work was studied in depth and where the idea for this dissertation was born.
13 Of course, Schellenberg defended the assumption of this first premise that God is perfect early in his book. Part of his defense was essentially to explain that he was attempting to refute the traditional orthodox Judeo-Christian God, which characterizes God in such a manner. Other support is also given, however, it should be noted that it is not the goal of this project to directly refute this analytic argument or any other; the intention is to undermine the analytic approach as a whole and to illustrate its alternative, that is, an existential approach.
15 Ibid., 1.
continental tradition to do so. One of the few who has made such an attempt is M. Jamie Ferreira in her essay, “A Kierkegaardian view of Hiddenness.” Schellenberg attempted in his book to refute a Kierkegaardian account of hiddenness found in the writings of Johannes Climacus.\textsuperscript{16} Ferreira’s essay seriously challenged his attempt. She argued,

Schellenberg’s examinations of Climacus’s rebuttal... does not address what lies at the heart of Climacus’s account of hiddenness. Schellenberg reads Climacus as making divine hiddenness a psychological requirement for the exercise of passion. ... I suggest, on the contrary, that Climacus is speaking not about a psychological all or nothing, but rather about a grammatical requirement—namely, that divine hiddenness is logically implied in the notion of God’s absoluteness.\textsuperscript{17}

Ferreira suggested that Schellenberg did not understand that for Kierkegaard, hiddenness was not a psychological requirement but, given His nature, that is, His “absoluteness,” a precondition for the God-relation. Put differently, God’s “absoluteness,” as she explained, means that knowledge of God would require a different means than that of objective revelation. It is in this way that Ferreira opened up the realm of a non-objective inquiry that can be used in response to the problem of hiddenness, as well.

Hence, as we have seen, Ferreira undermined Schellenberg’s argument by challenging his approach and showed that a proper approach to God might, in fact, require a non-objective methodology. This brief discussion of her response to Schellenberg helps to situate the nature and impetus of this project. In other words, this dissertation can, in some sense, be viewed as a more substantive account of

\textsuperscript{16} This is one of Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms.

Ferreira’s response to Schellenberg, or rather, an off-shoot of it. In her response to
Schellenberg, Ferreira only pointed out what his mistake was; she only hinted at a
possible alternative. However, it is this alternative, a non-objective approach to the
question, that I seek to explore and develop in the following pages and it is to this end
that I shall rely upon Kierkegaard and Marcel. The approach that I have chosen in this
dissertation attempts to do just that. It should be noted, however, that I do not intend to
respond directly to Schellenberg’s argument; I intend to open the door toward a
response, though I do not wish to address it directly.

The secondary purpose of speaking of this argument in relation to my approach
is simply to contrast and be clear as to what I will not be attempting. For instance,
what is most evident from the above argument is its formal structure. Schellenberg
shaped his argument as a formal one with premises that are intended to follow from
one another and logically lead to its conclusion. His argument began with a certain
premise from which all the rest were derived. The initial premise was that the
traditional notion of God entailed that God be “perfectly loving.” Schellenberg, of
course, went some way to defend this first premise, but this is beyond the scope of this
project. What is to be noted is the general approach undertaken; it is a logical-
objective approach which deals with objective phenomena (i.e. phenomena observable
by all), as mentioned above.

Another upshot for making this difference of approach explicit is that it helps
to highlight the significance of this project itself. It is not only intended to be a work
that contributes to the continental tradition under which existentialism is typically
placed, but it also intends to open a small door to more open dialogue among the
traditions. My sentiment is similar to that expressed by Brendan Sweetman in the following passage:

There has been a notable, and I would say regrettable, absence of dialogue between continental philosophy and analytic philosophy in the twentieth century. Since I believe the Marcelian existentialist approach can throw new light on some of the philosophical problems that concern contemporary analytic philosophy, it is imperative in my view that dialogue between the two traditions be established. This study in general is intended to be a small gesture in that direction.18

I believe that more dialogue should indeed occur among philosophers within these two traditions. Yet, while Sweetman attempted to take from the resources of the continental tradition—mainly from Marcel—in order to deal with some typically analytic themes in an analytic fashion (at least in its systematic presentation and mode of dealing with the questions), I am bridging these traditions by attempting to deal with a typically analytic issue in mostly a continental/existential fashion. As mentioned earlier, it has not been the concern of philosophers in the continental tradition to deal with the question of proofs for the existence of God, since they have largely seen it as contrary to their philosophical perspectives. I, however, try to carve a middle ground for such a discussion. In short, I believe that within existentialism lies an answer to some of the difficulties that arise within the analytical tradition with respect to knowledge of God, but I explore such an answer by remaining mostly rooted within the continental tradition in both content and style.

Why Kierkegaard and Marcel?

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Upon some reflection, some might wonder if my attempt to use Kierkegaard and Marcel is not misguided, given that they seem to have distinct approaches to the question of God’s existence. My response to this issue is dealt with in chapter one where I essentially argue that they are not as far apart as it might initially appear. At this point, however, I believe it is useful to provide a general response to the question as to why I have chosen these two thinkers, of whom some might say are opposed in their approach to God.

The most evident point of contact between Kierkegaard and Marcel, and subsequently the central reason for my use of them, is their attack upon objectivity. They poignantly attacked objectivity, suggesting that it abstracted from existence and bypassed what is most essential. Indeed, the concern Kierkegaard raised most forcefully is whether objective thought reached its limit precisely where it was most important, that is, within the ethical and the religious spheres. Kierkegaard, perhaps more than Marcel, rejected any attempt to prove the existence of God through demonstration; It could even be said that for him a proof for or against God was useless, since it was merely dealing with abstractions, which had nothing to do with the reality of God.\(^{19}\) It should also be noted that God was a Subject for Kierkegaard, which meant that He was not an object in the world. Thus, he could not be proven to exist in the same way that one would go about proving that a certain planet exists in a far-off Galaxy. In light of this, we can begin to see more clearly why Kierkegaard would dismiss the above approach to the question of God’s existence.\(^{20}\)


\(^{20}\) I am here referring specifically to Schellenberg’s approach above, though it is against God’s existence, but also to any analytic approach similar to that of Schellenberg.
For similar reasons, Marcel also did not place much weight on attempts to prove the existence of God, but his reasons differed slightly. In addition to what has been said, Marcel also emphasized not so much that the proofs for the existence of God fail, but that they, although valid, did not succeed in accomplishing their task. In other words, he believed that if we think of what it means to prove something, we see that a proof’s original purpose is to persuade another to a position he did not previously hold; however, it is precisely in this way that the traditional proofs of God fail. According to Marcel, the way in which a believer comes to believe in God is not by way of demonstration or analytic proof, but by another route, which again, as in Kierkegaard, renders conceptual proofs unnecessary and inadequate.

It is at this point, however, that an important question arises. If we grant to Kierkegaard and Marcel that the reality of God cannot be proven by objective means and that demonstrations are useless, then can we ever be assured of the existence of God? Are we left only with subjective assertions that hold no objective reality? Marcel’s response is essentially to challenge directly this all-or-nothing dilemma of the question itself. In other words, he puts into question whether our options are really only those of either pure subjectivity or objective knowledge. With respect to this dilemma, he writes, “I am convinced that this ‘dilemma’ misses the essentials of religious life and of the most profound metaphysical thinking.”21 Thus, with this statement, we can begin to see that Marcel opened up a space that is neither purely subjective nor purely objective and that it is in this realm that God may be

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encountered. It is in this realm, which objective thought cannot reach, that the hidden God of Schellenberg mentioned above can be revealed.

In a similar vein, in my reading of Kierkegaard, his response was also an attempt to tread a fine line between the objective and the purely subjective. Initially, his definition of truth, which he also equated with faith, seemed to be the perfect antithesis to objectivity—for he stated that religious truth is “an objective uncertainty held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness.” Then, however, he also stated that this is “the highest truth there is for an existing person,” which in itself begins to suggest that he was condoning neither subjectivism nor relativism per se. He was simply pointing out a certain aspect of our human condition: Because we are finite, existing, human beings in the process of becoming, the highest truth (“knowledge”) we can reach with respect to the religious is not to be found in the objective realm, but within subjectivity itself, or subjective appropriation, as Kierkegaard sometimes put it. Kierkegaard, through Climacus, suggested that, objectively, religious questions emphasize what is believed, that is, the thought content. But subjectively, the emphasis is on the how of the belief, which means that the emphasis is on the relation itself and not on the object of belief. The question is whether the relation itself is one of truth. He claimed that subjectively, the truth is precisely the how of belief, that the inward, infinite passion itself in our relation to God is the truth. It is in view of this that Kierkegaard was able to claim that Christianity is not a doctrine, which is thought content, but a way of being; it is the how itself of Christianity that is the content, the truth.
Methodology: Content and Form

The above discussion naturally brings us squarely into the issue of an existential methodology. In the above, I have supported my use of Kierkegaard and Marcel based upon their rejection of objective approaches to God, but we have still not clarified the exact nature of an existential approach or what it entails. It is the aim of this section to clarify the existential approach I intend to employ and the reason for its necessity.

To be clear on the issue of methodology, it will be helpful to clarify the term existentialism itself. First and foremost, the notion of existentialism that will be used here is most directly derived from that of Marcel’s notion of it, which I also take to be that of Kierkegaard, generally speaking. Put most succinctly, an existentialist is one who begins his philosophy with and gives ontological priority to the experience of the existing individual subject and to his concrete experience in the world in which he lives. In light of this and in light of what we have mentioned earlier with respect to the possibility of knowledge outside of objectivity, it makes sense that Marcel and Kierkegaard would have non-objective and non-systematic approaches. More specifically, what justifies their philosophical style is their observation that an objective approach misses much of the most significant experiences of our lives in the world and that it is essentially impossible to separate content from form given that which they are trying to illuminate.

22 Of course, it is well known that neither thinker called himself existentialist, but by the nature of their thought and the commonality of their interest, I take it safe to categorize them as such. Many attempts have been made to define existentialism and who belongs to such a group, which is why I have thought it necessary to define the notion of existentialism that I will be working with and it is one that is most in line with the thought of Marcel and Kierkegaard.
In Kierkegaard we see clearly this inseparability of content and form and how it affected his style of philosophizing in the following passage:

Whereas the objective thinker can perfectly well communicate directly the result of his own reflection, “the subjective existing thinker” discovers an impediment to communication in the further reflection that the truth he arrives at “interests” his existence (is part and parcel of it) and as such cannot simply be handed over to another, but to be appropriated, to becomes one’s own, it must be acquired through the same process of reflection by which it was originally reached. Hence the communication must be indirect, artfully devised to prompt the other to think out the thing for himself, while the subjectivity of the communicator remains concealed.\(^\text{23}\)

Here, it is clear that, for Kierkegaard, the form and content could be separated from that which is being explored; this is because the form, in some sense, is the content itself. This means, in reality, that the “truth” of that which is being sought—that is, God, in this case—cannot be found apart from the mode of seeking; the mode of seeking is supposed to be a subjective one since that which is being communicated was found through subjective means and as Kierkegaard put it, for this very reason, must be sought through the same process it was discovered (i.e. subjectively). More specifically, the reason this truth must be sought and discovered subjectively is because its nature is such that it has an intimate relation to the individual and can thus be revealed only through his/her own existence. In still other words, the truth attempted to be communicated is intimately tied to the individual existence of the communicator, and can thus only be communicated indirectly, “artfully,” in such a way that it may prompt the “receiving” party to search her own existence and thereby come to realize this truth within her own life; as Kierkegaard suggested, it is a truth

that “interests” the individual’s existence itself (and is “part and parcel of it”) and can thus only be known by one who is not indifferent to his own existence as it might be said that an objective thinker is bound to be (by the very nature of his approach).

**Terminology: Subjectivity, Objectivity, Knowledge**

For the sake of clarity, it will be useful to address briefly some terminological concerns. In the discussion above, much has been said of objective versus subjective approaches. In light of this, it seems appropriate to discuss the meaning of these terms.

Given that I find that Kierkegaard and Marcel had similar uses of these terms, I will employ them in a similar fashion. Not surprisingly, objectivity has to do with the approach to the world that places the subject as a detached observer that is separate from the observed such as in the Cartesian approach. In Kierkegaard, this approach is many times associated with speculative philosophy, or the historical as he also put it. In Marcel, moreover, we see that objectivity is viewed as associated with the world of science and technology, as well, which heavily relies upon the subject-object dichotomy just mentioned. In essence, it is apparent that the essential feature of objectivity is to be indifferent to the reality of the subject in order to be “objective” in one’s approach: at least, this is what is typically implied. Truly, the subject is irrelevant to an objective approach. Thus, when I speak of objectivity, the objective realm, or objective knowledge, they can generally be interpreted as relating to the world of science, material objects, mathematics, and the phenomenal world as a whole.
On the other hand, subjectivity has to do with all that involves the subject in his concreteness existence. It is, in a sense, the opposite of the realm of objectivity as presented above. Objectivity has to do with the external world of the verifiable, whereas subjectivity has to do with the intimate world of the subject and his individual relation to the world. I will view subjectivity as all that constitutes the world of the concrete individual in the world, including all her desires, her willing, her actions, beliefs, and emotions, in short, the full range of her experiences in the world. Note, moreover, that what characterizes subjectivity as opposed to objectivity is essentially that what is involved in subjectivity is generally unverifiable by an outside observer. The world of the subject is solely her own.

Now, in the context of these definitions, we can clarify some ambiguities that might arise in the use of the term *knowledge* in what follows. The obvious difficulty is that, in my claim to the possibility of a kind of religious knowledge of God through a subjective approach, the term *knowledge* itself seems to suggest objectivity. Thus, although Kierkegaard and Marcel were against objectivity as defined above, how can I use their subjective approaches in order to arrive at a kind of objective knowledge? Are we not engaged in circular reasoning? To avoid this confusion, I propose, for the purposes of this paper, to retain the dichotomy of the objective versus the subjective. On the other hand, I suggest that a distinction must be made between what is objectively true/real and what can be objectively known (verified)—what is objectively known is what can be known through any objective method. In other words, the distinction allows us to speak of something capable of being objectively true or of being an objective reality and yet not be objectively knowable or verifiable.
Put differently, what we are doing is using the word *objective* in two slightly different ways. In one sense, we are using it to emphasize the fact that the reality of something is independent of the subjective opinion of individuals; in another sense, we are using it to emphasize the fact that it is knowable within the world of objectivity—the objective realm as we have defined it. With this distinction in mind, we can now speak of something that is not objectively knowable, but that is nevertheless objectively real, that is, true. Granting that, we can then relate this to the reality of God. We can more easily understand the claim that, even though God cannot be known objectively or proven, He can still be known to be objectively real through subjective means, which is what I have called an existential approach/proof.

**Conclusion**

In the above, I have illustrated and explained what I take to be Kierkegaard’s and Marcel’s existential approach to God and how they open a path for a kind of religious knowledge. In the first chapter, I shall investigate the possible incommensurability of these two philosophers’ existential approaches, as suggested by Thomas Anderson. The second chapter will explore and develop the notion of existential truth in such a way as to absolve both Kierkegaard and Marcel from the labels of irrationalism and subjectivism, which are sometimes attached to their philosophies. I shall also show how Marcel’s more phenomenologically robust approach provides a more philosophically friendly method, in the sense that it makes more explicit some of the reasons for his method (whereas Kierkegaard does not), which allows for some clarification of Kierkegaard’s own philosophy. The third
chapter provides a final reflection on the notion of an existential proof of God and its legitimacy; this is where the main objections to such an approach are directly addressed.

In the end, the conclusion of this dissertation is that Kierkegaard and Marcel have provided sufficient basis for the possibility of a kind of religious knowledge hitherto ignored, or rather given scant attention in the literature. Further, I have defended the view that this kind of religious knowledge amounts to what can be called an existential proof of God. Finally, it should be noted that although this existential proof admittedly has the paradoxical nature of not being a conclusive proof of God (nor intending to be one), it nevertheless justifies the individual’s belief in God in and through his/her own concrete life experiences and existential encounters.
CHAPTER 1: MAN’S JOURNEY TOWARD GOD:

KIERKEGAARD AND MARCEL
Introduction

The goal of this essay is to provide further reflection on the relation between Kierkegaard and Marcel’s approach to God and to undertake a more detailed analysis of their supposed opposition since not enough clarity has been reached with respect to this issue, neither in our text nor in philosophical literature as a whole. Now, although scholarship on their relation is scant, there are some who have dealt with the issue, but have done so only cursorily, and have generally ended with an emphasis upon differences, rather than on commonalities. One such scholar is Thomas Anderson. He essentially suggested that their philosophies were mutually exclusive.24 His article, “The Experiential Paths to God in Kierkegaard and Marcel,” concluded with the statement, “I suspect that the two paths are fundamentally irreconcilable.”25 However, though an ecumenical interpretation of Kierkegaard and Marcel is rejected by him, I will defend the view that their differences are typically misunderstood, exaggerated, or both, and that his view of mutually exclusivity is at the very least not well founded, if not a blatant misunderstanding of the relation between the two.26

It is not my intention, however, to misrepresent professor Anderson by rendering his work as merely emphasizing their differences. On the contrary, his essay is an excellent summary and comparison of their respective philosophies; he does, in fact, outline the many ways in which Kierkegaard and Marcel were in agreement. Here

25 Ibid.
26 I am aware that even Marcel attempted to distinguish himself from Kierkegaard, yet I believe his criticism of Kierkegaard was also based upon a misinterpretation, hence, my contention is also against Marcel’s own view. I hold that their differences lay elsewhere and that they are not substantial.
is a brief summary or their agreement according to Anderson: (a) they both hold the
view that we are generally in a condition of despair or brokenness, (b) this brokenness
or despair is remedied by a re-establishment of the proper relation or connection to the
ground of our Being, that is, to God, and (c) that this restoring of our relation to Being,
or God, must occur by a kind of surrender of ourselves to this higher, transcendent
reality; in other words, we must surrender and realize that we do not belong to
ourselves, as Marcel would put it, and that we are nothing or are to become nothing
before God (i.e. surrender), à la Kierkegaard, and this is how we properly, or truly,
relate to God in order to remedy despair, and ultimately d) our brokenness can only be
healed by and through God, that is, the healing or restoration is achieved only by
grace, and not by our own power. Indeed, for receiving such a remedy there is no
clear-cut or “fool proof” plan of action, except through openness, a surrender, or
receptivity on our part. In the end, it is a gift and both Kierkegaard and Marcel
recognized this and responded to it by attempting to make others receptive to such
grace, since that is all that can be done at this level.

