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Sources of Dignity for Persons: Capacities, Friendship, Love and Subjectivity

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By  
Matthew Thomas Nevius  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
INTRODUCTION .....	5
I.    Statement of Problem .....	5
CHAPTER ONE. Boethius, Locke, Kant and the Capacities of the Person.....	23
I.    Boethius: Persons and Rationality .....	24
II.   John Locke: Persons and Self-Consciousness .....	25
III.  Kant: Persons and the Capacity to Set Ends for Oneself .....	27
CHAPTER TWO. Friendship, Love and the Uniqueness of Persons.....	35
I.    The Search for the Uniqueness of Persons .....	36
A. Aristotle on Friendship: Loving Persons <i>qua</i> Good .....	36
B. Badhwar on Friendship: Loving Persons as Ends.....	39
C. Velleman: Love as Affirmation of the Rational Will .....	41
II.   When Appraising Persons are we ‘Seeing’ Persons as Irreplaceable? .....	44
CHAPTER THREE. Karol Wojtyla, Gabriel Marcel and the Irreducibility of Persons....	46
I.    The Irreducibility of the Person .....	47
II.   Karol Wojtyla on Subjectivity and the Irreducible .....	47
III.  Gabriel Marcel and the Revelation of the Person in ‘Lived Experience’ .....	49
IV.  Is Marcel’s Embodied-Situational-Existence Sufficient to give us the Second Source of Dignity? .....	65

A. The Irreplaceability of Persons in Light of Marcel’s Understanding of Subjectivity .....	66
B. Critique of the Person as Being Irreplaceable in ‘Lived Experience’ .....	67
CHAPTER 4. The Tying of the Knot: How are we to Coherently Understand the Relationship between the Two Sources of Dignity? .....	70
I.    Problems with Thinking of the Two Sources of Dignity as Two Distinct Properties .....	71
II.   Gabriel Marcel and Substance .....	73
III.  Karol Wojtyla and the Relation between Human Nature and the Person.....	75
A. Consciousness qua Rationality as Understood by Karol Wojtyla .....	75
B. Distinction between Reflective and Reflexive Awareness .....	76
C. Man as an Actor .....	78
IV.   Response to Zagzebski.....	80
CONCLUDING REMARKS .....	84
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	87

**So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.**

- **Jesus Christ**

**Knowledge: as he beholds what confronts him, its being is disclosed to the knower. What he beheld as present he will have to comprehend as an object, compare with objects, assign a place in an order of objects, and describe and analyze objectively; only as an It can it be absorbed into the store of knowledge. But in the act of beholding it was no thing among things, no event among events; it was present exclusively.**

- **Martin Buber**

**The starting point for every reflection on disability is rooted in the fundamental convictions of Christian anthropology: even when disabled persons are mentally impaired or when their sensory or intellectual capacity is damaged, they are fully human beings and possess the sacred and inalienable rights that belong to every human creature. *Indeed, human beings, independently of the conditions in which they live or of what they are able to express, have a unique dignity and a special value from the very beginning of their life until the moment of natural death.***

- **John Paul II**

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## INTRODUCTION

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What does it mean to speak about the dignity of a human person? Is it permissible to speak about the dignity of trees and rocks? Does a rock share a sacred space in which we, as a society, develop laws to protect the rights and dignity of the rocks? What is it about the *human person* that demands protection from the state? What is it about the human person that demands respect from other human persons? What is this thing called ‘personhood’ that demands respect from other persons? Is there something *special* about the person that demands my full respect? What is this thing that we single out as ‘special’ in the human person?

In America at least, when we speak of the dignity of the human person, we are usually referring to something special or inviolable about the human person that protects them from being treated like the rest of the objects in the world; that is, we distinguish between a ‘someone’ and a ‘something.’ Why else would we have judges, juries and courts if we did not think that *someone* needed protection from violence or manipulation from other human persons? The primary referent in our development of civil laws, and state and federal policies, is the human person – the protection of the human person in all his rights and dignity. Human rights seem to be grounded in the concept of the human person – the dignity of the human person.

Though the above may seem to be common-sense to us, nevertheless the notion of *what dignity is* is left obscure and in need of explanation. This thesis paper is an exploration of what this thing we call ‘dignity’ *is*. The concept of dignity will be looked at in terms of the different features of the human person. Personhood and dignity are closely related in the sense that the term “person” refers to the human self – the ‘I’ and dignity is that which refers to the special

feature of the human person. *The main question that will be discussed in this thesis paper is what makes the human person – special, irreplaceable, inviolable – a possessor of dignity.*<sup>1</sup>

## **I. Problem: Is Dignity an Empty Concept?**

Traditionally, the word dignity referred to human beings with a special status – something that sets them apart from other human beings. This special status was conferred only on some human beings. The status was seen in degrees; that is, it was one of hierarchy or rank. An example of those who did not possess this special status were slaves; they were the lowest beings on the societal scale. It was not until the time of Kant that the term ‘dignity’ came to refer to something intrinsic to the human person; that is; dignity came to mean something special about all human beings. The word dignity today, if one looks at the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* document, which was published after World War II, uses the term ‘dignity’ to refer to the human being’s capacity to reason.<sup>2</sup>

If dignity means that there is something special about all human beings, then it would seem that we need to look at personhood – the characteristics that set persons off from non-persons. The problem of dignity, as found in the current philosophical literature, is whether it is necessary to evoke the term ‘dignity’ in the discussion anymore since all capacities that the human possesses are not, in and of themselves, special. Thus dignity would seem to be lost in the discussion of the criteria of what is a person, human or not. Post Kant, dignity was taken for

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<sup>1</sup> By ‘special’ I mean irreplaceable, inviolable, something that does not admit of a price. Dignity is referring to the special characteristic of the human person. This thesis paper will look at what is that which is irreplaceable, special, and inviolable about the human person. One will notice how difficult it will be to find the sufficient condition for the dignity of persons.

<sup>2</sup> UN General Assembly, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," *UN General Assembly* (1948). Article one, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

granted as referring to something intrinsic to the human being; Kant thought dignity was grounded in the human person's capacity to set ends for oneself. This is now disputed since it seems that no capacity has the *ontological weight* to anchor the concept of dignity anymore. Thus dignity is now seen as a concept that has no referent in the world of objects.

A good current example of dignity being regarded as an empty concept can be found in a paper written by Ruth Macklin, *Dignity is a Useless Concept*. In this article, which is written to the medical community, she asks whether the concept of dignity is a coherent concept. She asks, "Why, then, do so many articles and reports appeal to human dignity, as if it means something over and above respect for persons or for their autonomy?"<sup>3</sup> She is asking the right question, viz., whether dignity is *more than one's capacities, qualities or properties*. If dignity is something that is *derived* from the person's capacities, then yes, it seems that dignity is a meaningless concept.<sup>4</sup>

Another example of the problem of dignity comes from Peter Singer. He argues that the value of the person is *not* dependent upon whether the person is a member of the human species.<sup>5</sup> Given the historical, theological distinction between person and human being (though not humans, the members of the Godhead are persons), Peter Singer is correct in pointing out the

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<sup>3</sup> Ruth Macklin, "Dignity Is a Useless Concept," *British Medical Journal* 327(2003).

<sup>4</sup> Another source that takes a similar position on dignity is Tom Beauchamp in his article, *The Failure of Theories of Personhood*. A difference is that he does not think any theory of personhood accounts for *why human beings* are more valuable than any other species. He thinks at best that we are sneaking in metaphysical properties to account for such special status, but that this is unwarranted due to the contingent link between human beings and their capacities. A case in point is the handicapped human being who has not, and will not ever exercise certain capacities.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979). In the context of talking about the value of a human fetus Singer says, "The point should by now be familiar: whether a being is or is not a member of our species is, in itself no more relevant to the wrongness of killing it than whether it is or is not a member of our race. The belief that mere membership of our species, irrespective of other characteristics, makes a great difference to the wrongness of killing a being is a legacy of religious doctrines that even those opposed to abortion hesitate to bring into the debate (150)."

distinction between being a person and being a human being. But for Singer, a person is only one who is self-conscious, can set ends for him or herself, and has the capacity to *feel*. In order for the human being to have a *full moral status* (dignity) one must *actually* have the capacities.

Singer takes these criteria for personhood and applies it to the human fetus:

My suggestion, then, is that we accord the life of a fetus no greater value than the life of a nonhuman animal at a similar level of rationality, self-consciousness, awareness, capacity to feel, etc. Since no fetus is a person, no fetus has the same claim to life as a person. We have yet to consider at what point the fetus is likely to become capable of feeling pain. For now it will be enough to say that until that capacity exists, an abortion terminates an existence that is of no “intrinsic” value at all (S 151).

In other words, as far as Singer is concerned, a fetus possesses relatively *low* value since value comes in degrees. A sentient being, let us say a pig, that has the capacity to feel pain, has more value than a fetus at this point in his/her life. The problem, of course, is that this grants the fetus no dignity/moral status at all! I would contend that the reason the fetus has no dignity, given Singer’s criteria, is *precisely* because the concept of dignity is a thin concept that needs to be enriched by other sources.<sup>6</sup>

Ruth Macklin and Peter Singer seem to be on the same page when they make reference to dignity. By dignity, they do not mean *something* that goes above and beyond the person’s capacities. If Macklin and Singer are correct, then it would follow that *any* human being or thing that does not manifest the properties of rationality are things that do not have *full* dignity/personhood.<sup>7</sup> What about those who are infants or those human beings who happen to be disabled? Are they not considered full persons? Are we to be satisfied with making a conditional

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<sup>6</sup> This criteria of personhood is not only used by Singer but also by Mary Anne Warren in *On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion* (1973), Micheal Tooley in *Abortion and Infanticide* (1972) and *In Defense of Abortion and Infanticide* (1984), and Daniel Dennett in *Conditions of Personhood* (1976).

<sup>7</sup> It seems that Peter Singer is using the terms, ‘dignity’ and ‘personhood,’ in the same univocal sense. There does not seem to be a distinction between those two terms as he uses them.

statement about them *as if* they were full persons? If so, then let us *act* as if those in the human community with disabilities are full persons who have the fullness of dignity.

In the above section, the problem seems to be located in the concept of dignity itself. The problem is *not* the distinction between persons and human beings, but rather it is the concept of dignity. In this thesis I hope to respond to this problem by setting up ways to account for our intuitions as to *who* counts as persons and, as such, possess dignity.

## II. The Response to the Problem of Dignity

In response to Singer and Macklin I will be focusing on what makes a human person infinitely valuable and irreplaceable. The latter distinction comes from Kant in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (hereafter *GMM*) in which he says, “In the kingdom of ends everything has either a *price* or a *dignity*. What has a price can be *replaced* by something else as its *equivalent*; what on the other hand is raised above all price and therefore admits of no equivalent has a dignity (42).”<sup>8</sup>

The worth of a person is *above all price* and admits of *no equivalence*. In other words, the dignity of a person does *not* admit of degrees but is given as an either/or. Either a human being has it or he does not. Now of course we can conceive of a world in which no human beings have dignity but it seems to go against our deepest intuitions about human life. Peter Singer *at least* admits that there is such thing as a moral status called personhood that can be applied to human beings for the protection given by civil law.

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<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

## A. Infinite Value

According to Kant, the irreplaceability of persons follows from the infinite value the person has. Given that the person has infinite value, it would follow that the person cannot be just one of many.<sup>9</sup> Rather, the person is *unique* in that it is, metaphorically speaking, a world of its own. Let me flesh that out a little more here: Let us take Salvador Dali's *Christ of St. John of the Cross* painting as an example of the distinction made by Kant. It is true that the *original* painting of Dali's is irreplaceable, but is it of infinite value?<sup>10</sup> If I were to have the *original* painting in my *possession* and were in need of money, could I not try to sell it for a *price*? If I sell the painting for a price, then it would seem that I am admitting that it is not of infinite value. Indeed, if paintings were of infinite value, there would be very few of them sold by human persons. Another interesting point is the fact that we speak of *owning* paintings. To own something means to have property rights over the object in question. That brings to my mind what Martin Luther King Jr. has to say on the distinction between property and persons.

In his book *The Trumpet of Conscience* he writes,

I am aware that there are many who wince at a distinction between property and persons – who hold both sacrosanct. My views are not so rigid. A life is sacred. Property is

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<sup>9</sup> Linda Zagzebski, "The Uniqueness of Persons," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 29, no. 3 (2001). Zagzebski interprets Kant's phrase, 'raised above all price,' to mean of 'infinite value.' That which has infinite value is something that does not admit of any market price. If something has infinite value, it *entails* that that thing is irreplaceable. Zagzebski interprets Kant as saying that anything that has dignity is more valuable than anything that has a price. It entails irreplaceability because anything that does not admit of a price is also something that *cannot* be compared. The two concepts are logically connected for Kant, but not conceptually identical.