However, the challenge still remains for Anderson, for even though we could
generally accept their agreement with respect to certain aspects of our fundamental
condition in the world, the way we are ultimately to receive the gift of God that
remedies our despair or brokenness is quite different. For instance, one seemed to
recommend solitude and inward passion in relation to God, or the eternal, and the
other seemed to suggest that adequate access to God is through a proper relation and
openness to the other and that in this communion with others, we find our way back to
God—or re-establish our rooted-ness in Being. One also seemed to emphasize pure
passion, seemingly against reason, while the other seemed friendly toward using our intellect or reason to come to God. Finally, while one seemed to view God as utterly transcendent and far from contact with man except by grace, the other seemed to view God as immanent and extremely close to man, almost indistinguishably. These, in fact, could be seen as the central issues upon which Anderson based his claim of their incompatibility.

In response to this, my mode of approach will be to divide my response into four parts and address each of these three claims, the first part being a preliminary commentary on the source of the misunderstanding. The sections will be titled as follows: 1) The Misunderstanding, 2) The Individual vs. Community, 3) Faith vs. Reason, and 4) Transcendence vs. Immanence. In section (1), I will highlight a main source of the misunderstanding, which I take to be two fold: first, a lack of consideration of the signed text of Kierkegaard, and second, not taking seriously enough their intended goals as each of them envisioned. In section (2), I will proceed to show how Kierkegaard and Marcel are not so clearly at odds with respect to whether we should relate to God individually or through the other (i.e. the community). Section (3) will illustrate how their use of reason in our approach to God is also not as distant as it might first appear and section (4) will show that Kierkegaard’s God is not so transcendent as to be incompatible with that of Marcel’s God, and vice versa. Finally, the goal will be to show that in each case they are not as far apart as they may appear and that in the end, one need not necessarily choose between being either a Kierkegaardian or a Marcelian, but that one could adhere to
both. Hence, we would have shown that they are not mutually exclusive (i.e. incompatible) in their respective philosophies.

The Misunderstanding

When reading Kierkegaard’s texts, especially his pseudonymous works, it is easy to misunderstand him since his corpus is full of subtle distinctions, layers of meaning, and sometimes, hidden agendas. Surely, one can easily get lost in attempting to discover what Kierkegaard himself held to be true, especially considering that he was intentionally indirect (and even obscure) with his views and also warned the reader that he should not read his pseudonyms as if they were speaking on his behalf. He requested that we quote the pseudonyms instead of him when referencing passages from their texts. All of this was simply to show that it is, indeed, not always easy to discern Kierkegaard’s true meaning or views and that misunderstandings were liable to happen because of his style, as well as his intentions. As a result, in interpreting Kierkegaard, it is important to consider his corpus as whole, by which I mean that his signed works should also be considered in understanding his philosophy for much of the misunderstanding of Kierkegaard is clearly from our taking what his pseudonyms express at face value and sometimes attributing those views to him, instead of viewing the context and intention with which it is said. Hence, it is my intention to consider some of his signed works, especially *Works of Love*, as well some of his journal entries, in order to make it easier to discern his true views and intentions. For instance, if we consider WOL, it becomes quite obvious that many of the usual criticisms hauled against Kierkegaard (some of which I will address below) completely miss the

From now on this will be abbreviated as WOL.
mark, for there we see that he expressed his true views more clearly and directly.\textsuperscript{28} Again, the main point is that upon a closer examination of his entire corpus, it can be seen that many of the views commonly attributed to him and that appear to get him into trouble are gross misunderstandings of him.

A related cause to what I take to be Anderson’s erroneous depiction of the relation between Kierkegaard and Marcel, which arises out of the above as well, is not keeping in mind the intentions or overall views of their own philosophies, including not taking seriously enough certain important distinctions each made that are relevant for understanding their philosophies as whole. To be more specific, it is well known that Kierkegaard was a Lutheran Christian addressing himself to his intellectual contemporaries, but who were mainly Christian. As a result, we know that Kierkegaard was a Christian author from the beginning and was not addressing a purely secular philosophical community for philosophical purposes, as Marcel was. His purpose was simple and clear. As he himself expresses it, he was attempting to make true Christians out of Christendom. He believed that many of the Christians of his time, largely because of the influence of philosophy and particularly Hegelianism, lost the true sense of what it means to be a Christian and to be a person of faith. Thus, all of his authorship revolved around this idea: what does it mean to be an existing human being in the world and have faith, especially Christian faith. Even in his earliest work, \textit{E/O}, he expressed that his goal was to seduce people into the religious. At the same time, however, Kierkegaard’s account of religiousness was quite nuanced

\textsuperscript{28} Of course some might disagree
and he spoke of different kinds or levels of religiousness. In the CUP,\textsuperscript{29} for instance, he stated that there were two general kinds of religiousness: religiousness A and religiousness B, which I shall discuss in more detail later. Religiousness B, for him, was pure Christianity. Religiousness A, on the other hand, was a more general form of religiousness, which he sometimes described as immanent religiousness; here, a person need not relate himself to a specific religion, but merely yoke himself with the passion of infinity to an eternal joy, found in God, and nothing else. There are, of course, different levels and forms of religiousness A, but this is irrelevant to our concern here. It is enough for our purposes to recognize that Kierkegaard conceived of the possibility of religiousness of two kinds, a general religious sensitivity that anyone can have, and who need not belong to any specific organization, and then a more specific kind of religiousness, which was, for him, Christianity. Now, of course, from what has been said, we are well aware that Kierkegaard’s central interest was Christian religiousness from the start, and so, he evidently discussed religiousness A as a necessary step, toward Christianity. However, what is the significance of this distinction that Kierkegaard made between different kinds of religiousness? Simply, that if we keep in mind that Kierkegaard strictly focused upon Christianity and Marcel did not, then this can clearly reveal why they seemed to be contradicting one another in many places and why Anderson, as well as others, could easily misunderstand their supposed discord.

Thus, can it be shown that Marcel was focused upon the non-Christian religiousness while Kierkegaard is focused upon the Christian? Indeed. Marcel, in

\textsuperscript{29} Concluding Unscientific Postscript
fact, made almost the exact distinction Kierkegaard made: between a generally religious person (who does not conform to any particular religion) and a religious person who adheres to a specific religion or doctrine. Moreover, he stated not only that he would focus upon the generally religious, but also that for the latter, no philosophical reflection is possible. What is more, even Anderson himself wrote in his book on Marcel that he was concerned with the former in his philosophical analysis and that the latter—the specifically religious person, such as the Christian—is outside of the scope of philosophy altogether, being extremely personal. Anderson made the observation in the following passage:

Marcel also makes a very important distinction between two types of faith, of revelation, and of religion. One refers to God or revelation in general which can be present in someone who is not a participant in any particular religious tradition but is, in his terminology, “naturally religious.” The other, faith or revelation strictly speaking, contains specific beliefs in the God and revelation present in particular historical religions, churches, creeds, sacred texts, doctrines and so forth. That kind of faith is not attainable by human power, but requires a personal conversion dependent on God’s grace. The former, religious faith and revelation in general, is within the scope of philosophy for it involves natural religious experience that any human being may have.30

It is absolutely clear from this passage that Marcel not only decided to focus on the “naturally religious,” but also believed that special revelation was outside the scope of philosophy, so that his philosophy was assuredly not, strictly speaking, a Christian philosophy. However, if it is the case that Marcel was expressly focused in his philosophy on the kind of religiousness in people that is not specifically Christian while Kierkegaard was expressly concerned with Christianity and bringing people

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toward a religious transformation to it, then it stands to reason that this should be the cause of some significant differences in their form of expression, and most importantly, their focus and emphasis. It is my view, then, that differences between Kierkegaard and Marcel, as outlined by Anderson, can be reconciled if the above distinctions and observation are kept in mind. Hence, as we shall see, the observation made here will be a common thread throughout that will help explain why they may appear to contradict themselves, when, in fact, they do not.

**Individual vs. Community**

One of the most central objections to their compatibility is surely that Marcel’s approach seems to be based purely upon inter-subjectivity and community, while Kierkegaard’s seems to emphasize the individual and his absolute relation to God. One approach to God appears to be through community and our relation to others, while the other seems solely concerned with inwardness or the individual’s inward and absolute relation to God in solitude.

Now, of course, it must be admitted that Kierkegaard does seem to suggest at times that our approach to God is prior to our relation to others\(^{31}\) even in WOL, which I take to be one of his clearest accounts of our relation to others. There he stated,

> Love is a passion of the emotions, but in this emotion a person, even before he relates to the object of love, should first relate to God thereby learn the requirement, that love is the fulfilling of the Law. Love is a relationship to another person or to other persons, but it is by no means and may by no means be a marital, a friendly, a merely human agreement, a coterie of people, be it ever so loyal and tender! Each one individually, before he relates himself to the beloved,

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\(^{31}\) I take this priority, however, to be, in reality, an ontological priority and not a successive priority.
the friend, the loved ones, the contemporaries, must first relate to God and to God’s requirement.32

However, although Kierkegaard emphasized the individual and his relation to God as primary and seems to by-pass the other, this is only apparent. If we read in context and consider other passages, his true meaning becomes clearer. Indeed, if one thoroughly considers some of his own texts, including WOL, one can see past the illusion of a purely individualistic Kierkegaard and see his communitarian spirit that is comparable to Marcel’s. Consider the following passage from one of Kierkegaard’s journal:

Despite everything people ought to have learned about my maieutic carefulness, by proceeding slowly and continually letting it seem as if I knew nothing more, not the next thing—now on the occasion of my new up-building discourses [Up-building Discourses in Various Spirits] they will probably bawl out that I do not know what comes next, that I know nothing about sociality. Now I have the theme of the next book. It will be called Works of Love.33

Here we clearly see that Kierkegaard never intended to merely focus on the individual to the exclusion of the other, but that his reason for doing so was due to his initial purpose; to guide people, especially intellectuals, back into the religious sphere, and specifically, to Christianity. After having done that in his pseudonymous works, he was now in the proper position to explore and explain his notion of a Christian community or of our relation to others.

Now, let us look at passages that clarify his view of the other/neighbor in WOL. He stated,


No, Christianity has begun from the foundation and therefore with the Spirit’s doctrine of what love is. In order to determine what love is, it begins either with God or with the neighbor, a doctrine about love that is the essentially Christian doctrine, since one, in order in love to find the neighbor, must start from God and must find God in love to the neighbor.34

It is evident in this passage that our love for God does not exclude the neighbor, but instead that they are mutually inclusive. That is, one cannot have one without the other and hence, one can indeed love God by loving one’s neighbor, which is far from ignoring the neighbor, as some believe Kierkegaard did. In the following passage, we also see Kierkegaard suggested that one is, in fact, deluding herself if she thinks that she can relate to God without relating to the neighbor or the other:

Such a thing can only occur only either to a hypocrite and a deceiver, in order to find an escape, or to someone who misrepresents God, as if God were envious of himself and of being loved, instead of the blessed God’s being merciful and therefore continually pointing away from himself, so to speak, and saying, “If you want to love me, then love the people you see; what you do for them, you do for me.” God is too exalted to be able to receive a person’s love directly.”35

Hence, it cannot be claimed after reading this passage that Kierkegaard was purely concerned with our relation to God, pure and simple, since he suggested that to love God, we must indeed start by loving the neighbor, which seems to be the opposite of what was initially suggested. Indeed, if this passage alone is not enough to grasp Kierkegaard’s meaning, it should be kept in mind that he expressed this thought in the context of quoting, and being in accord, with the following Biblical text. “How can he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, love God, whom he has not seen.”

34 Kierkegaard, Works of Love, 140.
35 Ibid., 160.
In such a context, it is clear that Kierkegaard was suggesting that one must love the neighbor whom he sees in order to be able to love God, which is surely the opposite of our typical understanding of Kierkegaard as advocating a solitary relation to God, pure and simple. It is evident from what has been said that this is not the case and that his apparent emphasis on the individual’s relation to God must have a distinct purpose other than to exclude the importance and necessity of our relation to others, since he clearly suggested that our relation to God does not and should not exclude the other, but include it, for he even stated, “In the Christian sense, to love people is to love God, and to love God is to love people”\textsuperscript{36}. Indeed, it cannot be clearer that for Kierkegaard, our relation to God and to others cannot be separated. As a result, it begins to become evident that he is not as far apart from Marcel as many may believe him to be.

In Marcel, moreover, we have a similar confusion, but from the opposite end. Marcel, it is thought, contrary to Kierkegaard, seemed to focus purely on the community and our relation to others in our approach to God. One surely can get the impression that he left no room for the kind of solitary and intimate relation to God that is found in Kierkegaard. Consider the following quotations:

\begin{quote}
It is not enough to say it is a metaphysic of Being. It is a metaphysic of the we are, not the I think.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
I concern myself with Being only in so far as I have a more or less distinct consciousness of the underlying unity which ties me to other being of whose reality I already have a preliminary notion.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

From the moment we open ourselves to these infiltrations of the invisible, we cease to be the unskilled and yet pretentious soloist we perhaps were at the start, and gradually become (conscious) members, wide-eyed and brotherly, of an

\textsuperscript{36} Kierkegaard, \textit{Works of Love}, 384.


\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 19.
orchestra in which those whom we so inaptly call the dead are quite certainly much closer to Him of whom we would not perhaps say that He conducts the symphony, but that He is the symphony in its profound and intelligible unity.39

In the first passage, we are reminded of Marcel’s adamant rejection of a Cartesian metaphysic and his isolated cogito in favor of what he called “a metaphysic of the we are.” The following quote more specifically seems to state that we cannot know Being unless we are first aware, at least to some degree, of our connection or unity with others; this is significant since he equated God with Being, hence the statement seems to apply to knowing God as well. Moreover, this second quote refers to what Marcel termed our inter-subjective nexus or union; this union or our awareness of it is the precondition for our consciousness of Being or God. In the third passage, this seems to be stated more explicitly, so much so that it appears as if we are part of a symphony and that which unifies, the inter-subjective nexus, is equated with God.

Thus, from the above, it can surely appear as if our means to approaching God seems to be through our inter-subjective relations with others and perhaps to the exclusion of some solitary or private relation to God. However, if these passages, in conjunction with others, are read carefully, we can see that none of what Marcel suggested is to the exclusion of God and His necessary role in our lives and in our being. There are many ways that the above can be resolved and the first thing we can start with is by pointing out that Marcel does not, in fact, simply equate the inter-subjective nexus with God. He stated,

Can we admit that we have reached a point where we may identify Being with inter-subjectivity? Can we say Being is intersubjectivity? I must answer

immediately that it seems to me impossible to agree to this proposition if it is taken literally. The true answer, it seems to me, is something much more subtle…⁴⁰

If he does not identify the inter-subjective nexus with God, as we see him deny in this passage, then Marcel is not in danger of being a kind of pantheist who leaves no room for a transcendent God we can relate to personally. In fact, he did leave room for such an awareness of God that did not directly include others. In the following passage, we see Marcel express himself in a way that one could, perhaps, have confused him with Kierkegaard. He stated,

Perhaps my soul would be the ego of the psychologist, which really only a him, were I not to converse about it with God, were it not involved and vitally interested in this conversation…If I am asked why my soul can only become itself when in relation to God, and when confronted with God, I cannot at present see any means of formulating an abstract answer which will satisfy me. But I can at least say this (though it needs elucidating and sifting): My soul is always a thou for God.⁴¹

Not only is Marcel’s expression akin to that of Kierkegaard in that he spoke as if he could and did talk to God directly, but he emphasized a central Kierkegaardian theme, that we can only truly become ourselves before God. Thus, while we see in the previous passage that Marcel did not merely equate our unity with others with God, we also see that we can relate to God directly and further, that such a relation is fundamental to becoming ourselves. If this is the case, this alone brings him quite close to Kierkegaard, for he would only be incompatible with Kierkegaard if he were

to deny that we can relate to Him directly and only through others, but from what has just been shown, this is patently false.

Even further, although Marcel emphasized the community in our approach to God, he explained that in genuine community, or in our fidelity to others, one needs God as the foundation. In other words, he suggested that the condition for the possibility of unconditional fidelity is an awareness of an absolute Thou, as he called it, whether implicit or explicit. Consider the following quote:

A particular individual may simply not think about what is ultimately involved in his or her unlimited faithfulness to a spouse or child or close friend or cause. In fact, such an individual could even verbally profess atheism, Marcel says. Nevertheless, only an assurance grounded in an encounter, however faint, with an absolute Thou can furnish the underpinnings of a person’s unconditional commitment to another creature.42

In Marcel’s own words, “Unconditionality is a true sign of God’s presence.”43 As a result, it is undeniable that God, here, is necessary for our unconditional relations to others. Hence, we see that even for Marcel, God is the necessary third in our relations to others, so that God is never left out in all of our relationships. This is a similar concept to the one found in Kierkegaard where he expressed that God is the third in any love relationship. In fact, it could be argued that this is the cause of Kierkegaard’s emphasis on God, that is, that He is the ontological precondition of our love relation to others and this is essentially Marcel’s claim as well. Thus, the priority expressed in Kierkegaard of our relation to God could be seen either to perform a function of

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42 Anderson, A Commentary on Gabriel Marcel’s The Mystery of Being, 134.
43 Ibid.
communicating something in the context of his text or to emphasize God’s ontological priority in relationships.

Hence, as can be seen, then, Anderson position appears untenable. However, here we can again point to the source of the misunderstanding suggested above and address it in more detail. In other words, the objection to Kierkegaard’s philosophy being in harmony with that Marcel’s can be addressed by the fact that Marcel could be conceived as working within religiousness A, and thus, Anderson’s misunderstanding could be seen as having arisen from his not taking seriously enough the different forms of religiousness within the Kierkegaardian corpus. It is well known that Kierkegaard distinguished between what he calls religiousness A and religiousness B and even though Anderson seemed to be aware of this distinction, he did not think it relevant to his goal of distinguishing between Kierkegaard and Marcel, but I think it is. In religiousness A, for Kierkegaard, a person can relate directly and immediately to God. She can experience resignation, soul suffering, and guilt-consciousness, but God is still conceived as immanent in her, the personality can still relate to God and restore some kind of normalcy to its religious and ethical life through its own inner effort. In other words, as one commentator put it, this human religiosity “rests upon the supposition that truth is immanent in the human subjectivity.” Religiousness B, on the other hand, the specifically Christian religiousness, is the very opposite. Here, the truth lies outside the individual, and human subjectivity is untruth. The greatest human effort can only lead to an awareness of our absolute separation from God. This religiousness is characterized by sin-consciousness (which the individual cannot


achieve by himself, as guilt consciousness can in Religiousness A), and in the end, the individual person cannot be restored except by the revelation of God in history, in time. Now, it is significant that Marcel makes a similar distinction as mentioned above and we shall see why. He explained many times that he was not philosophically advocating Christianity, though it might lend itself to such a possibility; what is particularly relevant is that Marcel clearly expressed that in order to adhere to a particular religion, one must be called or have a conversion experience, so to speak. In order to have such a conversion, one can only make himself available or open to it; in other words, one needs grace. This is the same as in Kierkegaard. Thus, although in Kierkegaard God provides the condition for the possibility of faith in God or true Christian religiousness, we can see that Marcel holds the same view. Hence, it is in this sense that one must be alone before God, for no one can truly convert another person except God and this is so for both Kierkegaard and Marcel. However, what is most significant here is that if one does not make this distinction that they both seem to make, then we are liable to misunderstand their entire philosophical projects, at least in relation to one another, as Anderson may have done.

In other words, what has been shown is that perhaps because of their different historical factors or existential situations, they may have been responding to different historical factors and thus, had different goals or audiences in mind. That is, because of what they were each attempting to address, one might have been called toward a more individualistic emphasis in their religiousness while the other was drawn to a more communitarian emphasis (or religiousness). Kierkegaard was expressly attempting to convert Christians into true Christians, while Marcel was addressing
himself to a more general philosophical public/community and initially did not have any specifically Christian incentive or affiliation. It was the nature of his philosophical investigations that led Marcel to Christianity, while Kierkegaard began his work as a Christian. This must surely, then, account for much of their differences.\textsuperscript{46} We need not think that they are incompatible, not only given the initial explanation of this section, but simply because, as we have seen, Marcel was not meaning to espouse a strictly Christian philosophy—since he, in fact, thought this impossible—while Kierkegaard was specifically concerned with Christianity from the beginning. Clearly, this must account for much of their seeming differences, as well as the common misunderstandings of the two.

\textbf{Faith vs. Rationality}

That Marcel did not want to forsake reason and understanding when speaking of our encounter with God or Transcendence (or coming to know God), while Kierkegaard advocated believing against the understanding\textsuperscript{47} is a view that Anderson also espoused. This perspective, however, which makes it appear as if Marcel’s approach is completely compatible with reason and understanding while Kierkegaard’s is not, is simply false.

\textsuperscript{46} Another plausible factor one might consider is the personal/psychological factor: While Marcel grew up alone (a single child) and in a non-religious environment, Kierkegaard was one of seven (the youngest) brothers and lived under a strict religious household. Though I will not attempt an in-depth analysis of what psychological significance or influence this would have on their life and subsequent philosophy, it is far from inappropriate to consider this a possible element in the respective tenor of their philosophies. It is at least an interesting fact to take notice of in considering their divergences.

\textsuperscript{47} Perhaps reason and understanding, however, played slightly different roles in each (or have somewhat distinct meanings), yet Anderson does not seem to allow for this possibility.
The notion that Kierkegaard clearly rejected reason while Marcel did not in their approach to God is exaggerated, if not obviously false, though it is also common. Consider the following passage from Brendam Sweetman:

Gabriel Marcel has a quite unique approach to the question of the existence of God. It is an existentialist approach . . . yet it is not based on a faith commitment to God, as one finds…in Kierkegaard, whose view emphasizes the affective and volitional nature of one’s relationship with God at the expense, some would argue, of any rational approach.”

First and foremost, in answering this common misunderstanding, it is important to keep in mind their intended goals and then, more specifically, be clear as to how they intend to go about it; as we shall see, when this is clarified, they do not seem as far apart as usually imagined. The reason their intended goal is significant was mentioned earlier; it was suggested that because Kierkegaard had a specifically Christian audience in mind and a specifically Christian goal, this would cause some apparent differences between them. Hence, in this particular issue of reason vs. faith, Kierkegaard would obviously appear to differ from Marcel because he was, strictly speaking, interested in Christian faith. It is in this context that Kierkegaard especially seemed to recommend believing against the understanding, but again, this is not so strange since Marcel himself expressed the idea that specific religiousness is outside of the realm of philosophy and hence, that the specifically Christian revelations are outside philosophical reflection and strictly a personal and private endeavor, much like Kierkegaard. At this point, then, they were, in fact in accord, for they both agreed that such Christian faith is based upon pure grace and a direct revelation or encounter with

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God, which no human can be so pretentious as to think they were capable of achieving in another.

Aside from this more general point, however, we can also see that if we understand Kierkegaard correctly and in more detail, we see that it is implied in his approach that reflection, and even reason, can help lead us to the religious, though he claimed that (unaided) reason seeks or leads to its own destruction (in relation to God/faith). It is clear, indeed, that he did not completely do away with reason; it has its place. At the very least, it is implicit in Kierkegaard that reflection is a necessary tool, or can be, in bringing one to God; this is especially the case when we remember that in using pseudonyms, Kierkegaard showed that he believed in the possibility of seducing people into the religious, into the truth, and such a seduction cannot take place outside of reflection; hence, it is implied that in coming to God, reflection and understanding can play a role, even if it is to be removed so that there can be a true existential movement. Indeed, reason can have its role, even if it is just to show reason its own limits and force the individual to come face to face with his concrete reality and in the end, his need for God. However, if Kierkegaard’s intent is seen in this light, he was in accord with Marcel, for he also sought to show the limits of reason. Thus if there is a difference here, it is a matter of emphasis, goal, and perhaps terminology, but it is not an essential difference. This common ground of showing the limits of reason can be more clearly seen when we take into account Kierkegaard’s view of indirect communication, which may be connected to the notion of secondary reflection in Marcel.
In *Practice in Christianity*, Kierkegaard explained the need for his indirect method and its nature in the following way:

Whereas the objective thinker can perfectly well communicate directly the result of his own reflection, “the subjective existing thinker” discovers an impediment to communication in the further reflection that the truth he arrives at “interests” his existence (is part and parcel of it) and as such cannot simply be handed over to another, but to be appropriated, to becomes one’s own, it must be acquired through the same process of reflection by which it was originally reached. Hence the communication must be indirect, artfully devised to prompt the other to think out the thing for himself, while the subjectivity of the communicator remains concealed.49

Anyone familiar with Marcel should be struck by the poignant similarity of what Kierkegaard expressed here to Marcel’s philosophical approach, especially to what he called secondary reflection. The lynchpin of my argument here is that they seem to be trying to bring us back into contact with a concrete reality that is not achieved through mere abstract thought or unaided reflection, which is in large part the core of Kierkegaard’s revolt against reason. If we properly understand his actual critique of reason, the above misunderstanding we are trying to clarify would not have taken place. Indeed, as one commentator put it, “It is the totalizing reason that equates itself with reality and all truth, as in Hegel, that he rejected”50 With respect to the notion, as expressed earlier, which views Kierkegaard as voluntaristic, let us look at the following revealing passage from one commentator:

Existentialism is thus neither intellectualistic nor voluntaristic, neither rationalistic nor irrationalistic. It transcends the distinctions. The validity of thought is in nowise denied. What is denied is that thought can be reduced to a rational,

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49 Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 117.
objectifying, theoretical activity . . . (Kierkegaard) he speaks most positively of thought, as long as it is rooted in existence.51

Indeed, it cannot be more clearly illustrated that the reason Kierkegaard (as well as Marcel at times) has been thought to be an irrationalist and a voluntarist is not because there is truth in these claims, but because he has tried to tread a fine line between objective truth and the purely subjective. Clearly, Kierkegaard did not disdain thought in general, but a particular kind of thinking that attempts to capture all of reality though abstract thought and logical thinking. However, thought that is intimately tied to existence as explained in the above passage he, in fact welcomed, and even encouraged. In this sense, he was, again, in harmony with Marcel, for he claimed that his method is that of beginning in the concrete, moving to the abstract, and back to the concrete. As he stated it, “My method of advance does invariably consist, as the reader will have noticed already, in working my way up from life to thought and then down from thought to life again, so that I may try to throw more light upon life.” Indeed, in the following passage from Schrag who explains Kierkegaard, they seemed to have in mind strikingly similar notions:

It is precisely the task of the existential thinker to think his existence. He must penetrate his concrete particularity and existential involvement with thought which has universal validity. The existential thinker is a thinker and an existing individual at one and the same time. He lives his existence at the same time that he thinks it . . . Kierkegaard’s far reaching reservations about Hegel arise, not because Hegel was a thinker, but because he identified thought with the rational and the logical. We must distinguish cautions Kierkegaard, between “pure thought” and

51 Ibid., 14.
“abstract thought.” Abstract thought is that which reflectively examines and describes existence by preserving a relationship with it.52

In this rich passage, we see that, much like Marcel, thought and understanding have there very significant role to play in the life of a human being and in fact, one gets the impression that thought is indispensable for Kierkegaard. It is only that we are supposed to be a specific kind of thinkers, who think about our existence, as opposed to disdaining all thought in general. As nicely explained here, it is only thought as identified with the rational and the logical that Marcel had problems with, but this being the case, it begins to be clear that Marcel actually did not disagree with Kierkegaard.

Thus, let us look at Marcel with respect to this issue in more detail. In one place Marcel expressed the following:

Person—engagement—community—reality: there we have a sort of chain of notions which, to be exact, do not readily follow from each other by deduction (actually there is nothing more fallacious than a belief in the value of deduction) but of which the union can be grasped by an act of the mind.53

What can be immediately gleaned from this passage is 1) that Marcel seemed to be rejecting the kind of reason, as mentioned above, that Kierkegaard rejected, which proceeds through pure deduction, that is, logic and 2) that although they are not arrived through reason, the mind can perceive it to be real. This second point is significant, since it shows how he, as well as Kierkegaard, was attempting to speak of

52 It seems clear here that thought, as used by Kierkegaard, is analogous to Marcel’s use of the word reflection, which is also not merely reduced to the rational, but can penetrate into reality in its existential concreteness. Hence, I will use thought and reflection as analogous terms throughout.

a reality or truth which cannot be spoken of objectively, since they are outside the reach of pure reason alone. At this point, they seemed in total harmony, as is beginning to be clear. Consider another passage from Marcel:

We are here at the most difficult point of our whole discussion. Rather than to speak of intuition in this context, we should say that we are dealing with an assurance which underlies the entire development of thought, even of discursive thought; it can therefore be approached only by a second reflection—a reflection whereby I ask myself how and from what starting point I was able to proceed in my initial reflection, which itself postulated the ontological, but without knowing it. This second reflection is recollection in the measure in which recollection can be self-conscious.54

From these statements, we see that Marcel was also launching a critique of reason of his own or of a particular kind of reason; this critique is clearly analogous to that of Kierkegaard’s. It might even be the case that Kierkegaard would not object to Marcel’s kind of reflection and understanding if he had been exposed to it. It is a particular kind of arrogant reflection, objective/scientific, and totalizing reason, which both of them rejected. Furthermore, though it might be said that Marcel made more use of reflection in coming to religious consciousness, while Kierkegaard wanted to reject such an approach, it is also the case that while allowing an awareness of transcendence through reflection, Marcel was also adamant that such contact with God (transcendence) is one that is beyond all conceptual grasp and description, hence beyond our understanding. Indeed, his notion of Being and God55 was that which resists and overflows all conceptions that we attempt to ascribe to it. Hence, they evidently seemed to approach each other from opposite ends and came into contact

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54 Pax, An Existential Approach to God, 19.
55 It is well known that Marcel essentially equated his notion of God with Being, unlike Heidegger, who shied away from making such a leap—explicitly at least.
and to be clear, they came into contact in wanting to bring their audience into contact with their existential reality, and not through a thought that disconnects itself from lived experience.

**Immanence and Transcendence**

As is well known, Kierkegaard’s God appears to be much more transcendent than that of Marcel’s. There appears to be an absolute gulf between God and man in Kierkegaard, such that this separation—through man’s sin—is capable of being repaired only by God and not by man. In Marcel, on the other hand, we easily get the impression that God, for him, was quite immanent and that the separation between man and God was not so great; in fact, the closeness was so great that the separation was not as obvious, so that one could perhaps reasonably argue that there was a sort of continuity between God and man for Marcel. If such is the case, it would be a small step to consider man as being capable of reaching God through his own powers, so to speak, or his nature—that is, that one could approach God through one’s own efforts. To explore this possibility, let us recall an earlier passage, already quoted, where Marcel stated,

> From the moment we open ourselves to these infiltrations of the invisible, we cease to be the unskilled and yet pretentious soloist we perhaps were at the start, and gradually become (conscious) members, wide-eyed and brotherly, of an orchestra in which those whom we so inaptly call the dead are quite certainly much closer to Him of whom we would not perhaps say that He conducts the symphony, but that He is the symphony in its profound and intelligible unity.\(^{56}\)

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Surely it appears here that Marcel took God to be quite close to man so that
one could hardly distinguish between them and one might even go as far as to think
that he is proposing a kind of pantheism. However, more to the point, if this was his
view of God, that we intimately participate in God’s reality, then surely we cannot be
far from being able to reach God through our own powers, or so it seems. Hence, he
appeared to be veering away quite far from Kierkegaard on this point. However, let us
explore further if it is, in fact, the case, that is, that they were at odds with each other
at this juncture.