<sup>10</sup> Clarification: By using the term 'irreplaceable' I am highlighting the fact that some natural or artificial object, by its nature, is something unique. The term 'unique' means one of a kind, and denotes that which does not share its being with another. If it did, it would not be unique. By 'sharing its being with another' I mean sharing the same species or genus. For something to be defined/categorized is for its essence to be *communicable* in nature. By the term 'infinite value' I mean just that which does not admit of any degrees. The value of *The Cross of St. John of the Cross* admits of a price and hence of a degree of value. The value is not infinite since we can conceive of the painting being put on Amazon or eBay and being sold for a finite price, whatever that price may be.

intended to *serve life*, and no matter how much we surround it with rights and respect, it has *no personal being*. It is part of the earth man walks on; it is not man (649).<sup>11</sup>

In our everyday speech we speak of *property* as something of finite value, which admits of a price. With the above distinction we can see why dignity must mean something that has infinite value, for if it admits of a price, we can then say that some human persons have more value than other human persons.

## **B. Irreplaceable value**

In our concept of dignity we do not want to leave out another aspect of human persons. That is, we want to say that human persons are not only of infinite value but of *irreplaceable* value. From what we have said above, does it follow that if a human person is of infinite value she/he is also irreplaceable? It does not seem so, given the nonequivalence of these terms in connection with Salvador Dali's painting of *Christ of St. John of the Cross*. But before we analyze what the connection is between infinite value and irreplaceability, let us look at the concept of someone/something being *irreplaceable*.

Though we cannot say that Dali's painting is of infinite value, we can say that it is of irreplaceable value. In Christopher Grau's article, *Irreplaceability and Unique Value*, we see that the history attached to the valued object is very important to us. In our example, the artist

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<sup>11</sup> M.L. King, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr* (HarperCollins, 1990). Martin Luther King Jr. is writing in response to the urban riots of the black community in 1967, which is a couple of years after the Civil Rights Bill and the Voting Rights Act were passed by Congress and the President of United States. The response is in light of the property damage that happened during the riots. The focus, in other words, was on non-violence protests against the white upper class, but *not* on the damage done to their *property*. King Jr. was defending a more charitable interpretation of what *actually* happened and who was targeted in the riots of '67. Property was targeted, he argues, and *not people*. The interpretation given by the U.S. media was one where property trumpeted in *value* more than the cries of the black community!

Salvador Dali *painted* the painting, and *only he* painted *that* painting.<sup>12</sup> The way the painting came about is itself an important aspect of why we consider it irreplaceable. To substitute for Dali's painting another one would effectively mean that the latter was equivalent to the one that cannot be replaced. But such a substitute would not be the original painting. It would be a substitute *not* painted by Dali.

The talk about substituting one thing for the other is talk about replaceability. To substitute the original painting by Dali with a painting not done by him makes a significant difference in how we gauge the value of things. But I am hesitant to say that the painting itself is irreplaceable *because* of some intrinsic value that it has in and of itself since the value of the painting seems to be derived from the fact that Salvador Dali painted it. That is, the value seems to be derived from the human person, in this case, Dali, and those who value his paintings. If there were no human persons on earth to paint but it was filled with original paintings, then it seems that the paintings would not have irreplaceable value. It seems absurd even to talk about original paintings having irreplaceable value if there were no artist to endow them with value, or persons to recognize that value.

It is one thing to speak about paintings being *irreplaceable*, but what can we say about human persons having irreplaceable value? Say that, unbeknownst to me, someone duplicated my wife and replaced her by someone *with the same properties*. Would I find anything out of the

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<sup>12</sup> Christopher Grau, "Irreplaceability and Unique Value," *Philosophical Topics* 32, no. 1-2 (2006). In reference to the uniqueness of persons, Grau says, "I want to argue that it is the particular *shared* history between the lover and the beloved that plays this individuating role, and thus helps us to make the lovers truly irreplaceable to each other. No one else can *have a shared history*, and accordingly no one else can take the place of the beloved. Further, I think that much of the importance we place on shared history can be illuminated through a focus on the role that shared agency plays in a relationship (127)." This unique aspect of persons will be fleshed out in chapter two of this paper. But for now it suffices to say that history of individual actions plays an individuating role to account for the uniqueness of persons. I will argue later that such an individuating role is *not* grounded properly in the subjectivity of persons, but that it needs to be if the person is unique and not merely his actions.

ordinary if I were approached by her clone? I would think so. It then would *not be her* whom I love but *someone* else! How could I say that the clone is the same person as my wife? Sure, it is *logically* possible that such a switch could occur, but highly unlikely given the *metaphysical* nature of my wife and her being an individual substance of a rational nature.<sup>13</sup>

What is the alternative to viewing the human person as irreplaceable? That some human beings are not persons? Lacking the irreplaceable uniqueness that we associate with personhood, such beings would likewise lack value. Who are these human beings? Are they the vulnerable, the elderly and small children? Who determines who is irreplaceable and who is not? What is the criterion for a human being to be a person, and to have dignity?

### **C. The Justification for the Two Aspects of Dignity**

If the infinite value and irreplaceability of persons are *essential aspects* of dignity, then what *grounds* these concepts? I would submit that the human person himself grounds them. The importance of this question must be stressed, for if the human person is not irreplaceable and does not possess infinite value, then there is nothing to violate. No law can protect the human person who lacks these aspects of dignity. It is one thing to do conceptual analysis of irreplaceability and another thing to talk about what things are essentially irreplaceable.

To answer the question of the ground of human dignity, I believe Linda Zagzebski is correct in observing that the irreplaceable aspect of dignity must be something that is *not*

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<sup>13</sup> These thought experiments seem to work if one holds to a Cartesian understanding of the body and soul. For the 'I' is not the body qua body but the soul. The Cartesian soul is one that has *all the mental properties* that can be switched with another person. There is nothing that would safeguard persons if such a thought experiment were to obtain in reality. We start *not with* thought but with beings, with that which exists! Human beings are not by their nature divided into constituent parts, but are unified in what we call a 'person.'