Recalling a point made earlier as to the fact that they had different purposes in
mind when writing their text, it might be useful to note, once again, that Kierkegaard
made a distinction between different kinds of religiousness and further, that Marcel
did the same. It is significant to recall this since it could be argued that in light of the
fact that Marcel denied that we can truly philosophize about a specific revealed
religion, such as Christianity, then Kierkegaard and he were actually speaking past
each other. In other words, they were, by and large, speaking of different things:
Kierkegaard, of Christianity and of the Christian faith and Marcel, of the generally
religious which can be experienced by anyone without belonging to any specific
religion. This can even be taken a bit further. Their apparent difference could be
explained as a product of the fact that, under Kierkegaardian terminology, Marcel was
working within religiousness A, while Kierkegaard was interested in pure Christianity.
Indeed, there are places where Anderson described Kierkegaard’s notion of
religiousness A in terms that are almost identical to that of Marcel; for instance, he
stated that “religion A maintains that in one essential dimension of his being man
participates in the eternal realm of God,”
Marcel’s descriptions of God and His relation to man. He also explains religiousness
A as the religiousness of immanence and quotes passages from Kierkegaard that
suggest that God, at this stage, can be viewed as being inside a person. Again, what
this shows is that we might, indeed, be misinterpreting them if we do not keep such
distinctions in mind and that their views were closer than it might seem since, when it
seems that they were disagreeing, it is plausible to think that it is because one was
speaking to the realm of the specifically Christian, while the other was not. However,
let us not lose focus on the present issue: whether Marcel’s view of God, as expressed
in the above passage, is too immanent to be reconciled with Kierkegaard.
Now, aside from the possible misunderstanding mentioned above, Marcel
actually denied that he was a pantheist, and more specifically, that the quote just above
was not intended to equate the inter-subjective nexus between people and God; indeed,
there is plenty of evidence that Marcel’s notion of God is not as immanent as it might
first appear, which thus brings him closer to Kierkegaard than typically recognized.
Consider the following quote:
The more we take notice of the specific character which the affirmation of God
presents—above all the fact that it aims at a transcendental reality—the more we
have to realize that no fact of any kind, no objective structure, can be placed on a
level with this reality and exclude it.

It is clear from this that Marcel was expressing that God is utterly beyond any
objective structure in the world, and in this way, completely transcends it. Another

57 Anderson, “The Experiential Paths to God,” 27.
58 Gabriel Marcel, “Contemporary Atheism and the Religious Mind.” Philosophy Today 4, no. 4
place where it becomes evident that Marcel showed that his notion of God was close
to that of Kierkegaard’s in its transcendent element is the following passage:

Unlike both the atheist and the traditional theologian or philosopher who would
demonstrate the existence of God, the man of faith looks not to an ultimate and
necessary metaphysical that, but to an absolute Thou who can only be approached
by invocation and testimony. In this sense Kierkegaard rightly saw our approach to
God as a leap into the abyss of faith.\textsuperscript{59}

Here we see Marcel quite explicitly agreeing with Kierkegaard that God cannot
be approached through logical demonstrations or arguments, in short, by our natural
powers of reason, but by relating to Him as a subject or an absolute Thou; yet, more
importantly, he was also suggesting that God is, in fact, transcendent from the world
such that we can approach him \emph{only} through “invocation and testimony,” as he put it.
As a result, he was admitting that we are left only with the leap into “the abyss of
faith” that Kierkegaard spoke of. It appears, then, that he was in agreement with
Kierkegaard in both the fact that God is transcendent, and that this transcendence
makes him inaccessible to us through our natural powers. In fact, it was also admitted
by Anderson that they both suggested that we must ultimately rely on grace to come
truly to God. This is especially the case for Marcel when we are speaking of the
specifically Christian; in this realm, he spoke only of the conversion experience as
being appropriate. That is, only through a personal conversion experience does a man
truly become a Christian and such a conversion is clearly thought to be outside the
power of the natural man. Thus again, when we remain clear as to when we are

\textsuperscript{59} Pax, \textit{An Existential Approach to God}, 68.
speaking of the specifically Christian or not, it becomes clearer that Kierkegaard and Marcel’s supposed opposition is only apparent.

Now, we have only to see if Kierkegaard’s alleged radical transcendence can be brought down to a level compatible with that of Marcel’s notions, since we have already seen that Marcel’s notion of God can be brought closer to that of Kierkegaard’s. The first thing to point out in accomplishing such a task is to be as specific as possible in what Kierkegaard’s view of transcendence actually was. Well here, again, if we remember that Kierkegaard was, by and large, concerned with Christianity, we can more accurately understand his notion of transcendence, and how, at this level, he was fundamentally in agreement with Marcel; in other words, when Kierkegaard was speaking ontologically about the nature of God or reality, as he often seemed to be doing in WOL, we see that God seems to be quite immanent and is even described as being “within a person’s innermost being.” However, when he was strictly speaking about Christianity, and in this context, remarked about our relationship to God, he spoke of God as being utterly transcendent and far from us; however, this is clearly because he was intent on emphasizing our utter qualitative difference from God. By this, he meant that as sinners, we are utterly separate and distant from God. As such, then, his claim was not to be taken as the declaration of God’s utter transcendence at an ontological level—since he spoke of God in terms quite similar to those of Marcel’s in many places—but as one that declares a qualitative distinction between man and God, which we can recognize only by the help of God Himself; of course, after such a divine revelation, we would have come closer

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to knowing the truest or highest notion of God, as Kierkegaard would have it. Note, moreover, that the notions of God by a person in religiousness A as immanent were never denied by Kierkegaard, but in religiousness B, we simply see a greater notion of God that we can only come to by grace; where religiousness A believed that one could relate to God through her own powers; in religiousness B, the relation is wholly established by the power of God, not man.

Having said this, it has been shown that Kierkegaard’s notion of transcendence was often in the context of what he thought was true Christianity, but that inasmuch as we are speaking ontologically, Marcel’s notion of God as the ground of being and the absolute Thou are not far from what Kierkegaard suggested. Let us, then, look briefly at some Kierkegaardian passages that illustrate this point further. In explaining the origin or source of Love, Kierkegaard expressed,

There is a place in a person’s innermost being; from this place flows the life of love, for from the heart flows live. But you cannot see this place; however deeply you penetrate, the origin eludes you in remoteness and hiddenness. . . . From this place flows love along many paths, but along none of these paths can you force your way into its hidden origin. Just as God dwells in a light from which flows every ray that illuminates the world, yet no one can force his way along these paths in order to see God, since the paths of light turn into darkness when one turns toward the light—so Love dwells in hiding or is hidden in the innermost being.61

Aside from the image of God as the light of the sun upon which one cannot gaze directly, what is most striking about this passage is that the origin of love is claimed to dwell within man himself. If we recall the fact that Kierkegaard has already equated God with Love itself, then the above amounts to stating that God resides deep within humans themselves, and not outside. Clearly this is not the typical Kierkegaard

that many have come to know, that is, one who views God as utterly transcendent from the world. Of course, he claimed that we cannot glance upon God directly, but neither can we do so according to Marcel; this is precisely the reason he found it necessary to employ his notion of secondary reflection—an indirect methodology—and why he spoke of a blinded intuition, for we cannot gaze upon God directly.

Another such passage that brings Kierkegaard’s notion of God much closer to that of Marcel is the following:

Love’s hidden life is in the innermost being, unfathomable, and then in turn is in an unfathomable connectedness with all existence. Just as the quiet lake originates deep down in hidden springs no eye has seen so also does a person’s love originate even more deeply in God’s love.62

Here, not only are we told that human love originates in God’s love—God being the precondition for our human love—but it is claimed that God, as Love, is unequivocally within the innermost being of all people. He stated even more strongly that this Love, which is God, was in an “unfathomable” connection with all of existence. A clearer ontological claim could not be made; it is obvious that Kierkegaard saw God as the ontological foundation, not only of our love, but also of all existence. Hence, much like in Marcel, God, here, is characterized as the ground of Being. It is for this reason that Kierkegaard could confidently assert, “Ah, but if you bear in mind that from the point of view of Christianity and truth God is always present in everything, that it is solely around him that everything revolves.”63

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63 Ibid., 382.
In the end, then, we have seen that though Kierkegaard’s God appears to be overly transcendent and incompatible with that of Marcel’s God, it turns out that Kierkegaard’s God is not as divorced from the world as it first appears and neither is Marcel’s God as immanent as one may think in Marcel. Assuredly, they are not as distinct on this point as usually depicted and in fact, appear to come into contact on some passages, especially when their remarks are understood in their proper context and reference, as already explained.

Conclusion

Finally, the foregoing has intended to show that although Kierkegaard and Marcel could easily be viewed as holding mutually exclusive philosophies, careful consideration of their text reveals that such an easy distinction is not as easily justified. The method of approach has shown that on every major issue typically ascribed to Kierkegaard as being opposed to Marcel, there are passages that seem to leave the possibility of including the others’ viewpoint, thus, making them mutually inclusive. It can be admitted, of course, as professor Anderson pointed out, that they seemed to emphasize experiential approaches that were distinct, but a mere emphasis did not equal the exclusion of other possibilities or even of opposed possibilities. In other words, although it is true, in fact, that Kierkegaard could be seen to be emphasizing “negative” human experiences such as guilt, sin, anxiety, despair, and so on in our approach to God while Marcel seemed to focus on positive experiences such as love,
fidelity, and hope, it is not the case that Kierkegaard said nothing of such experiences, or did not allow for them to be of aid in bringing us to God, and vice versa. What is more, we have seen that on three major points of possible tension—their views of the individual vs. community, faith vs. rationality, immanence vs. transcendence covered in the sections above—the supposed extreme usually viewed as not being held by the other was contradicted many times by passages that resembled the other’s view, or at least, made their distinction less clear. Whatever remaining issues may not have been directly addressed, I suspect that the answer lies in what I have suggested with respect to their focus; my general response to the apparent un-resolvable differences between these thinkers has been that they essentially spring from a subtle misreading of their texts. In other words, though Professor Anderson’s account is correct in many ways, upon a deeper analysis, the differences between them begin to reveal themselves as less definitive and inconclusive. I believe it has been shown sufficiently that their supposed differences usually arose out of their respective interest, focus, and individual goals, such as bringing people into a true Christianity for Kierkegaard, and reflecting philosophically about the nature of faith and how we are to have a proper knowledge of Being or of God for Marcel. It is also because of these diverse interests and purposes that there arise differences in terminology, which is what causes much of the confusion. In light of this, after clarifying some terminological difficulties and the individual emphases of each, we are able to pierce more deeply into their relation and begin to see not only their compatibilities with one another, but also the fact that they were, in fact, often complimentary, though Anderson remained skeptical of it. Yet indeed, though some differences must be admitted, the differences, I have argued, lie
in emphases, rather than on substantial irreconcilable differences. In reality, my claim is that their mutual exclusivity is not to be taken for granted or as being so obvious, and that further reflection is at least warranted to support such a claim, for there is much that is ignored in Anderson’s analysis.

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64 I argue, instead, that their differences are superficial and, at best, a dispute among members of a family, so to speak.
CHAPTER 2: EXISTENTIAL TRUTH
Introduction

The following attempts to explore the possibility of an existential proof of God by developing a viable option for the notion of an existential truth. To be clear, I do not yet intend to provide an existential proof, but simply to strive toward laying the groundwork for its possibility. It will generally be argued that such a foundation has already been laid within the philosophies of Soren Kierkegaard and Gabriel Marcel, as already mentioned. It will first be shown that Kierkegaard’s notion of truth is not a subjectivist or relativistic one, (as it is commonly thought), thus revealing his contribution to the problem of religious truth. Then, it will be argued that although Kierkegaard’s philosophy may retain some level of obscurity, Marcel’s brand of existentialism allows for a clearer elaboration of what Kierkegaard opens the door for, but leaves mostly implicit. Finally, it is hoped, that a plausible notion of existential truth will become clearer via the analysis here provided of Kierkegaard and Marcel, which in turn, will open up a space for what I choose to call an existential proof of God.\footnote{The notion of an existential proof of God has appeared elsewhere, yet serious attention to this approach in the literature is extremely scarce.}

Kierkegaard’s Existential Approach

Before proceeding to Kierkegaard’s notion of existential truth, I would like, as a point of departure, to briefly discuss some of the possible problems that might arise with the notion of an existential proof of God. To begin, if one is to speak of an existential approach to God, it is clear that by its very nature, the approach must be one that attempts to bypass the traditional analytic methodology in dealing with the
question. But as such, one faces some peculiar difficulties: the most pressing of these is that, as an existential approach, the “argument” does not allow for a conceptual point of departure from which a logical conclusion can be progressively and systematically derived (for that would entail an analytic methodology). As a result, an existential approach to God is one that must remain in large part unsystematic, and for that reason, introduces an unexpected difficulty for the reader; though, an author sometimes desires such difficulties for his own purposes, such as in Kierkegaard. An existential approach, then, is one that may not even possess a clearly presented argument, or rather, one that is easily discerned, and this is usually based upon the insight that what is being revealed has an element that cannot be contained within the limits of a conceptual framework. It is for this reason that many existentialists, such as Kierkegaard and Marcel, have resorted to a more literary or artistic form of expression and philosophizing. Kierkegaard wrote many books through pseudonyms and Marcel wrote plays, dramas, and metaphysical diaries. Moreover, even Marcel’s strictly philosophical works were not systematic in any usual sense of the word. So how can we categorize such an approach? The view here suggested is that what Marcel and Kierkegaard attempted to show us, they do so through a kind of phenomenological approach, broadly speaking, that is focused upon existence, or the existing concrete individual. It is for this reason that I would characterize their approach as a phenomenological-existential approach, or for the sake of simplicity, an existential approach.66

66 From this point on, then, it is implied that whenever using the term existential, it is implied that it is a kind of phenomenological approach, broadly construed, that is focused upon existence.
A further problem that can arise is that of characterizing a proof of God as existential since it could be said that the notion of a proof is contrary to the notion of a proof. However, in the context of what has already been said, some light can be shed on the issue. Indeed, it is true that the very juxtaposition of the terms existential and proof may sound like an oxymoron to anyone remotely familiar with the notion of existentialism and proof, but this need not be the case. The first point of clarification to be made is that the term existential is precisely meant to qualify the latter term; that is, it is meant to indicate a shift in the use of the word *proof*. In other words, the term existential is intended to give a new color, or quality, to the word proof. Hence, the point is that the term is surely being used in a qualified sense; and this qualified sense is one that entails a revelation of truth in the manner mentioned above, intended to be explored below, and that most existentialist thinkers have generally used.

As mentioned above, many existentialists have indeed sought other means of philosophizing that have not been the traditional academic, or analytical, approach. A prime example of this is Kierkegaard. As already noted, many existentialists’ impetus toward such an approach is the insight that some truths may wholly, or in part, escape the purview of conceptual-analytical thinking, that is, conceptual-objective thought.

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67 Surely, I am fully aware of this problem, for anything with the word *proof* smells too much of the spirit of abstraction from which existentialists have famously and vehemently revolted. However, this is, in reality, because of the stigma many existentialists associated with the word. Yet, such perception need not be permanent, especially if another usage of the term may be more useful or appropriate to our philosophical endeavor and current historical situation.

68 This use of the word may also allow for a typical Marcelian style re-evaluation of these terms, which may perhaps yield to us unexpected new insights.

69 It is important to note at this point that I am not implying in this paper that Kierkegaard or Marcel attempted to espouse such an existential proof of God. I am merely suggesting, with some slight modification in our use of terms, that such a proof can be made possible through their work.
This is clearly evident in the work of Kierkegaard as can be seen in the following passage:

Whereas the objective thinker can perfectly well communicate directly the result of his own reflection, “the subjective existing thinker” discovers an impediment to communication in the further reflection that the truth he arrives at “interests” his own existence (is part and parcel of it) and as such cannot simply be handed over to another, but to be appropriated, to becomes one’s own, it must be acquired through the same process of reflection by which it was originally reached. Hence the communication must be indirect, artfully devised to prompt the other to think out the thing for himself, while the subjectivity of the communicator remains concealed.70

Aside from the obvious richness of the passage, one of the most impressive aspects that may be noticed is the fact that Kierkegaard was clearly affirming that there was a truth that “the subjective existing thinker” is trying to communicate, and further, that he could not do so through objective thought, or an objective approach, that is, directly. So two significant things we see here are 1) the affirmation of a truth and 2) its incommunicability. The affirmation of truth is significant here because Kierkegaard has for many years been thought to fall into the problem of subjectivism or relativism, whether intentionally or not. However, it is absolutely clear in this passage that he is at least intending to speak of a truth that is objectively real, else he would not try to communicate it, and further, that it is a particular kind of truth that has the peculiar quality of not being able to be communicated in the usual way. The question remaining, then, is why? The answer lies in his statement that the truth he speaks of “interests” his existence and is “part and parcel of it;” in other words, it cannot be separated from his intimate subjective acquaintance with it. It is for this

70 Kierkegaard, Practice in Christianity, 117.
reason that, for Kierkegaard, the form could not be separated from the content, from
that which is being explored. Again, this is because the form, in some sense, is the
content itself. This means, in reality, that the “truth” that is being sought—that is, God,
in this case—cannot be found apart from the mode of seeking. The mode of seeking is
supposed to be a subjective one, since that which is being communicated was found
through subjective means, and as Kierkegaard put it, (for this very reason), had to be
sought through the same process it was discovered, that is, subjectively. More
specifically, the reason this truth must be sought and discovered subjectively is
because its nature is such that it has an intimate relation to the individual and can thus
be revealed only through his/her own existence. Further, because this truth to be
communicated is intimately tied to the individual existence of the communicator, it
can only be communicated indirectly, “artfully,” in such a way that it may prompt the
“receiving” party to search her own existence and thereby come to realize this truth
within her own life. Again, as Kierkegaard suggested, it is a truth that “interests” the
individual’s existence itself, and can thus only be known by one who is not indifferent
to his/her own existence, as it might be said that an objective thinker is bound to be—
by the very nature and necessities of his approach.