*shareable* in nature.<sup>14</sup> If shareable qualities or capacities that the person *possesses*, or potentially possesses, were sufficient to ground the dignity of persons, then one could allow for those persons' replaceability. If we respond, with Zagzebski, that the person is incommunicable in his/her value, then this gives us the uniqueness we need in order to talk about the richness of dignity. What, then, is this incommunicable aspect of persons that gives them unique value? Karol Wojtyla identifies it as subjectivity or *lived experience* that is irreducible to analysis. Similar to what Gabriel Marcel says when he distinguishes between *having and being*, we can say that the experiences I have are uniquely mine and no one else's. To come to *know* the subject takes time and love. Hence one way epistemically to have access to the unique value of the person is through love and friendship.

### **III. Groundwork for Further Research in Developing a Richer View of Human Nature**

In our attempt to come up with a rich and robust concept of dignity, the aim is to protect not only those human persons who are functioning properly but also the vulnerable. Due to the limited scope of this thesis paper, I will not be able to get into the rich philosophical anthropology which deals with the mind and body as essential to who we are as human persons. In fact, I do not think that philosophy alone can do the job of accounting for all aspects of personhood, especially when it comes to the vulnerable. The reason why is because of the nebulous nature of a '*who*' vs. a '*what*.' Though the nature of what I am researching is obscure, nevertheless it can be supplemented by a theological framework. My hunch is that the

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<sup>14</sup> Zagzebski, "The Uniqueness of Persons." "The suggestion, then, is that what is irreplaceable about a person is something non-qualitative that nobody else has or even could have. It is also possible that a person can have this before he has gained the power of self-consciousness and after he has lost it."

philosophical discussion could greatly benefit from the theological discussion if the two were to connect in some fashion or other. Theologians such as Karol Wojtyla have done work in this area; examples found are in his works: *Love and Responsibility* and the *Theology of the Body*.

#### **IV. The Position**

The position I will be taking throughout this thesis is this: All human beings have infinite and irreplaceable value. These two aspects of value will be used interchangeably with dignity. The word ‘value’ refers to a moral normative concept, denoting something of worth. Now whether the moral worth of the human person comes in degrees is debatable, but insofar as I understand the human person, he/she does not admit of “degrees” precisely because of his/her infinite value and irreplaceability. This thesis will be a fleshing out of what the dignity of persons, so conceived, looks like.

#### **V. Limitations**

I will not primarily be dealing with the applied ethical questions such as abortion and euthanasia. Though I will not be spending a great deal of time with either issue, both are nevertheless *important implications* of what I am trying to do. Nor will I be spending much time discussing the *relationship* between being a human being and being a person, though in the last chapter of this thesis I will *briefly* touch upon that conversation. To understand the relationship between those two concepts requires a long discussion of the metaphysics of human persons. If, for example, someone argues from a Thomist starting point that the person is grounded in an individual substance of a rational nature, then it would follow that the person functions as the whole human being. The two aspects are conceptual and *not* things in themselves, for if the self

and the body are *two* distinct things, then one has a Cartesian understanding of the ‘self.’ In chapter three of this thesis paper, I will be referring to Gabriel Marcel for a critique of the Cartesian self. Marcel does not deny that the body and self can be divided, but he argues that such a division represents an unnatural level of being human.

## **VI. Development of Thesis**

Given the above discussion, chapter one will set the stage for our search for the two aspects of dignity; the irreplaceability and infinite value of the human person. Starting with Boethius, we will flesh out what it means to be an ‘individual substance of a rational nature.’ How are persons distinct from other things in the world? What is the distinction between a human being and a human person? What does the concept personhood *add* to that of a human being? Does it add dignity? Is it a status that all human beings have or only some? These questions will be asked in light of Boethius’s definition of personhood. The latter will be the ground from which we work to build up a concept of dignity.

Locke builds upon Boethius by arguing that the person is of a rational nature and has the capacity for self-consciousness. By adding the latter dimension, Locke provides us with a deeper reason for why we love persons rather than non-persons. It seems that we do not love persons for their capacity to reason but for the fact that they are presently aware of themselves as persons. Does Locke give us the definition of dignity we are looking for? Can we tie the capacity for self-consciousness to what is special about the human being? This seems to bring us closer to our constitution as subjects but does it account for the inviolability of the human being? Even with this capacity, it seems that Locke does not go far enough in his definition of the dignity of the

person since we can, with Peter Singer, explain away that capacity as being instantiated in someone else and hence replaceable.

Kant seems to think that Locke brings us closer to the definition of the dignity of persons. Kant argues that dignity resides in the person's rational will; that is, the human person is understood as special because of his/her capacity to set ends for oneself. Kant believes that this capacity is the ground of dignity because, if one has it, then one cannot will that the person be a mere means to an end, but also an end in itself. To will that the person be a mere means to an end is to undermine the very ground of determining means and ends, viz., that person's rational nature. The categorical imperative only makes sense if there is a person who is willing such an imperative; if *all* laws are derived from the will and that will is a good will, then it follows that it cannot be a mere means to an end but an end in itself.

Kant's argument is interesting, but does it provide us with the unconditional, absolute worth of the human person? He thinks that it does, but what is special about the 'rational will?' Does one have to *exercise* this capacity in order to be worthy of dignity? Similar to our criticism of Boethius and Locke, the question still remains, 'What is so special about this person's rational capacity?' Peter Singer regards capacities as insufficient to account for the irreplaceability of human persons since one can think of instances in which one might lose one's capacities, and therewith, one's personhood.

Given the insufficiency of capacities as the ground for the uniqueness of human persons, in chapter two we will attempt to develop an account of the unique aspect of dignity. We will first look at Aristotle's account of friendship, viz., his account of friends who are goods, or ends,

in themselves. Aristotle's account will provide something that we are looking for – a way to come to know persons as unique and infinitely valuable in themselves.

Upon completion of our analysis of Aristotle, we will look at Neera Kapur Badhwar's analysis of friends as ends-in-themselves. Given that Aristotle correctly distinguishes between different kinds of friendship, Badhwar will add another texture or layer to the conversation by arguing that friends are unique and irreplaceable *because of the historical development* that can be found between two good friends. This historical dimension of friendship determines the value of the person in the friendship – the friend is valued *because* of our shared history. This historical aspect of the friendship cannot be shared by any other person. Given that the friend is the only one with this specific property, viz., friend-that-shares-this-history-with-me, we can say that the friend is, in him/herself, unique and irreplaceable. The identification of this property that both friends possess is one that is irreplaceable since it can be instantiated in *no* one else. Badhwar argues for a concept of irreplaceability on which a person's essential qualities are *inseparable* from his/her historical identity.<sup>15</sup>

The problem with the preceding account of friendship, however, continues to be that of *identifying* the friend with his/her properties. It is also interesting to note that in attempting to account for the irreplaceable aspect of persons as individuals, Badhwar comes up short in accounting for their shareable, universal, infinite value. But as regards the "property" aspect of personhood, if the person is *merely* the aggregate of his/her properties, then we have the problem that David Hume came up against – viz., that the bundle of properties just *is* the human person. The puzzling question, then, is how to account for *both* aspects of dignity, that which is shareable and that which is un-shareable.