Kierkegaard and Existential Truth

In light of this, it is evident that Kierkegaard’s reason for writing through
pseudonyms was to communicate a truth, which though objectively real\footnote{I think it appropriate to call the truth he is attempting to communicate “objectively real” since otherwise, I take it, he would not consider it a truth.} in his view,
was nevertheless incapable of being communicated directly. However, from the above,
one can still remain quite skeptical toward Kierkegaard’s suggestion and desire a clearer exposition as to his notion of truth. In other words, it might still be argued that he has simply not said enough to absolve him from the problem of subjectivism or relativism, since the objectivity of the supposed “truth” to be communicated can still be put into question. Now, although a full defense of Kierkegaard’s notion of truth is not intended here, it would be useful to see if we can go any further in uncovering a basis for his claim or whether there is a kind of religious epistemology within his work.

In order to address this question, it will be useful to refer to his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* where he deals with the issue of truth and objectivity at some length. It is in this work that he made one of his many controversial claims: “Truth is Subjectivity.” The first observation to be made, in order not to fall into the common misinterpretation that Kierkegaard was intending to speak of truth as being merely subjective, is that he was speaking here specifically of religious truth and not of truth as a whole—for he did respect a principle of objective truth, just not within the religious, as will become clearer. Thus, although this distinction helps to clarify things, we are not yet out of the woods. His initial definition of truth in this section—which he also equated with faith—seems to be the perfect antithesis to objectivity (and this is as it should be) for he stated that religious truth was “an objective uncertainty held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness.” However, he

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72 There is a new and growing body of literature in defense of Kierkegaard on this issue, and the tide has indeed been changing in the traditional interpretations of his work. The most convincing defenses I have encountered can be found in the works of Stephen Evans and Merold Wesphal.

73 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 203.
then also stated that this was “the highest truth there is for an existing person”\textsuperscript{74} (my emphasis), which in itself already began to suggest that he was condoning neither subjectivism nor relativism, per se. He was simply pointing out a certain aspect of our human condition: because we are finite, existing, human beings in the process of becoming, the highest truth (“knowledge”) we can reach with respect to the religious is not to be found in the objective realm, but within subjectivity itself or through subjective appropriation, as Kierkegaard sometimes expressed it. Through the pseudonym Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard was suggesting then, that, objectively, religious questions emphasized what was believed, that is, the thought content, but that subjectively, the emphasis was on the how of the belief.

Thus, this means that subjectively, the emphasis is on the relation itself and not on the object of belief: the question is whether the relation itself is one of truth. He claimed, then, that subjectively, the truth was precisely the how of belief: the inward, infinite passion itself, in our relation to God, was the truth. Perhaps the most helpful example of this would be Kierkegaard’s notorious passage of the idolater praying in truth to a false god. In the postscript, he provided us with the following illustration:

If someone who lives in the midst of Christianity enters, with knowledge of the true idea of God, the house of God, the house of the true God, and prays, but prays in untruth, and if someone lives in an idolatrous land but prays with all the passion of infinity, although his eyes are resting upon the image of an idol—where, then, is there more truth? The one prays in truth to God although he is worshiping an idol; the other prays in untruth to the true God and is therefore in truth worshiping an idol.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid. Sweetman, \textit{The Vision of Gabriel Marcel}, 121.

\textsuperscript{75} Kierkegaard, \textit{Concluding Unscientific Postscript}, 201.
Clearly, then, what Kierkegaard was suggesting here was that the religious truth he was speaking of was not merely to be known through the content of thought—such as the idea of the “true” God of the Christian—but through our very mode of being. That is, the passage indicates that we shall come to truly “know” the truth of Christianity only by a proper relation to its truth, through infinite passion, which would put us within the truth we seek. In other words, the essential element of Christianity, as viewed by Kierkegaard, is not thought content; he seemed to be indicating that the essential element was the very mode of being of the person, which puts him in contact, or rather, places him within the truth. Though he did not express that the idea of the true God was irrelevant in religiousness, he did suggest that if we are cognitively to know the truth of Christianity at all, it is only through a proper mode of being that we could place ourselves in a position of encountering it or becoming aware of it. Of course, the fact that the mode or way of being is the most essential can also be seen by the fact that from the above illustration, we can see that anyone of us could be as the idolater who is relating to the true God without full awareness; again, this is because the truth is one that we encounter existentially, through our mode of being, rather than through pure thought alone. It is a truth that we can potentially know only though our participating in it, so to speak, or being that truth ourselves. It is in view of this that Kierkegaard similarly claimed that Christianity is not a doctrine, which is thought content, thus implying, instead, that it is a way of being. It is for this reason that Kierkegaard could say without hesitation that it is the how itself, or belief, that is the content of Christianity, that is, the truth.
In my reading of Kierkegaard, then, his response to the problem of religious truth is one which attempts to tread a fine line between what is purely objective and what is purely subjective. Carl Schrag brilliantly expressed a clear explanation of this balancing act of Kierkegaard’s. He summarized the nature of Kierkegaard’s existentialism and what he took to be the nature of existentialism, as a whole, and shows concisely how he avoided the pitfalls of relativism and irrationalism. As he cleared up some of the common confusions usually attached to Kierkegaard’s thought, his analysis will provide a good transition to the existentialism of Marcel—with which he shared much—and its benefits. In his book, Schrag expressed the following:

Existentialism is thus neither intellectualistic nor voluntaristic, neither rationalistic nor irrationalistic. It transcends the distinctions. The validity of thought is in nowise denied. What is denied is that thought can be reduced to a rational, objectifying, theoretical activity . . . (Kierkegaard) he speaks most positively of thought, as long as it is rooted in existence. It is precisely the task of the existential thinker to think his existence. He must penetrate his concrete particularity and existential involvement with thought which has universal validity. The existential thinker is a thinker and an existing individual at one and the same time. He lives his existence at the same time that he thinks it . . . Kierkegaard’s far reaching reservations about Hegel arise, not because Hegel was a thinker, but because he identified thought with the rational and the logical. We must distinguish cautiously Kierkegaard, between ‘pure thought’ and ‘abstract thought.’ Abstract thought is that which reflectively examines and describes existence by preserving a relationship with it.

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76 It seems clear here that thought, as used by Kierkegaard, is analogous to Marcel’s use of the word reflection, which is also not merely reduced to the rational, but can penetrate into reality in its existential concreteness. Hence, I will use thought and reflection as analogous terms throughout.

77 This is another intimate point of contact with Marcel, as shall be seen later, for this seems precisely his aim when he claims that his method is one that begins in the concrete, moves to the abstract, and then goes back to the concrete.

78 Schrag, Existence, and Human Freedom, 5.
This provides us not only with a good summary of much of the existentialist’s thought, but also with a useful transition to the thought of Marcel since it embodies much of the principles through which Marcel philosophized and which he shared with Kierkegaard. Indeed, they were both attempting to develop a different kind of reflection or thought that did not divorce itself from the concrete life of the individual. However, returning to Kierkegaard for the moment, although Schrag nicely illustrated how Kierkegaard did acknowledge the validity of thought and by-passes the labels of irrational or rational, the following question might still remain: are these explanations enough to transcend the subjective interpretation and provide for a kind of religious knowledge or epistemology? Of course, some may find this general account satisfying, but it is my guess that many may find it falls short of a proper grounding for religious truth. Granted that a more thorough or detailed account can be given of his notion of subjective truth (as some have tried) or existential truth, in order to be better grounded his claim, my contention is that one has to undergo much searching and digging in order to elucidate any substantial support. The reason for this, I believe, is quite simple. Kierkegaard himself claimed to be attempting to make “Christians out of Christendom,” according to his own admission. As a result, it is safe to say that his concern was not primarily to address himself to philosophers of his time or epistemologist of our time, and because of this, his goal was not to develop a rigorous religious epistemology that would satisfy either. It is for this reason, then, that Gabriel Marcel provided us with much-needed assistance.
Marcel and Existential Truth

As is known, aside from his artistic and creative endeavors, Marcel was clearly a philosopher addressing himself to philosophers (not to suggest that Kierkegaard was not—only that his emphasis lay elsewhere). As a result, Marcel’s account of existential truth, as I will call it, will be immensely helpful in providing for us an understanding of the strikingly similar notion of existential truth for which Kierkegaard opened the door but left without proper grounding. We shall see that Marcel not only paved the way for a notion of existential truth, but also provided us with an existential epistemology that greatly clarified what was left obscure in Kierkegaard.

Thus, while Kierkegaard seemed to thrust us into a realm outside of objectivity without proper foundation or protection from the perils of subjectivism, Marcel sought both to describe this realm as well as to justify its existence philosophically. In order to facilitate our understanding of Marcel’s epistemology, let us look at some secondary literature that does a good job of capturing the essence of his work. With an admirable exploration of the richness of Marcel’s philosophy and its importance to traditional philosophy, The Vision of Gabriel Marcel by Brendan Sweetman provides the following summary of Marcel’s existential epistemology:

The distinction between experience and conceptual knowledge is obviously at the heart of Marcel’s new approach to epistemology. We have noted that he develops his epistemological views so as to allow a significant role for non-conceptual knowledge in human experience, and also in such a way as to enable the philosopher to recognize the nature of this non-conceptual knowledge and its value. Marcel has argued that there is a type of knowledge which is non-conceptual, but which is nevertheless real⁷⁹ (my emphasis).

⁷⁹ Sweetman, The Vision of Gabriel Marcel, 121.
It can be easily seen from this passage that while Kierkegaard shied away from allowing a consideration of a proof for God and from developing an in-depth existential epistemology, Marcel has at least gone some way toward developing an epistemology that allows for a knowledge that is outside of conceptuality, thus creating an opening for a notion of existential truth. Marcel was clear in not only the fact that one can have knowledge outside of conceptual thought, but that the philosopher can recognize this realm as well as describe it—limited though the description might be. It is surely the case, then, that Marcel appeared to tread this line between the purely objective and the purely subjective more safely than Kierkegaard.

To understand Marcel’s existential epistemology fully, however, one must first understand one of his central discoveries or concepts: the notion of Mystery. Marcel’s notion of the realm of Mystery is precisely the realm of non-conceptual knowledge in the passage above, where something can be outside the conceptual realm and still be real. His discovery of this realm resulted from his interest in the nature of the subject.80 In his search into the nature of the subject, he realized that conceptual thought seemed unable to account properly for the reality of the subject and his most important experiences such as love, hope, fidelity, and an incarnate being immersed in a world with unique experiences; such observations were essentially the opening into that aspect of reality he calls the realm of Mystery. Mystery, of course, is an appropriate term given the fact that if it is agreed that thought cannot fully grasp it, it can obviously be said that it remains a Mystery to thought by its very nature. Marcel

80 This, of course, also echoes Kierkegaard’s own critique of German Idealism, of Hegelian philosophy in particular, in its lack of consideration for the existing individual.
essentially defined Mystery as the “sphere where the distinction between subject and object, between what is in me and what is before me, loses its meaning and its initial validity.”\textsuperscript{81} Put differently, he stated, “A mystery is a problem which encroaches upon its own data, invading them, as it were, and thereby transcending itself as a simple problem.”\textsuperscript{82} Mystery, therefore, involves all that cannot be put completely before us and is not susceptible to our full conceptual analysis. An example of this that Marcel gave is that of the union between the body and soul (mind?), of which he stated:

The indivisible unity always inadequately expressed by such phrases as I have a body, I make use of my body, I feel my body, etc., can be neither analyzed nor reconstituted out of precedent elements. It is not data, I would say that it is the basis of data; in the sense of being my own presence to myself, a presence of which the act of self-consciousness is, in the last analysis, only an inadequate symbol\textsuperscript{83} (emphasis his).

A mystery, then, as seen from this example, transcends the realm of problems because it cannot be analyzed and solved through thought alone because the inquiry involves an object with which I am intimately involved and thus cannot make any objective judgments upon it: this is precisely what occurs in the instance of the connection between the body and the soul. The unity of body and soul, as he suggested, was something that was present to us and which was thus presupposed, so to speak, in all our experience; it could not, therefore, be treated as simply another object within our field of experience that we could fully analyze because it was not fully present before us since it was a presence in and to us, as he put it, or partook of our own being. In short, it is clear that mysteries, in Marcel’s sense, were the things within our

\textsuperscript{81} Gabriel Marcel, \textit{Being and Having} (Westminster, England: Dacre Press, 1949), 117.
experience that our concepts could not fully grasp or properly explain on their own.\textsuperscript{84} It was for this reason that he introduced what he calls secondary reflection, which was, generally speaking, the kind of reflection that makes us aware of and capable of describing the realm of Mystery by putting us into contact with it.

The four concepts, in fact, that give us a complete sense of his epistemology are primary reflection and secondary reflection, problem and Mystery, respectively. Let us begin with primary reflection. In essence, primary reflection can be viewed as the opposite of secondary reflection, and includes the following: complex theoretical thinking, everyday reflection conceptual abstraction, generalizations, and all that depends upon what is universal and verifiable. It can basically be said to include the entire realm of objectivity or objective thought. The important fact to remain aware of is that such thinking, that is, all that is within primary reflection, involves abstracting from our situated involvement in the world—which is the fundamental nature of the subject, or existing individual: to be an embodied being in a situation—in order to arrive at the disinterested concepts that are shareable, universal, and verifiable. It is upon this that primary reflection depends.\textsuperscript{85} Accordingly, he essentially called primary reflection the mode of thinking that dealt with the realm of the problematic, that is, the realm of “problems.” Problems are that which confronts us in our situated involvement

\textsuperscript{84} One of the main analyses of the concrete subjects that lead Marcel to discover his notion of mystery was his existential/phenomenological exploration of the relation between the mind and the body, which he analyzes in \textit{Being and Having}. He found that the experience of the subject could not be accounted through conceptual thought, and further, that this experience of the \textit{being my body} as opposed to having \textit{a body} within the plethora of objects could not be properly described or accounted for through traditional methodology; thus, he felt bound to assert a realm beyond conceptual thought that nevertheless reveals itself as valid through our own concrete experiences.

\textsuperscript{85} It should also be noted that the influence of Descartes upon objective knowledge is manifested here in that the distinction between the subject and object is retained—where the subject is viewed as an observer isolated and looking out into the external world.
and requires a solution that is available to all. Primary reflection, then, deals with problems, and can be thought of as problem-solving thinking. Again, a problem is simply defined as that which presents itself before us in need of a solution that anyone, in theory, could come up with, hence, the usefulness of the abstract thought of primary reflection. All of the propositions and questions, then, that could be devised within an empirical science would fall under the rubric of the problematic for a problem is that which can, at least in theory (potentially), be solved through some technical procedure. It is against this backdrop that Marcel made his monumental contribution to philosophy with the introduction of his notion of Mystery and secondary reflection.

Secondary reflection, in contrast to primary reflection, deals with the realm of Mystery and bypasses the subject/object distinction upon which primary reflection depends. In primary reflection, in order to arrive at the universal concepts that make the possible communicable solutions to problems accessible to all, there needs to be an abstraction from our intimate involvement in the world, that is, our concrete situation. In order to do this, however, (for this abstraction to take place), a separation between the subject and the object must take place; that is, the object must be seen as completely separate from the subject, and for this reason, fully exposed and open for complete analysis by the subject. In this way, abstract thought, or primary reflection, is able to dissect its object into its parts in order to analyze and understand it. Yet, unlike primary reflection, secondary reflection restores the unity of experience that is lost in primary reflection: it binds what primary reflection severed and this it does because secondary reflection does not abstract from the situated involvement of the individual. It is through secondary reflection that we become aware of and have access to the
realm of Being, within which the concrete subject can be known or more fully encountered. In essence, secondary reflection gives us access to all that is left behind in the abstraction of primary reflection, which includes all that is intimate to the experience of the individual. It is there that things such as love, fidelity, faith, hope, God, evil, and so on can truly be explored and analyzed in their full existential significance. Secondary reflection is essentially recuperative of our fundamental connection to our concrete experience in the world. However, because of this, we have also left the realm of the verifiable, but we are not for that reason, according to Marcel, prevented from having knowledge, though our concepts may fail us at this point to give us the kind of objectivity that can make our knowledge public.

At this point, it may still be somewhat unclear as to how secondary reflection does allow for non-objective knowledge, so let us clarify further. First, let us highlight the dual factor that is involved in this process of secondary reflection. As Brendam, again, nicely explained, “Secondary reflection is a general term that refers both to the act of critical reflection on primary reflection and the realization or assurance of the realm of Mystery beyond primary reflection.”86 This kind of reflection, then, has at least two moments: that of reflecting upon the nature of primary reflection itself and perceiving its limits, and for this reason, thrusting us away from the confines of conceptual thought and into contact with actual experience. A further consequence (of non-objective knowledge or how secondary reflection makes possible non-objective knowledge) also seems to be a kind of action that arises from the assurance and experience of such a realm of Mystery. If it is still unclear as to how this realm is

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discovered, it will be helpful, first, to note that Marcel sometimes described his approach as phenomenological analyses based upon our concrete experiences in the world. To gain further clarity of his method and how we may become aware of Mystery, let us consider an example. An instance of something within the realm of Mystery that Marcel discussed is the notion of presence. He stated the following:

It is an undeniable fact, though it is hard to describe in intelligible terms, that there are some people who reveal themselves as “present”—that is to say, at our disposal—when we are in pain or in need . . . while there are other people who do not give us this feeling, however great is their good will. It should be noted at once that the distinction between presence and absence is not at all the same as that between attention and distraction . . . there is a way of listening which is a way of giving, and another way of listening which is a way of refusing, or refusing oneself.87

In this rich and telling passage, it is beautifully illustrated how one can, in fact, come to know something with great clarity and certainty within our concrete experience and yet not be able to conceptually describe it, let alone communicate it to another!

However, this was not shocking for Marcel, since this was the very nature of Mystery for him. What we are beginning to see here is how Marcel approached those things which cannot be dealt with conceptually, but that one can be quite certain of knowing them. This example clearly shows what Marcel meant by the possibility of non-conceptual knowledge. However, let us attempt to go further.

Although the above example demonstrates what Marcel meant by non-conceptual knowledge within the realm of Mystery, let us attempt to ground further his notion of knowledge by taking one final step. It is significant for our purposes,

87 Marcel, The Philosophy of Existentialism, 10.
then, to note that Marcel also called the realm of Mystery, or the meta-problematical, the realm of Being. This is important because it helps us to understand the confidence he had in his approach and his claim to a knowledge that was outside the traditional conceptions of knowledge. In other words, what grounded Marcel’s unique epistemology was that he considered that we are immersed within Being. This he showed, for instance, in “The Ontological Mystery” which claimed that this is evidenced by the act of the skeptic who questions existence—and such doubt, by the way, can only arise in a thought that has already divorced itself from experience—for, it can be noticed that the question can only arise within the stage of existence, so to speak. In Marcel’s own words:

> It might be said, by way of an approximation, that my inquiry into being presupposes an affirmation in regard to which I am, in a sense, passive, and of which I am the stage rather than the subject. . . . I am therefore led to assume or to recognize a form of participation which has the reality of a subject; this participation cannot be, by definition, an object of thought; it cannot serve as a solution—it appears beyond the realm of problems: it is meta-problematical.88

One of the main points here is that the very question of the reality of existence can only arise within the stage of existence, or rather, Being. That is, for Marcel, within our inquiry into being was implicitly contained an affirmation to which we are “passive,” or rather, in which we are “the stage rather than the subject,” because it affirms itself in the act of questioning. In yet other words, Marcel was indicating that Being affirms itself within us, in our very questioning of Being. As he explained in the second half of the passage, we are, in light of this, forced to acknowledge/recognize that we participate in a reality that encompasses the subject completely, on every side,

and thus cannot be put into question. This is what led Marcel to conclude that Being is what must be conceived as indubitably real, since it is that which must be presupposed in every inquiry (into being). Indeed, it is that which cannot, or should not, be put into question, since to do so would lead to the greatest absurdities or contradictions; it would lead us to deny, for instance, the reality which makes possible the reality of the subject that is asking the question. It is clear, then, from this passage, that the question presupposes Being in its questioning; that is, the act of questioning cannot occur outside of Being. Thus, this shows that we are entirely immersed within Being. Yet if this is admitted, although this participation cannot be an object for objective thought—since we are immersed in that which we would seek to explore, as Marcel pointed out—we are, nevertheless, in a unique position to access it, though clearly not through the traditional means of an objective methodology which requires the distinction between the subject and object.

Indeed, if the above is taken for granted, then, our approach must be radically different from that of traditional approaches to the question of Being as already suggested earlier. This is surely the reason Kierkegaard and Marcel’s approach diverged so distinctly from traditional philosophy, for they had similar intuitions about the flaws and shortcomings of tradition. If the above is correct, however, we can indeed have access to Being because we are in the unique position of participation within Being, but this also means that we are immersed within the “object” we seek to explore, which creates a problem for our usual approach. That is, our approach must be transformed from that of a logical-analytic approach that systematically deals with concepts and attempts to derive valid conclusions. This alternate approach is what
Marcel called secondary reflection, of which we have already spoken, and through which we are to have access to Being. Thus, what Marcel sometimes called the realm of Being, the realm of Mystery, or the meta-problematic, and the reason for the need of secondary reflection as an alternative means to access these is revealed in the following passage:

To postulate the meta-problematical is to postulate the primacy of being over knowledge (not as being as asserted, but of being as asserting itself); it is to recognize that knowledge is, as it were, environed by being, that it is interior to it in a certain sense . . . From this standpoint, contrary to what epistemology vainly seeks, there exists well and truly a mystery of cognition; knowledge is contingent on a participation in being for which no epistemology can account because it continually presupposes it (emphasis mine).89

What can be gleaned from this important passage is the reason and grounding for all that has been said. That is, the need of secondary reflection is clearly seen to be that, for Marcel, ordinary knowledge, that is, traditional epistemology, was premised upon a cognition that could not properly ground itself because its true foundation was a “participation in being for which no epistemology can account,” no matter how much it deludes itself into thinking that it can; indeed, it had to “continually presuppose it” since it was surrounded by it. With this suggestion, we are beginning in the recognition of our participation in Being, for it is what surrounds all cognition to begin with: this, as discussed above, is also discovered through secondary reflection. However, to do so is to assert Being over all cognitive knowledge, so to speak, that is based upon primary reflection. Indeed, his critique was that all prior epistemology was based upon this kind of primary reflection, which remained ignorant of and refused to

acknowledge its fundamental participation in Being, thus retaining its separation from that which founded it. Marcel, however, bypassed this problem through secondary reflection and showed that there is an alternate way other than that of traditional epistemological approaches that ignored our root-ness in Being and its ontological priority. In doing so, he reconfigured our fundamental epistemological assumptions and opened us into new grounds for an alternative form of knowing that ontologically preceded all conceptual thought or the realm of objectivity.

As a result, we have seen that the realm of Mystery is that within which we can encounter Being itself and become aware of realities that cannot be fully grasped through concepts. Hence, the priority of Being over conceptuality affirmed by Marcel, together with his formulation of secondary reflection, provides the foundation for the non-conceptual knowledge mentioned at the opening of this section and of which I would simply give the name existential truth. Existential truth then, in light of what has been said, would be all that which can be revealed within the realm of Being or Mystery, that which transcends our ordinary categories of thought. It is a truth, that although not lending itself to be conceptualized and universalized, can nevertheless be recognized to be real and this sense known; this reality is one that can only, strictly speaking, be encountered or revealed through our own concrete experience in the world (as opposed to through conceptual analysis available to all).

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90 This is, of course, a reversal of Cartesianism, and this shall be dealt with in a more detailed fashion in the essay that follows this one.
Conclusion

In the end, then, it has been shown quite clearly that while Kierkegaard appeared merely to thrust us into the waters of what Marcel called Mystery, Marcel went some way into describing its nature, as well as into justifying its reality philosophically through the concepts of problem and mystery and their complementary forms of reflection. As a result, then, although it is evident that both Kierkegaard and Marcel opened up space for a truth that lay outside objectivity or objective thought and which Marcel called mystery, Marcel has provided us with a way to philosophically safe-guard this realm and allow us a greater understanding of it. More poignantly, it has been shown that Marcel has made it possible to speak plausibly of existential truth, which this essay endeavored to show. This, in turn, also makes possible the notion of a religious truth and epistemology that transcends the kind of objective thought that ultimately bypasses the true significance and meaning of religiousness by its very nature. In light of this, what then, can be said of the question with which we began as to the possibility of an existential proof of God? Well, in so far as we have established the fact that there is such a coherent notion of existential truth that is not merely subjective, then it stands to reason that an existential proof is indeed possible, for as such, it would mainly entail elaborating the pathway through which such a truth can be discovered or revealed. However, this would be the subject for a separate reflection.
“…our hearts are restless until they find peace in You.”

St. Augustine
Introduction

In exploring the nature of an existential proof of God, one could surely begin with the fundamental question as to why Kierkegaard and Marcel wrote in the styles that they did. With their talents and abilities, they could have easily made it more congenial for all philosophers to follow their philosophical views. It could reasonably be asked why, with such brilliant minds, they did not write clearer philosophical treatises, but chose instead more creative, yet unsystematic, ways of writing that leave them vulnerable to misinterpretations. Or, more poignantly, for our purposes, it might be asked why, although they reject the traditional proofs of God, they seemed to affirm vehemently the existence of God and even spend their lives attempting to bring others to such an affirmation. The preliminary answer to this that can be gleamed at this point is that these questions are not entirely separate: indeed, they are intimately connected. It is safe to assume that given what has already been shown, they saw their unsystematic approaches as a necessary means toward the truth they sought to communicate. Thus, one can presume that if they had an assurance of God that did not involve the traditional methodology of logical analytic proofs, then they must have conceived of another way of arriving at such truth, or knowledge of God, and this “other way” is precisely what I seek to uncover and explore in this essay and which I also choose to call an existential proof.

91 This is a reference to the previous reflection on the notion of existential truth on which this essay is intending to build. It will attempt to continue exploring the notion of truth established there in order to investigate now the possibility of an existential proof and what it entails.

92 I have already shown that Kierkegaard and Marcel seemed to reveal that there is something that, in my view, can be called existential truth and that the nature of this truth is what causes their unusual writing style and unsystematic approaches. Their approaches, evidently, were contingent upon their philosophical insights. At this point, I will delve further into such a notion of truth and how it relates to (or what it would mean for) the development of an existential proof, as I am calling it.
As a point of departure to the question of an existential proof, I will first begin with Marcel’s critique of Descartes, which ultimately provides a useful context; then, I will explore Marcel’s notion of ontological exigence as an important exemplary of an existential proof. I shall then proceed by exploring the notion of despair in Kierkegaard, within which I argue that a parallel notion of an existential-phenomenological proof can also be found.

**Marcel’s Critique of Descartes**

In order to properly uncover what an existential proof would entail, it will be useful to begin with some of the reasons for Marcel’s rejection of traditional philosophy and the reason for his approach. It could be argued, in fact, that the hallmark of his philosophy is his rejection and subsequent reaction to Descartes, that is, his reversal of some of Descartes’ fundamental insights, or assumptions, which Marcel took as a point of departure. We must, however, be cautious of too narrow a depiction of Marcel, as if he merely reversed some of Descartes’ presumptions and used them as a logical point of departure for his philosophical system. On the contrary, Marcel never systematically used any philosopher—since he rejected all philosophical system building—from which he derived or developed his own philosophy; he seemed to have developed his philosophy through many influences, but also, and perhaps most significantly, through reflection upon his own concrete experiences in life. It should be clear, also, that he critiqued not only Descartes and all philosophy influenced by him, but also German Idealism and any system-building philosophy thereof.
For the purposes of clarity, therefore, I will focus upon his critique of Descartes, since it is of fundamental importance in an understanding of Marcel and since Descartes has perhaps been the greatest influence upon modern philosophy and all analytic philosophy. Marcel’s dissatisfaction with Cartesianism can be summarized as follows: Descartes’ portrayal of the subject is inadequate and his improper examination of the subject led to further problems such as the inability to properly account for the concrete individual’s own unique life experiences in the world. Such a critique of Descartes’ notion of the subject is crucial, for it is the foundation for his notion of truth, which Marcel put into question.

What, then, is the crux of Marcel’s critique that would entirely reverse his approach to philosophy and characterizes his existentialism? One commentator, Brendam Sweetman, expressed the following about Marcel:

He is not attempting to coerce the reader by force of logic alone into acceptance of his position, the latter approach being typical of Cartesian and recent analytic

93 A similar critique can be found in Kierkegaard against Hegel. He faulted Hegel for leaving the individual out of his system, as if the individual had no essential part of the system, except, perhaps, as being the means through which the system is made manifest.

94 There is an important note to be made here with respect to my use of both Marcel and Kierkegaard. It is entirely clear that neither of them would have approved, it is likely, of such a terminology as I have employed here with respect to knowledge of God and an existential proof (especially for Kierkegaard). However, this is of little consequence for me for several reasons—though time does not allow for an in-depth discussion. One observation may suffice, namely that an existential approach such as his had not yet been developed and for this reason, he feared to veer into the realm of the “spirit of abstraction” in any way: this was the cause for his caution with respect to certain terminology. He would then be apprehensive about my use of terms on at least two counts: for appearing to confuse the “spirit of abstraction” with his own project, so to speak, and that it confused him with the existentialism he attempted to dissociate from so strongly. Yet, my contention is that both of these worries may be less serious in our times than they were in his. For one, existentialism, at least in some sense, has come to be better understood. At minimum we are better aware of its meaning and of its different possible modes, so that we know not to confuse Marcel with Sartre, for instance. Second, it is clear that such an attempt at a kind of proof is being attempted here within the principles he himself uncovered for us; thus, nothing, I believe, should stop us from developing or of conceiving a new notion of proof that lies within his notion of the realm of mystery and existential truth. Hence, fully aware of the reason for his apprehensions, my articulation of the “proof” attempts to tread a fine line that is both novel and consistent with his views, as well as that of Kierkegaard.
philosophy. Marcel believes that coercion by means of formal argument is not possible for most of the crucial issues that are the special concern of philosophy.\textsuperscript{95}

The reason for this attitude toward logical coercion or an analytic approach, as already noted, stems from a rejection of the Cartesian subject. However, let us explore further what Descartes’ approach entails, which would result in such a radical rejection of a logical/analytic methodology.

In his search for certainty Descartes first postulated that the beginning of knowledge must be the thinking subject, since it was the only thing upon which he could not cast doubt; further, since he had not, and could not yet, establish the reality of the external/material world, this thinking subject was also conceived of as disembodied and looking out upon the world, thus giving rise to the mind-body problem. As a result, the subject was conceived of as an immaterial soul confronted with an external world, which it examined via its own “clear and distinct ideas.” Truth, then, was that of a correspondence between the ideas held in the mind and the world outside us.\textsuperscript{96} Such ideas, moreover, which properly corresponded to the world, he called clear and distinct ideas: we would, therefore, know the truth of something when we arrive at a clear and distinct idea of it. This notion in Descartes of course remained vague, but from this, one can understand the process by which we would arrive at what we would call a proof, i.e. logical coercion. Within this framework, a proof would inevitably entail a process of beginning with a proposition that expresses a clear and distinct idea, such as the \textit{cogito} and from this premise, deriving certain other

\textsuperscript{95} Sweetman, \textit{The Vision of Gabriel Marcel}, 9.

\textsuperscript{96} This, in fact, can essentially be thought of as the traditional notion of truth as correspondence. Indeed, we have not veered far from this form of correspondence theory in modern epistemology.
premises which would eventually lead us to a conclusion we were attempting to establish\textsuperscript{97} or prove. It is clear, under this view, that our ideas or concepts, conceived as disembodied—that is, not dependent or derived from the external world—are not only our conduit to truth but, more fundamentally, are held to be \textit{ontologically} prior and, thus, the foundation for the objectivity of knowledge or of our coming to know reality. This means that the objectivity of knowledge is ultimately couched upon our ideas. However, it is important to note that since such a view of objective knowledge is dependent upon a disembodied subject looking out upon the world of objects (or objects of the world), a rejection of such a subject would then entail a radical recasting of our notion of truth and objective knowledge altogether;\textsuperscript{98} indeed, the very notion of our traditional correspondence theory would be put into question and this is precisely what Marcel boldly did. He rejected the Cartesian model of the subject and thus opened up the door for a new conception of truth and foundation of knowledge: some of the consequences of which we shall explore as we proceed.

However, Marcel’s rejection is not a simple denunciation and recasting of a similar epistemological model, but an exact reversal of the Cartesian subject. His approach, therefore, had to be fundamentally distinct if he reversed the Cartesian model. The logical approach to truth only holds under such a Cartesian schema, and thus, a rejection and reversal of the foundation of his epistemology is bound to have radical effects upon our philosophical approach and our view of knowledge altogether.

\textsuperscript{97} One problem, of course, with this kind of correspondence theory is that of knowing or being certain that our ideas properly correspond to the external world if we are completely apart from it. His solution depended on God existing and not deceiving us so that our clear and distinct ideas must be true; however, the problem that remains is that it seems to lead us into a circular argument since Descartes appeared to presuppose what he was trying to prove when he argued for God and his non-deception.

\textsuperscript{98} At the very least, it would show that there is not just one kind of objective knowledge—or of arriving at objective truth.
Let us now turn to the details of Marcel’s recasting of the subject, which subsequently determined his philosophical outlook and approach.