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<sup>15</sup> See Badhwar's article *Friends as Ends in Themselves* for more details, esp. pg.19.

In attempting to account for the irreplaceability and the infinite value of the person, Velleman develops Kant's definition. To alleviate the problem to which we have already alluded, Velleman argues that Kant is on the right track by pointing out that dignity is grounded in the ideal rational will, but argues that he is missing a key phenomenological aspect of dignity, viz., what it is that we love when we love a person. Is it the fact that the person has the capacity to legislate ends for himself? Or is the person loved because he is *this* person? How do we account for both the particular person and the ideal rational will that all persons possess? Velleman argues that we can account for the uniqueness of persons by *appreciating* the person as a particular individual *and* judge him/her to have dignity by virtue of his/her rational will. The way we come to appreciate the particular person is through the epistemic vehicle of love. To love, in other words, is to stand in awe of the dignity of the person – the person having the rational capacity to will ends for his/herself. We, epistemically, *come* to stand in awe of the person's capacity through the particular person which accounts for both the uniqueness and the infinite value that human beings possess.

The problem we will find with Velleman's account is his definition of what makes a person unique. He argues that all human persons are unique, but only by virtue of their capacity to set ends for themselves. The love by which we come to value the *particular* individual *is not a valuing of the person for his/her uniqueness*, but solely for his/her capacities. It seems, as will be argued, that Velleman does not go much further in his analysis than Kant does. To account for the coherency of both aspects of dignity we will need to look elsewhere. The problem, I will suggest, might be that we are starting off on the wrong philosophical foot; it could be that our methodology for how we come to understand the concept of dignity is flawed.

Up until this point, the problem seems to reside in finding the irreplaceable aspect of the human person. We have seen that Boethius, Locke, Kant, Aristotle, Badhwar, and Velleman all understand that there is something infinitely valuable about the human person, namely, the capacities to do x, y and z. These capacities set human persons off from the rest of nature but are found and analyzed as though they were natural objects. The human person is not only a '*what*' but a '*who*.' When we ask for someone's name we want to know *that* person's name and not another; when we address the person as an 'it' we are not taking into account the 'thou.'

The nature of friendship has shown us the importance of this irreplaceable intuition that we have in our close friendships; it gave us reasons for why we think our loved ones are *really* irreplaceable. The problem, it seems, is the difficulty in accounting for our loved ones being *really* irreplaceable. This intuition seems to point in the direction of methodology and the nature of concepts themselves. In chapter three of this thesis, following Karol Wojtyla and Gabriel Marcel, it will be argued that the reason we think the person is irreplaceable in dignity is because the human person, unlike natural objects, *cannot be reduced to concepts*. The question that will be raised will concern our epistemic starting point: Where do we start our analysis of the human person and his/her dignity? The problem until now has been that we began with the assumption that we can only know the human person conceptually. Karol Wojtyla will argue that we need to look at what he calls '*lived experience*,' the level of existence that is non-conceptual. Marcel will fill in the gaps when we look at his distinction of 'mystery' vs. 'problem.' Gabriel Marcel, an existentialist, will show how we mistakenly start with concepts without reference to the non-conceptual experience from which those concepts arose. To put it differently, the starting point ought to be from our being-in-a-situation rather than from the standpoint of pure concepts.

Given our intuition of our friends as irreplaceable in dignity, it may be that the reason why is *because* they are in principle irreplaceable by virtue of our concrete experiences of them. When we *experience* human persons in the phenomenological sense, we can say that they are irreplaceable because we experience them as such.<sup>16</sup> It is similar to the problem in epistemology of finding a foundation for our most basic beliefs. In attempting to explain *why* the beliefs are at bottom basic we appeal to the fact that they are basic. The only way out of this epistemic circle is to appeal to our non-conceptual experiences. It seems that, given chapters one and two, Marcel's explanation of the nature of the person as irreplaceable is on the right track.

Given Marcel's analysis of the irreducibility of the person to bare concepts, how are we to tie the knot between these two aspects of dignity, irreplaceability and infinite value, grounding them in the same human person? Assuming that we are correct in concluding that there are two aspects of dignity, how are we to show that both can be *said* of the same thing? Linda Zagzebski will argue that both aspects cannot be grounded in the same logical subject since that which is shareable in nature, the capacities of the human person, cannot be grounded in something un-shareable, subjectivity. Chapter four will explore ways in which we can ground both aspects in the selfsame subject. It will be argued, contrary to Zagzebski, that we can understand both aspects of dignity as grounded in a metaphysical subject. In response to Zagzebski, the two ways of talking about dignity should not be two distinct types of properties of the human person (shareable vs. un-shareable) but two different aspects of the same thing. What we have here is a paradox, not an

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<sup>16</sup> Someone might object that experience is not sufficient to account for the irreplaceability of the person. In response, I would argue that we need to understand 'experience' as something that is non-conceptual, something grounded in intuition. If I were to 'see' a tree without making an inference, I would be seeing-something-treely. The important distinction here is between my experience and the inference I make in making a judgment about the tree being green and so forth.

inconsistency, communicability vs. incommunicability. By ‘incommunicable’ I mean something that is mysterious and difficult to grasp conceptually. As we saw with Marcel, the human person is both a ‘mystery’ and a ‘problem.’ As an example: If I ask my friend Nathan’s help with fixing my car, he knows what I am referring to by virtue of the universal understanding of what ‘car’ means. But the concept “car” does not exhaust *this* car’s reality, for I have a *unique* understanding of *this* car – it is the car in which I asked my wife to marry me. Are these two aspects of the car *inconsistent*? Of course not – we are merely speaking of it in two different modes of epistemic activity, objective vs. relational.

To substantiate the above claim, we will look at Karol Wojtyla’s analysis that ties the two aspects together into a single whole. Wojtyla will argue that the two aspects of the human person are known by two different activities of the person. Activities involve relations with things. For example, when I am consciously aware, I am always aware of something. One aspect of the human person is his/her subjectivity; this is what grounds our awareness of the irreplaceability of human persons. This aspect of the human person is grounded in the individual substance of a rational nature. But clearly the subject cannot be objectified or else it would not be a subject. It will be argued that subjectivity must be assumed on pain of becoming involved in an infinite regress, since if there is no subject, there can be no object. This subject cannot be fully grasped, but it can be touched by virtue of our being ‘self-present.’ The person, then, is not identified with any one activity or capacity, nor with subjectivity itself. Personhood is not to be identified with one of its aspects, but with the whole of what it is. Thus the human person is both *subject* and *object*, incommunicable in terms of particularity and communicable in terms of shared nature and properties, unique and universal, and possessing infinite value that derives from one’s irreplaceability as well as the nature that one shares with other human persons.

CHAPTER 1:  
BOETHIUS, LOCKE, KANT AND THE CAPACITIES OF THE PERSON

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When we think of persons as being valuable *what is it* about them that causes us to deem them valuable? More specifically what is it about *human persons* that gives them a special status in comparison to the aspidistra sitting on my kitchen counter? Intuitively speaking, we would grant a *higher* value to human persons than an aspidistra plant. Let us take an example: If I were to walk into my kitchen and find my aspidistra plant upside down on the floor, I would be a little flustered *because I have to clean up the dirt off the floor*. But if my wife were on the floor unconscious next to the aspidistra plant, *my attention* would turn immediately to my wife. My vision would be ‘tunnel vision,’ turning my whole being to my wife and attending to her needs. The plant in this scenario would *feel* to me as though it were *valueless* in comparison to my wife.<sup>17</sup>

Given our intuitions about human persons and their value, what are we to say about this value that we intuitively grasp? What makes something valuable? What makes persons valuable? For direction and guidance I suggest we explore Kant’s notion that what makes something valuable is its being raised above all price. That which is raised above all price is also irreplaceable since it admits of no equivalence. He defines dignity as such:

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<sup>17</sup> Of course we could add more persons to the scenario making it more difficult for me (one person) to attend to the need of many persons but nonetheless we would not say *one* is deficient in value in comparison to the other persons. My attitude towards my wife would be one of a stronger love than towards a stranger and hence I would attend to my wife’s needs first. But the example does not take away the intuition of the value of persons in general, for I would not feel as if the other persons are valueless in comparison to my wife. Many utilitarian scenarios have the feature of having more than one person to attend to, but given the Principle of Double Effect we can say that *my intention* was to save all persons in the context above. Cf. Trolley problems and other thought experiments. For a good historical study on the doctrine of double effect, see: Joseph Mangan, "An Historical Analysis of the Principle of Double Effect," *Theological Studies* 10(1949). For a good analysis of the trolley problem see: Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Trolley Problem," *The Yale Law Journal* 94, no. 6 (1985).

In the kingdom of ends everything has either a *price* or a *dignity*. What has a price can be *replaced* by something else as its *equivalent*; what on the other hand is raised above all price and therefore admits of no equivalent has a dignity (42).<sup>18</sup>

Given the above understanding of the dignity of persons, what features set human persons off from the rest of natural objects? What does Kant mean when he says something that is raised above all price? Zagzebski interprets ‘raised above all price’ as meaning ‘infinite value’. That which has infinite value is something that does not admit of any market price. If something has infinite value then it *entails* that same thing to be irreplaceable. For Zagzebski interprets Kant as saying that anything that has dignity is more valuable than anything that has a price. It entails irreplaceability because anything that does not admit of a price is also something that *cannot* be compared. The two concepts are logically connected for Kant but not conceptually identical. Zagzebski argues that something can be infinitely valuable and yet have another equivalent. Given that it is in fact possible to distinguish something being infinitely valuable and irreplaceable we can say that if something is infinitely valuable it does not follow that it is irreplaceable in value.<sup>19</sup>

When we arrive at chapter four, I will argue that Zagzebski’s starting point of inquiry is part of the reason why she finds the two concepts incompatible. For the purpose of this chapter, it should suffice that we have a distinction between the two concepts of dignity.

## **I. Boethius: Persons and Rationality**

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<sup>18</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

<sup>19</sup> Zagzebski points out that the infinite value is logically connected with irreplaceability but she will argue that they are conceptually incompatible. I will argue in chapter five of this thesis paper that the concepts are in fact compatible by virtue of a substance metaphysics.

Historically, Boethius seems to give us a starting point in coming to understand what a person is – what makes a person infinitely valuable compared to the rest of the objects we find in the world.<sup>20</sup> Starting with Boethius’s definition of persons, individual substance of a rational nature, we can see how persons are set off from non-persons.<sup>21</sup> This definition gives us a starting point in understanding how persons are distinct from non-persons.

What then do we mean by rationality? Rationality can be thought of as solving a problem, thinking of an explanation, doing conceptual analysis, participating in mathematical reasoning, or thinking of logical possibilities. These and other such activities seem to point out the essence of being a person. But is this sufficient? It seems, as Linda Zagzebski points out, that rationality lacks an explanation as to *why* persons act this way rather than another. There seems to be something deeper that is needed to explain *why* we act rationally than not. What about those who are do not exhibit signs of rationality? Are we to merely say they potentially have the capacity to reason? I think Zagzebski is correct, there seems to be *something more* to a person than mere rationality.

## II. John Locke: Persons and Self-Consciousness

John Locke, who is building off of Boethius’s definition of the person, defines a person as,

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<sup>20</sup> The reason why we are starting with Boethius is to set the historical stage for how the term was used and what it means for us today. By looking for the sources of dignity historically, we can attain a better grasp of what we mean by something having infinite value – that is, is the assumption correct that the human capacities to reason are the grounding for infinite value? What about irreplaceable value?

<sup>21</sup> In Boethius’s *Treatise Against Eutyches and Nestorius* Boethius defines a person as ‘the individual substance of a rational creature.’ By individual substance, Boethius means something that underlies the essential and accidental properties of a thing. The nature of a thing is what it is. In this context Boethius is responding to Nestorius in his rendering of Christ and his two natures as being two persons (85). What is interesting is that the distinction between person and nature is one in which can be applied to God, angels and human beings. Peter Singer on the other hand uses this *theological distinction* to apply personhood to other animals.