Marcel, then, in contrast to Descartes, conceived of the subject as most essentially an embodied being in a situation,99 as he puts it. For Marcel, Descartes’ notion of the subject as a disembodied mind was an arbitrary violence to the fullness of the concrete subject, however rationally justified he may have thought it to be. Through his detailed phenomenological analysis of the subject, Marcel concluded that Descartes’ assumption was fundamentally flawed, and that the subject, being primarily an embodied being in the world, was first and foremost in direct contact with the world she experienced, that is, with reality. If Descartes were to ask, or suggest, that such experiences could be put into question because they were perceptions of the mind or the subject, Marcel could question Descartes as to the possibility of such doubt. That is, under what conditions could his intellect, or any one’s intellect, doubt anything? Descartes’ answer could clearly be, “Through his own clear and distinct ideas and ability to think.” It can then be asked again, however, how such a possibility to think and, therefore, to doubt arises. Here is where Marcel could answer that it arises after we detach ourselves from the situation or world in which we live, are involved in, and are in contact with. Since thought is the precondition for “system building,” this is why he would also state that “a system is a spectacle which is there for a disengaged mind, a mind which is not itself enclosed within the panorama it beholds.”100 In other words, Marcel would suggest that the precondition for building a

99 This expression, borrowed from Brendan Sweetman, accurately expresses one of Marcel’s central notions: that of the subject as an incarnate being or a being in a situation as expressed in this essay.

philosophical system is a divorcing of the mind from its world. However, this is precisely what Marcel vehemently rejects: “For the human subject such a disengagement is unthinkable.”\textsuperscript{101} He also stated it quite clearly in \textit{Being and Having}: “I cannot really stand aside from the universe (in which we exist), even in thought. Only by a meaningless pretence can I place myself at some vague point outside it.”\textsuperscript{102} In light of this rejection, we are barred from the possibility of a totalizing philosophical system. The reason for such an impossibility, again, is that “the human mind cannot, even in pure thought, reach the central observatory of the absolute looker-on, for the startlingly simple reason that it is only by participating in reality that it exists at all.”\textsuperscript{103} Again, Marcel essentially reversed Descartes’ epistemology and suggested that the subject was an embodied being that was in contact with his world prior to his abstractions, his notions, or “clear and distinct ideas,” and therefore, could never be fully detached from it to become the “absolute looker-on.” This means that he thought that our contact with the world, with reality, is ontologically prior to ideas. A consequence of this, Marcel also suggested, was that the subject was not transparent to himself\textsuperscript{104} and if Descartes were right in his view, then it would be. As such, the foundation for the objectivity of man’s knowledge is actually not in his ideas, but

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 13.
\item \textsuperscript{102} Marcel, \textit{Being and Having}, 19.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Ibid. One place Marcel expressed a similar thought is in \textit{Being and Having}, p. 27. There he stated, “Thought cannot go beyond existence. It can only to some degree abstract from it, and it is of first importance that it should not be deceived by this abstraction.”
\item \textsuperscript{104} This notion is clearly expressed by Gallagher: “Any mind detached from being could only deliver a verdict that was a pure construction: but knowledge which is a pure construction can only issue from a self which is a pure construction. Such a self would be absolutely transparent to itself, and this is clearly not the case with men. To recognize the non-transparency of the self is the supremely philosophical act: it is the intellectual counterpart of ontological humility.” Gallagher, \textit{The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel}, 7.
\end{itemize}
within man’s own lived experience in the world. This, then, is the true foundation of knowledge for Marcel since we exist within Being.

At this point, we can begin to see that two notions of truth arise, for Marcel ultimately did not reject abstract/objective knowledge as traditionally conceived, but simply showed that it was not the only kind of knowledge, nor the most fundamental. He merely relegated Descartes’ form of objective “scientific” knowledge to the realm of what he called the problematic or the world of primary reflection, which is the mode of abstract thinking that gives rise to our “objective” systems of thought. Marcel generally defined a problem as that which confronts a person and is in need of a solution that is accessible to all. A problem forces a person to detach from his concrete situation in the world in order to arrive at such a universal solution; it is this kind of reflection—problem solving reflection or primary reflection—that is the source of all abstract thinking: from our everyday reasoning to our more complex theoretical systems of thought such as that within math, science, and abstract philosophical thought. However, Marcel showed that this kind of thinking does not properly illuminate or explain the reality of the living subject.105

If this is all the case, then we can clearly understand why Marcel’s view forces us to reconsider what our proofs for God could achieve, for analytic philosophy, being influenced by Descartes, has taken this approach, which Marcel patently rejected as

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105 However, if he rejects this approach and notion of the subject, what happens to our correspondence theory? Well, clearly the foundation of such a notion of truth collapses and we are left either with no knowledge or with a notion of truth and knowledge that does not depend upon such a notion of correspondence—and we can conceive a knowledge outside of correspondence and universal verifiability—or we must recast a different notion of correspondence that does not involve the ontological priority of ideas over our embodied contact with the world in our knowledge. Contrary to Descartes, Marcel found the world, existence, including the reality of others, to be indubitable, that is, that which must be presupposed before any philosophical inquiry.
being appropriate for the most fundamental questions of philosophy: the existence of
God being among them. What Marcel suggested is that there is an entire realm of
reality which has not been properly explored because of the previous conceptual
prejudice and mode of approach in traditional philosophy and this is what he called the
realm of mystery or Being. He called mystery a problem “which encroaches upon its
own data, invading them, as it were, and thereby transcending itself as a simple
problem.” Under this view, then, things such as love, hate, evil, fidelity, faith, hope,
and God are within what he calls mystery and can be known only within the realm of
mystery itself. However, it must become clear that by mystery he did not mean
something that could not be solved at present but that in theory may have a solution.
By its very nature, a mystery is that which remains insoluble to objective thought, but
that is not, for this reason, subjective or unknowable. What Marcel classified as being
within the realm of Being or mystery can surely be known, but not through conceptual
analysis alone; rather, it can be said to be known in either of two ways: through direct
contact, so to speak, or revealed through a phenomenological description focused upon
concrete existence. In other words, through a phenomenological analysis, it is possible
to become aware of what has been implicit within our experience; this process is what
he sometimes characterizes as secondary reflection and secondary reflection most
essentially, or generally, can be characterized as a reflection that puts us into contact
with Being or mystery or, in essence, reality.

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107 In light of this, as we shall see, God can only be known through description (or secondary
reflection), which can then make one aware and see one’s previous experience differently. This also
shows why the traditional proofs would fail, for God, then, would not be an idea, or concept, but a
concrete reality (as Thompé points out as well). If God were the conclusion of a logical proof, he
would be an idea or would be conceived as an object outside the mind, as a “truth” we were seeking to
At this point, then, the grounding for Marcel’s approach has been established, which, can be understood in contrast to his critique of traditional philosophy, and specifically of Descartes. Specifically, we have seen that because Marcel reversed Descartes’ view of the subject, the character and approach of his philosophy was radically changed, such that it focused upon the lived reality of the subject and a detailed analysis of concrete experience, as opposed to an attempt to prove certain proposition through logical demonstrations. Having said this, we are now in a position to explore his insights and method with respect to the existence of God.

**Ontological Exigence As Existential Proof**

At this juncture, we endeavor to explore Marcel’s notion of ontological exigence in conjunction with the notion of an existential proof in light of what has been said above. The central issue that can be discerned from the above is that, for Marcel, Descartes’ notion of the self is a pure construction, and as a pure construction, any “knowledge” derived from such a self must also be a pure construction. In other words, “Any mind detached from being could only deliver a verdict that was a pure construction.”\(^{108}\) It is this central notion that colors Marcel’s approach and moves him toward a thought and approach that remains as closely tied to our concrete reality in the world as possible. It is for this reason that he characterizes his approach at different points as starting from the concrete, moving to the abstract, and then back to the concrete. As he described it in one place, “My method of advance does invariably

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consist, as the reader will have noticed already, in working my way up from life to thought and then down from thought to life again, so that I may try to throw more light upon life.”¹⁰⁹ This illustrates for us more clearly that what Marcel had in mind was that in our attempt to ascertain truth or know reality, we cannot remove ourselves from our contact with the world or our lived experience—for our existence cannot be conceived of as other than within being, as we have seen. The only problem that this poses is that if “I am altogether engaged in being,” then, “no merely objective judgment upon it is possible.”¹¹⁰ Hence, we are forced to alter our approach to something other than a merely objective approach, which is how Marcel, in fact, proceeded, and through his phenomenological analyses, ended by discovering what he called ontological exigence, which I will also show can be thought of as an of existential proof.

Ontological exigence is a central notion in Marcel, which he discussed at length in many of his works, including his famous two-volume lecture series, *The Mystery of Being*. He dealt with this notion at some length in these works, and what we are presented there is a progression and a development of the thought—although it should be noted that he did not necessarily arrive at these through the same progression in other of his works. The notion plays such a significant role in Marcel that he ascribed to it the reason for the philosopher’s quest; this is the essential claim that is made in the first volume of *The Mystery of Being*. He described the ontological exigency as an inner demand in man or as the need for transcendence and that this is what propels the philosopher to philosophize. In volume two of *The Mystery of Being*,

we also see that he identified the need as more specifically the need for Being, which he also equates with God—and the reason for this shall become clear as we go along.

We have already seen that Marcel did not think it possible to abstract from being and we must thus explore reality through our concrete experiences rather than through abstract thought. In his attempt at such an exploration of our existence as it is lived in the world, he came to discover the notion of an absolute exigence that he sometimes called the existence for Being, as mentioned above. He suggested through many concrete examples that man is guided by this ontological exigence for transcendence and that if man ignores such an exigence he is likely to come to despair or experience the world as broken, as he sometimes referred to it. One such concrete example is the phenomenological analysis of one who is attempting to prove the existence of God. This is an instance in which we see ontological exigence revealed through Marcel’s phenomenological analysis/description. He explained that, in reality, the natural theologian would not undertake the endeavor to prove God if he were not guided by something other than pure reason. Marcel declared that

An “objective” demonstration of the existence of God is impossible. An objective demonstration pretends to prescind from the absolute exigence. But if a would-be theologian really did this, no demonstration would ever be forthcoming. . . . reality treated as pure “object” could not serve as a premise to establish a conclusion with transcendent value.111

It is here suggested that the very attempt to prove God must come from something other than a simple objective treatment of reality, hence, the proof presupposes that which Marcel called ontological exigence. In another place, speaking of mystery,

111 Gallagher, The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel, 125.
which can be equated with his view of the knowledge of God since he is within Mystery, Marcel stated the following:

> It is clear that the apprehension of the ontological mystery as meta-problematic is the motive force of this recovery through reflection. But we must not fail to notice that it is a reflexive motion of the mind that is here in question, and not a heuristic process. The proof can only confirm for us what has really been given to us in another way.\(^\text{112}\)

The “heuristic process” would here be a logical proof for God, but he affirmed that a proof can only confirm what has been given to us another way. Ontological existence, then, in reality precedes any genuine attempt at a demonstration, for Marcel. Further than this, it is one of the central ways that we have access to Being or God, aside from its propelling us toward attempts at objective proofs or demonstrations. In other words, ontological exigence is one of the ways in which one may actually become aware of transcendence or God, without which, proofs for God would not be forthcoming.

What the above shows, then, is that a person who endeavors to prove God must do so out of a desire that God exists; that is, his implicit or explicit desire that God exists is what propels him to prove God. As a result, we see that with this observation, Marcel was suggesting that ontological exigence is actually a mode of participation that explains our turning toward the search of a meta-problematic reality and which moreover, precedes any logical proof—and in fact, may not entail it, as in the case of some persons of faith. As Gallagher put it, “The proof of God’s existence,” rather than some logical progression, “is an elevation to the level of thought of the participation

\(^{112}\) Marcel, *Being and Having*, 121.
within which thought arises.” The real proof of God, then, could actually lie, according to Marcel, in our realization that our longing for transcendence or our ontological exigence itself is an indication of our participation in a higher reality. In one of the clearest expression of this thought I have come across, Gallagher expressed the following:

*Man’s assurance of the presence of being is not separable from his need for being.* . . . This need, which verbally would seem to denote a mere absence or lack, is actually at the bottom of my deepest assurance of positivity. “Man is infinite lack”: but in so apprehending himself he utters the magic words which give him an absolute meaning and dispel the opacity of the world. We have spoken of the blinded intuition as shedding a light across experience, but we might just as well have spoken of the ontological exigence doing so. I am a source of light in so far as I participate in a transcendent: but *ontological exigence is the mode in which my participation is revealed to me.* [my emphasis]

This is a shocking and profound statement: our ontological exigence or need, instead of being an expression of a lack, is in fact an indication or revelation of our participation within Being. Hence, in so far as I am capable of experiencing this ontological demand, I am already participating in a transcendent reality. In other words, the exigence itself is the proof of the transcendent or the evidence of it.

The “argument,” in fact, can be summarized quite easily, for it is essentially the same Augustine expression noted at the outset of this essay. Indeed, it could be said that Augustine was the precursor to this existential proof. Put this way, Marcel’s view was that we have a need for Being, that is, for transcendence or for God and this

115 The point turns on the fact that we are capable of experiencing this exigence, but not on the fact that we all actually have it or are aware of it. Marcel grants that it is possible for a person not to be aware of his ontological exigence or live in the world without experiencing such a demand or need.
need is satisfied only in and through God. Thus the proof, in this light, can go two ways, meaning that if God is the only thing that can fulfill it, then we know God to be real and that when we do not find fulfillment in God, or reject God, the result is that we fall into despair, or remain in a broken world as he sometimes described it. Of course, it is not so simplistically argued, for he did not argue in this way at all, especially since it would be considered an analytic form; instead he “argued” by his phenomenological description of this condition of man and from his detailed analysis that reflects both upon our common experiences as well as on his own experience. He concludes that the need for being is indeed part of the human condition, that is, part of the condition of man’s existence in the world or his existential structure, so to speak. Thus, he did not simply state this as an argument, but the notion is buttressed by the ontological perspective described above in which man is discovered to be enveloped within being, thus giving more credence or ontological weight to our experiences in the world.\footnote{He made his detailed concrete observation and only later did he suggest or arrive at his affirmation that this need for Being is equal to our need for God. Part of his explanation for this, as we see in his \textit{Mystery of Being}, is because God as a personal or supra-personal Thou would be the only possible source of the unconditional transcendent values that we long for and depend upon for our commitments and ideal. That is, he suggested that it would be difficult to understand how some of us take upon ourselves ideal causes for which we were willing to live and die if it were not for some awareness, even if remote, of an absolute Thou to which we were responding. Such sacrifices would not be intelligible without some awareness of an absolute Thou that is the source of absolute meaning and values for Marcel. How could these things be explained otherwise, he suggested.}

The objection might be made at this point that Marcel presumed to know the longing of every person’s heart and could one not imagine that he could live quite happily without ever thinking of God? Marcel’s response to this would be that he never claimed that this awareness needed to be explicit. His claim was simply that we can be implicitly—or indeed explicitly—aware of God through certain experiences in
our lives, and that without such an awareness, we would have trouble explaining some experiences and/or actions. For instance, even though a person may profess to be an atheist, his conviction that justice must be served and that it should be defended unto death would not exist—or be difficult to explain—if there were not some kind of implicit awareness of God, who is the source of all unconditional value.\footnote{Such a notion was echoed by William Lane Craig in his Ethical Argument for the existence of God. He argued that we do hold that there are objective moral values, but that moral values imply a moral lawgiver and that, therefore, there must be an eternal Lawgiver, that is, God.}

However, Marcel was aware that this affirmation of God, based upon such a conviction, will not and does not occur to everyone, but surely there are some for whom such occurrences are experienced as an influx of transcendence which thus leads them to an affirmation of God. Of course, Marcel gave other accounts for his notion that our experiences of being in the ultimate sense must be of a Thou and are the condition for experiences such of fidelity and hope, but that this would be somewhat tangential to the focus of our present concern, which is upon the significance and meaning of ontological exigence.

One of the most telling passages in relation to ontological exigence that specifically lines up with our need for God, is when Marcel spoke of our need to ask the question “who” or “what am I.” It will be beneficial to quote the passage at length to capture the full impact of his thought:

> When I reflect upon the question “What am I?” taken as a single issue, I see that it means, “What is there in me that can answer this question?” Consequently, every answer to this question coming from me must be mistrusted.

> But could not someone else supply me with the answer? An objection immediately arises: the qualifications which the other may have which enable him to answer me, the eventual validity of what he says, are observed by me; but what qualifications have I for making this observation? I can therefore, only refer...
myself without contradiction to a judgment which is absolute, but which is at the same time more within me than my own judgment. In fact, if I treat this judgment as in the least exterior to me, the question of what it is worth and how it is to be appreciated must inevitably be asked afresh. The question is then eliminated qua question and turns into an appeal. But perhaps in proportion as I take cognizance of this appeal qua appeal, I am led to recognize that the appeal is possible only because deep down in me there is something other than me, something further within me than I am myself—and at once the appeal changes its index.”

Thus, aside from our very need to ask the question, the significance of this passage lies in the question of who is qualified to answer the question “What am I?” He immediately suggested that we find ourselves in a dilemma since we might quickly discover that we are not qualified to answer the question, for “every answer coming from me must be mistrusted.” By this, Marcel meant that we are not in a position to judge objectively, for if we were, we would not have had the need to ask the question in the first place—we would be transparent to ourselves. For this reason, we cannot find an objective answer by ourselves and, thus, need recourse to an absolute judgment which is not our own; he also established that such objectivity could not be found by any other person who lies outside of us, for their judgment would therein be judged by us, leading us back into the initial dilemma. This is what forced Marcel to suggest that the “question is eliminated qua question and turns into an appeal,” an appeal toward something that is absolute, transcendent, and yet more deeply within us than we are to ourselves. That is, at the moment that we realize that we can not refer to anything or anyone outside of us to answer the question, and at the same time recognize that the question has transformed into an appeal, we can become aware that the appeal, as he put it, has “changed its index” since the condition for the possibility of the appeal is

118 Marcel, Being and Having, 124-125.
the recognition that there is something other than I, deeper within me than I am to
myself that can answer the appeal. The appeal, then, toward something other than I
that can answer the question is an expression of our ontological exigence, which also
indicates, for the first time, why the ontological exigence must also be understood to
be toward an absolute Thou.