...a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that *consciousness* which is inseparable from thinking and seems to me essential to it; it being impossible for anyone to perceive without perceiving that he does perceive.<sup>22</sup>

The person is defined as one who thinks about the act of thinking and is not merely one who actually thinks. The self-consciousness aspect of persons is important to distinguish us from a ‘what.’ For Boethius’s definition gave us a start by stating that persons are essentially rational but it does not single out what is most *meaningful* about human persons. When I reflect on *my* thoughts I am thinking about something that is personally myself. When *I* reflect on my memories I am referring to something in which I participated that contribute to *who* I am as a human person.<sup>23</sup>

#### **A. Locke: A Building Block for Grasping What is Most Intimate About Persons**

This personal identity could not be found in Boethius’s definition for he is merely labeling the world and its objects. As such, we need to supplement Boethius’s definition of persons by adding the capacity for self-consciousness. For rationality seems to be more personal than merely doing calculations. There is something *intimate* when I come to understand something rather than merely a ‘what’ coming to understand something. Though the definition seems to add a richer dimension to the concept of persons, it nevertheless is not sufficient to capture why persons are considered unique and irreplaceable. For what is so special about self-reflective

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<sup>22</sup> John Locke, "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding," in *Philosophic Classics : Modern Philosophy*, ed. F. Baird (Prentice Hall, 2010). Pg.445-446.

<sup>23</sup> For a critique of Locke’s theory of personal identity read Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Edinburgh University Press, 2002). Pg. 276. Richard Swinburne also critiques Locke on what he calls the “memory theory of identity.” Richard Swinburne, "Personal Identity: The Dualist Theory " in *Metaphysics : The Big Questions*, ed. Peter and Zimmerman Van Inwagen, Dean W. (Malden, MA Blackwell 2008).

activity? What gives such activity an inviolable value? As a counterexample to show the insufficiency of such a definition, we can point out those who cannot or do not exercise their capacity for self-conscious activity. The severely cognitively disabled and very small children would be good instances where the above definition is found lacking in ontological weight. The self-consciousness aspect of persons, though important, does not capture in its entirety what we mean when we say that all persons have dignity. Maybe Kant can show us where we went wrong in our analysis.

### **III. Kant: Persons and the Capacity to Set Ends for Oneself**

#### **A. The Argument Leading Up to Persons as Ends-In-Themselves:**

We started this chapter with a discussion on Kant's distinction between something having infinite value and irreplaceable value.<sup>24</sup> In this section we will explore more deeply whether Kant can account for both aspects of dignity. If dignity, in both aspects, is grounded in capacities, then does it matter *what* capacities both aspects are grounded in? Let us look at what Kant's definition of person is and see if his definition can account for both aspects of dignity.

What does Kant mean by person or persons?<sup>25</sup> The latter question is a loaded one because for Kant the person is not an Aristotelian substance but rather a rational being. For the latter to make sense it would be a good idea to look at how Kant conceives of the will as being unconditionally good. By analyzing the will we can then come to a better understanding of what Kant means by a person as being an end-in-itself.

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<sup>24</sup> Refer back to page 24 of this paper for more details.

<sup>25</sup> Personhood is a term hardly used by Kant, but if I am right I think he would use 'rational nature' or 'humanity' as interchangeable terms with persons/personhood or person.

What does Kant mean by a ‘good will?’ He says, “It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a *good will* (7).”<sup>26</sup> For Kant, a good will is not something that is governed by anything except the self, for the self is what gives the laws and is what submits to them (44). For the will to be a *good will* it must be unconditionally good by formulating a maxim that, if made into a universal law, would not conflict with itself. To make what I just said clearer, I think it would be best if I quoted Kant himself, “[A]ct in accordance with maxims that can at the same time have as their object themselves as universal laws of nature (44).” For the concept of a good will to be possible it must have no other end but itself *qua rational nature*. If the will were to set ends that were only instrumentally good then it would follow that the will is instrumentally good, but for a will to be absolutely good it must act from reverence to reason itself. To so act is to act from duty and not merely in conformity with duty.<sup>27</sup> We could also say that acting from duty implies that one is acting out of respect for the law and not out of any other inclination.

Why is the above discussion on the good will important for our inquiry into what Kant thought about persons? For one, Kant is going to ground his metaphysics of morals in the autonomous agent. For Kant, in order for the will to be unconditionally good it must not have any *external* influences upon it, causing it to become *heteronomous*. Kant says,

If the will seeks the law that is to determine it *anywhere else* than in the fitness of its maxims for its own giving of universal law—consequently if, in going beyond itself, it seeks this law in a property of any of its objects—*heteronomy* always results.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. 7.

<sup>27</sup> “...though much may be done *in conformity with* what *duty* commands, still it is always doubtful whether it is really done *from duty* and therefore has moral worth (19).” For Kant the moral law ought to be obeyed by virtue of having *respect* for the universal law; all other inclinations or feelings are not sufficient for an action to be good in and of itself.

<sup>28</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. 47.

In other words, if the person wills an end for the sake of some other object than the universal law itself, then heteronomy results. Why is this the case? Given that Kant has already discussed the categorical imperative, which says “Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law,” we can say that this is where the unconditional aspect of the will is made manifest. The absolute goodness of the will consists in the willing of a categorical imperative.

Secondly, the discussion about the good will gives the rational agent *worth* so that it is an end in itself and not of another. Again, if the will is an end for some other purpose than for itself, then it is not intrinsically valuable.

The will is thought as a capacity to determine itself to acting in conformity with the *representation of certain laws*. And such a capacity can be found *only* in rational beings...the ends that a rational being proposes at his discretion as *effects* of his actions (material ends) are all only relative; for only their mere relation to a specially constituted faculty of desire on the part of the subject gives them *worth*...But suppose there were something the *existence of which in itself* has an absolute worth, something which as *an end in itself* could be the ground of determinate laws; then in it...would lie the ground of a possible categorical imperative.<sup>29</sup>

For Kant, the will is the key to this discussion on the value of persons since it is that which sets ends for the rational agent. If the will is infinitely valuable, that is, if it does not admit of a price, then it has dignity and hence cannot be violated by another rational agent (42). Conversely, if the will sets an end that is not out of respect for the law, then it is acting contrary to what it was designed to do.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 36.

## B. Persons and Their Absolute Value/Dignity

Now I say that the human being and in general every rational being *exists* as an end in itself, *not merely as a means* to be used by this or that will at its discretion; instead he must in all his actions, whether directed towards himself or also to other rational beings, always be regarded *at the same time as an end* (37).<sup>30</sup>

Human beings are ends-in-themselves because they are objective ends. By objective ends Kant means, “beings the existence of which is in itself an end, and indeed one such that no other end, to which they would serve *merely* as means, can be put in its place, since without it nothing of *absolute worth* would be found anywhere (37)...” The concept of the good will supplies that which is of unconditional value since it, and only it, is able to legislate and submit to universal law. A will could not do so if there were no rational nature existing as an end in itself. Now, if *all* laws are derived from the will, and that will is a good will—that is to say, a rational will—then it follows that it cannot be a means to an end but is an end in and of itself.