To illustrate the link between ontological exigence and the notion of an
absolute Thou in Marcel, let us look at one further passage from *Creative Fidelity*
where he spoke about exigence:

> We are now perhaps in a better position to give an answer to the question who am I, or, more properly, to the question who are we who can ask who we are. Formulated in this way the question emphasizes the radical ontological lack of self-sufficiency in the human condition itself. Not only am I a person only in the presence of another person, but this mutually constituted presence itself is wholly oriented toward and dependent upon an absolute Thou. It is not only I who must find my center beyond myself, but we as well. The fact that our center lies beyond us changes the question into an appeal: ‘You alone really know me and judge me; to doubt you is not to free myself but to annihilate myself.’

Here, we find clearly expressed, not only our exigence for Being, but also, for Being as an absolute Thou, as God, who is the only one who can satisfy the need and answer our appeal for self disclosure—since we cannot fully know ourselves. He begins the passage by showing that human beings are ontologically insufficient on our own, not only because we are mutually constituted selves in need of the presence of others, but also because, even together, we are insufficient, as a group, since we must still find our “center” or what constitutes us. As a result, then, our exigence shows that we are wholly dependent upon an absolute Thou that engulfs us and is deeper within us than

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we are to ourselves and can truly know us and judge us. To deny such a Thou as is implied here is to forgo any truly valid answer to the question “Who am I?” or “Who are we?” since we would have eliminated the only way such a question could be answered—we would be left unable to know ourselves, thus his claim, “To doubt you is not to free myself but to annihilate myself.”

Let us conclude this section by returning to its initial concern and ask, “How exactly does the foregoing constitute an existential proof of God?” Our initial step toward an answer was to show that Marcel first and foremost reversed the Cartesian assumption of a disembodied subject, thereby negating the ontological weight or validity of ideas in casting its vote upon reality. Then we established that in contrast to Descartes, the subject, for Marcel, was a being environed within a world, enshrined in being; and thus, being “altogether engaged in Being” in this way, preventing us from the ability to give a merely objective judgment upon it. This means, then, that a genuine analysis of Being must come, not through an objective approach, but through a “subjective” approach like that of Marcel that explores the concrete subject as he encounters reality. Only as such can we get close to an apprehension of Being. In light of this, then, we have established that Being can be revealed through a phenomenological analysis of the living subject in the world, since thoughts are no longer given arbitrary ontological priority over the experience of the living subject and her encounter with Being. It is thus that Marcel’s ontological exigence can be taken as a serious claim to the reality of a transcendent being he called an absolute Thou. Given that we are immersed within being, our primordial encounter and experience with reality, when examined in their subtleties, should be taken quite seriously. Again, the
final point is that what I am calling an existential proof of God—ontological exigence—arises from the fact that we are immersed within being or participate within it and are thus entitled to say with Marcel that “man’s assurance of the presence of being is not separable from his need for being.” Our need for being is thus not the evidence of a lack but a revelation of our rooted-ness and dependence upon God, without whom our experiences in the world would not be colored as they are.

Kierkegaard and Despair

In this section, we explore the parallels between Kierkegaard and Marcel with respect to the above notion of an existential proof. This shall not be an extended analysis of Kierkegaard on the issue, since the notion of an existential proof has already been discussed at some depth above. However, we will simply examine how the notion shows up in Kierkegaard’s philosophy, as well. Let us briefly review Kierkegaard as we proceed.

Because of his psychological genius, Kierkegaard was aware of the will of man. He thus knew well that the will is a major factor in man’s rejection or acceptance of God; hence, he rarely approached the issue directly. He used his indirect approach: his pseudonyms. Now the purpose of this was to, in some sense, respect the freedom of man, for he thought we are essentially free and that it was up to us to make the choice to move toward God or not, to live a certain kind of existence or not, and that this choice was ultimately up to us. However, as we already know, Kierkegaard was trying to communicate a certain truth, for he wanted to move people into a genuine religious existence. Thus, what did he accomplish through his pseudonyms? He
developed three spheres of existence, which he called the esthetic, the ethical, and the ethical-religious. He then expressed that he was trying to seduce people into the religious. He explained that this was his purpose from the beginning of his writing career, that he was always religious and had a religious goal. It should be clearly noted that he did believe his “goal” aimed toward something objectively real. In other words, he was attempting to transmit a *truth* that he could not communicate through objective means or approaches. Thus, what he did in the unsigned works was to show, essentially, that the lives of the non-religious are essentially in despair and that our only salvation from despair is a life of faith.

This is all clearly and beautifully stated in his *Sickness Unto Death*, where he stated that the state of most men is despair and not to be in despair is to be in the “state” of faith, where despair has been rooted out—this is done by “resting transparently in the power that established” the self. In other words, we can only escape despair when we rest in God and if we do not rest in God, we are in despair, and there, one can reasonably argue, is the exact phenomenological “proof” found in Marcel that we have described above.

God is the ground of our being for Kierkegaard, as he stated in *Works Of Love*, and thus we are incomplete and restless without him: as in Augustine. Of course, like Marcel, Kierkegaard was keen enough not to suggest that we are literally feeling our despair or feeling depressed, when we do not trust or believe in God consciously—he, in fact, explained that someone can be in despair and not be aware of

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121 From now on WOL.
it, and even fool himself into thinking that he is happy and has no need of God.122 Despair, for Kierkegaard, was a technical term that describes the state of an individual who is not properly relating to God, to the ground of his being—sometimes he expressed this as not relating absolutely to the absolute and relatively to the relative. However, it is significant to note that when one is in despair and not aware of it, it is always possible to become aware of it; this is partly what Marcel and Kierkegaard seem to have attempted to make us aware of. While Marcel expressed it by saying that we have an Ontological need for Being or Ontological exigence, without which we live as in a broken world, Kierkegaard would say that we need God, to rest in Him, and that without a proper relation to the ground of our Being, the God who created us, we are in despair and are never fully ourselves in the deepest sense or experience ultimate fulfillment. In his own words, he stated, “The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it.”123 It is evident from this that, for Kierkegaard, despair is to not be properly related to God, and that to remove despair was to “rest transparently in the power that established” us, that is, in God. Of course, it is also evident that this is how he defined faith, for the opposite of despair is faith.

Let us attempt at this point, to make it more explicit why the Kierkegaardian view we are unveiling can qualify as a similar existential proof outlined above. In like

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122 This can be revealed as despair later—if only in eternity. Kierkegaard suggested that we can be in despair and not know it because of the fact that we might be having a pleasant time in the world and enjoying ourselves, but that with a disruption of these pleasures, it would become evident by our reaction that we were in despair all along.

manner to Marcel, Kierkegaard stated that “the human self is such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another.”

In other words, because we are an established relation, we are incomplete without a proper recognition of this relation since we are dependent upon this ground that established us. In fact, he was suggesting here that in relating to ourselves, we can inadvertently, as earlier in Marcel, realize that in the deepest sense we are relating to God in our inquiry or that in our seeking for ourselves, we eventually find our need for God in self-realization and to answer the question “Who am I?” Furthermore, this is what provides the context for the claim that we could not or would not despair if the above description of our ontological dependence on God were not the case. That is, because we are constituted by God and are dependent upon Him, we are thus in an inadequate state of being when we live in discord or in rejection of God, whether consciously or unconsciously. Kierkegaard explained it in the following passage:

This is why there can be two forms of despair in the strict sense. If a human self had itself established itself, then there could be only one form: not to will to be oneself, to will to do away with oneself, but there could not be the form: in despair to will to be oneself. This second formulation is specifically the expression for the complete relation (of the self), the expression for the inability of the self to arrive at or to be in equilibrium and rest by itself, but only, in relating itself to itself, by relating itself to that which established the relation.

This clearly reveals the answer to the question we began with, for here we see that Kierkegaard’s view was that we, indeed, would not despair if we were not beings that were constituted by God and dependent upon God. To speak more faithfully about this

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125 Ibid., 14.
particular passage, we would only despair in one way—by not wanting to be ourselves or to “want to do away with” ourselves—but there would not be the kind of despair that is the “expression for the inability . . . to arrive at or to be in equilibrium and at rest by itself,” but only by relating itself to that which established the self, that is, God. In other words, the kind of despair that realizes the need for God would not exist in anyone if a human being were not established by and in need of God.

Hence, in light of the above, we can already see the direct parallels of Marcel’s notion of ontological exigence. If we consider a few other passages from Kierkegaard this becomes even clearer. Consider the following passage:

In other words, what makes a person despair is not misfortune but his lack of the eternal. Despair is to lack the eternal . . . Despair is not, therefore, the loss of the beloved—that is unhappiness, pain, suffering—but despair is the lack of the eternal.127

Perhaps no clearer expression can be had to illustrate the fact that for Kierkegaard, as for Marcel, we are in a kind of incompleteness without God, for here we are only to replace the term eternal with God to see that Kierkegaard is plainly stating that we are in fact in despair when we lack God. In another passage he explained:

Despair is due to relating oneself with infinite passion to a particular something, for one can relate oneself with infinite passion—unless one is in despair—only to the eternal. Spontaneous love is in despair in this way, but when it becomes happy, as it is called, its being in despair is hidden from it; when it becomes unhappy, it becomes manifest that it was in despair.128

126 Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, 14.
127 Kierkegaard, Works of Love, 41.
128 Ibid., 40.
Here is yet another instance that reveals Kierkegaard’s view that the self is incomplete, or unfulfilled, without relating with infinite passion to God. Hence, it can be said, as he appeared to suggest in the SUD quoted earlier, that such despair would not occur if there were not a God who establishes the self as such a dependent being and who fulfills such a lack. Thus, we have reached the point of unveiling the connection between Kierkegaard and Marcel on the notion of an existential proof, for what we have shown is that the ontological exigence has an obvious parallel in the notion of despair and faith in Kierkegaard. All we have left to reference is the positive element of their connection, that is, how faith compares to Marcel.

In the section on Marcel above, we made mention of the fact that his existential proof had two moments: that of the negative side of the ontological exigence as providing an occasion for revealing that we are in need of Being or God and second, that such a longing does find fulfillment—only through God. Thus, these two moments provided what I called an existential/phenomenological proof since neither occasion—the positive nor the negative expression of the exigence—would be possible without God. In Kierkegaard then, we have made it explicit that despair is the negative expression of the negative moment of the ontological exigence. Faith, however, would reveal the positive side of the two moments of the existential proof discussed in Marcel. That is, faith would resemble the fullness of Being spoken of by Marcel and that, in faith, we have rooted out despair and thus found a kind of fulfillment or rest within our lives, within our beings, through God. This “rest” that is also a kind of constituting of the self is to be seen as an existential proof since the condition of the possibility of such a fulfillment is that there is such a God who fills
the cavity of despair. In Kierkegaard’s own words, we, indeed, cannot be indifferent to
the role of faith in our lives as if it were some conceptual conclusion that one could
live with but be quite indifferent to it:

But the goods of the spirit are only in the inner being, are only in the possession,
and therefore a person cannot, if he actually possess them, be as one who does not
possess them; on the contrary, if one is such a person, one simply does not possess
them at all. If anyone thinks he has faith and yet is indifferent toward this
possession, is neither cold not hot, he can be certain that he does not have faith.129

In other words, faith is the fulfillment of something that previously was lacking;
hence, one could not be indifferent to it. Just as despair, for Kierkegaard, constituted a
kind of phenomenological proof of God, faith also provides such an assurance in being
the only way to quench the longing of the soul.

Conclusion

In the end, what have we come to learn about the possibility of an existential
proof of God through Kierkegaard and Marcel? First and foremost, we have found that
the common ground between them is that they both attempt to bring us into contact
with our concrete reality, and further, that this concrete reality within which we find
ourselves is the only place within which any relevant truth or meaning is to be found
by us in this all-too-human existence. But more specifically, with respect to the
question of the existence of God we saw that they both illuminate a path for us that is
contrary to all traditional conceptual approaches to God, which would have us follow
some logical deductions toward our affirmation of God. We saw that they found this
approach profoundly lacking and that, on the contrary, such an approach might detract

from the only true way that a knowledge of God is possible, that is, through a careful analysis of our existence, or as Gallagher put it,

Being’s role in thought is not so much that of a concept as it is a creative intuition analogous to that of the artist. The presentiment of transcendence haunts human experience, as the artist’s intuition haunts his consciousness. Just as the artist’s intuition only comes to be recognized in the artistic process which it alone makes possible, so the presence of being is only recognized by being read back out of the human experience which it alone makes possible.¹³⁰

This beautifully expresses the entire impetus of Kierkegaard and Marcel's writing with respect to God, for their central claim was that we cannot find God outside of our experience and certainly not in pure thought. Even more poignantly, it could even be said that for Marcel and Kierkegaard, our proof could never be in the text itself (strictly speaking), though the closest would be the kind of phenomenological descriptions they have provided, but rather, in our own encounter with transcendence, with God, as He can be encountered or be read out of our experience in the world. Indeed, it is only from our lived experience in the world that God can truly be known and encountered, and not as the conceptual result of a logical proof. Thus, if there is to be any knowledge of God through what I have chosen to call an existential proof, it is ultimately to be found within our own experience in the world and the text is only a sign or a pointer to look upon our existence in the way that Marcel and Kierkegaard

¹³⁰ Gallagher, The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel, 125.
pointed us to, within which we may find the transcendence that we are consciously or unconsciously searching for.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


ANTHONY MALAGON

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Queens College

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EDUCATION

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<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Degree</th>
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<tr>
<td>Purdue University</td>
<td>Ph.D., Philosophy</td>
<td>2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Queens College</td>
<td>B.A. Philosophy</td>
<td>2003</td>
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Areas of specialization
- 19th and 20th Century Continental Philosophy
- Philosophy of Religion, Ethics

Areas of Competence
- History of philosophy (Ancient Greek and Modern),
- Eastern Philosophy of Religion

Dissertation
- Title: *An Existential Proof of God*
- Committee: Dan Smith (Chair), William McBride, Jaqueline Marina, Christopher Yeomans

FELLOWSHIPS, AWARDS, AND SCHOLARSHIPS

- Purdue Fellowship (Two year full scholarship, and two years of teacher assistance—2003-2007)
- Institute for Recruitment of Teachers Fellow (IRT) (2002)
- Queens College SEEK honors awards (1999-2000)

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

John Jay, New York City, New York
Instructor (full responsibilities)
- Existentialism (Spring ‘13)
- Introduction to Philosophy (Fall ‘11, Spring ’12, Fall ’12, Spring ‘13)
- Judicial and Correctional Ethics (Fall’11, Fall’12)
- Philosophy and Law (Spring’12)
Queens College, Flushing, New York  
Instructor (full responsibilities)  
  Philosophy of Religion (Spring ‘14)  
  Introduction to Ethics (Spring ‘09, Spring ‘10, Spring ’11, Fall ’13, Spring 14’)  
  Introduction to Philosophy (Fall ‘08, Spring ‘09, Fall ’09, Fall ’11, Spring’12, Fall’12, Spring’13)  
Supplemental Instructor  
  Political Science 101 (three times: Fall ‘07, Fall ‘08, Fall ’09)  
  World Studies: Social Science (Two times: Spring ’08, Spring ’09)  
Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana  
Teaching Assistant  
  Religions of the East (Two times: Donald Mitchell, Fall ’06, Spring ’07)  
  Philosophy of Religion (Michael Bergmann, Spring ’06)  
  Introduction to Ethics (Two times: Patrick Kain, Spring ’05, Fall ’05)  
Queens College  
  Tutor (2000-2002)  

CONFERENCES  
“Toward and Existential Proof of God,” Baylor Symposium on Faith and Culture:  
  Kierkegaard a Christian Thinker for our Time? Baylor University, Waco, Texas,  
  October 31-November 2, 2013.  
“On the Notion of Existential Truth,” Kierkegaard and the Present Age Conference,  
  Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, November 14-16, 2013.  

OTHER ACTIVITIES  
  Poetry Club (Initiated and helped to organize the first SEEK Poetry Club. Currently,  
  over forty student members)  
  Spoken Word Poetry (Helped organize end of semester Poetry events. Fall ’09, Spring  
  ’10, and Spring ‘13)  
  “The Great Debate” (Hosted and helped to organize this college wide student debate,  
  attended by over two hundred students. Fall ‘09)  

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS  
  American Philosophical Association  
  Soren Kierkegaard Society  

REFERENCES  
  Dan Smith, Purdue University (committee chair): smith1302@googlemail.com  
  William McBride, Purdue University: wmcbride@purdue.edu  
  Abigail Doukhan, Queens College: doukhana@yahoo.com  
  Stephen Grover, Queens College: Stephen.grover@qc.cuny.edu
# LIST OF GRADUATE COURSES TAKEN

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