When Kant speaks about dignity, he speaks of it as applied to only rational beings. Why? In the kingdom of ends, that is, “a systematic union of various rational beings through common laws (41),” only rational beings can be members since it is only they that give and submit to those laws. Such a kingdom is possible only through freedom of the will. The fact that rational beings can give themselves laws makes them absolute ends. Hence, dignity resides not in the human being as an occult property to be recognized by others but rather has to do with the rational person being a legislator and a member of the kingdom of ends. So, what is the ground of dignity? This law-giving capacity, *autonomy*, is “the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature (43).”

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<sup>30</sup> This quote is the pinnacle of Kant’s moral philosophy and one that has helped develop discussions on human rights and bioethical issues. Examples of the latter’s contribution to human rights issues can be found in the universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and in the political writings of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas.

### C. Given Kant's Definition of Dignity, Who is a Person?

Given the above analysis, *it is clear that Kant would find the moral status of personhood in the capacity to set ends for oneself from reason.* The capacity to will is to *freely* act in accordance with the law, from duty, and at the same time to legislate for oneself such a law. If the latter is the criterion for the dignity of persons, however, can we say that infants are persons? Are other animals or are severely disabled human beings persons? From what I read of Kant, I cannot say that he talked much about human beings except in terms of their possessing a rational nature. It seems that Kant would place infants as worthy of absolute value due to the fact that they could potentially become autonomous persons. Even if we were to grant that within Kant's moral theory we can account for infants and their potential capacity to set ends for themselves, can we say the same thing about those who will never be able to become autonomous, fully rational? It seems we need something else here to account for such persons. Would mere sentience and having a will that is not rational in Kant's sense be sufficient conditions for those that lack the capacity to set ends for themselves? Maybe, but then we would have to allow for some non-humans to be persons. The latter does not seem intuitive.

Would Kant use such language as potency or actuality to speak of persons? I am not sure; I think the main point for Kant is that dignity is not found in any other object other than the rational being itself. For if we were to find the dignity of persons in the concept of perfection or the divine will we would be heteronomous and hence have not an unconditional good will (G 48-49). Does it make sense to find dignity anywhere else other than the actual unconditional good will or is there something else like a potential unconditional good will?

#### D. Are Persons more than the Sum of their Capacities?

If, according to Kant, persons are rational beings who are autonomous, then how ought we to understand the value of persons as distinguished from *things*. Kant says,

Beings the existence of which rests *not on our will but on nature*, if they are beings without reason, still have only relative worth, as means, and are therefore called *things* [*Sachen*], whereas rational beings are called *persons* because their nature already marks them out as an end in itself, that is, as something that may not be used merely as a means, and hence so far limits all choice (and is an object of respect) (G 37).

The distinction made by Kant between persons and things is a key distinction; it provides us with a framework as to distinguish persons over things. Even though the latter distinction is made by Kant, I still find something missing; if I were to say that, according to Kant's definition, a newborn infant were a potential person and as such he/she is infinitely valuable, then to commit infanticide would be immoral. Even if the person was a potential person and not an actual person, the same problem would persist- is the new-born infant replaceable or not? The potential capacity-to-set-ends-for-oneself does not seem to prevent infanticide. That is, given that persons in Kant's 'Kingdom of Ends' all 'participate' in the creation of categorical imperatives, then it would seem that persons are replaceable. Why? What is it about having a rational nature that provides the person with an irreplaceable value? I understand why persons, according to Kant, are infinite in value, but what about their being irreplaceably valuable?

To make myself clearer I suggest that we think of something that could be infinitely valuable and yet replaceable. Linda Zagzebski gives a good example of the latter when she says, "a world containing life is infinitely better than a world without life. But it is still possible that all living organisms could be replaced by similar organisms without the loss of value."<sup>31</sup> Subjective

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<sup>31</sup> Zagzebski, "The Uniqueness of Persons."

experiences are akin to this; for example, the memory I have of fishing with my dad in the Rocky Mountains is infinitely valuable and cannot be exchanged with anything higher in value, but it can be exchanged with something that is also infinitely valuable such as another memory that is similar in form and content.<sup>32</sup>

In the case of something being irreplaceable, we could say that Dali's *Christ of St. John of the Cross* painting is something that admits of a degree of finite value but is irreplaceable; for it was painted at a *specific time* and is located in a *specific place*. Given that there are things that are irreplaceable, why can we not say the same thing about persons? *Given that Kant imagines that all persons have this capacity to act for ends, there does not seem to be anything unique about this capacity; hence persons are replaceable.*

Overall I think Kant is right *that persons do have rational capacities to act for ends and that by virtue of that we can say that they are infinitely valuable*. But as to whether persons are replaceable or irreplaceable is difficult to adjudicate when reading Kant. In the previous section I proposed a problem for Kant's moral philosophy to account for. However, I think that Kant's understanding of personhood can be supplemented by those of other philosophers. The moral intuitions seem to be that persons are: (1) infinitely valuable and (2) irreplaceable. I think Kant found the source of personhood in the former, but not the latter.

From Boethius to Kant we find that dignity seems to be something a person has; that is, dignity seems to be grounded in some capacity that a person possesses that makes them infinitely valuable. But going back to our first example of my wife being found unconscious on our

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<sup>32</sup> I will argue with Gabriel Marcel that such a thought experiment is meaningless since it lacks the self who had such memory. Memories are not things that can be exchanged as if they were material goods! The memories I have of fishing with my dad are not merely mental properties that can be manipulated by logic since there is something intimately myself in those memories, such that to divorce myself from those memories would be logically possible but humanly undesirable.

kitchen floor, I do not want to say that *because of her capacities* x, y, and z that she is *deserving* of help and care. No, it seems that there is something more going on here; it seems there is something that I love and respect in my wife *despite her incapacitated state* in the proposed scenario that requires self-sacrifice on my part. It does not seem that anyone would sacrifice their time and effort for mere capacities that a person possesses. Some persons do not have such capacities, or if they do have them, they are not exercised to their highest degree. I do not *love* my wife because she is an individual substance of a rational nature who has the capacity for self-conscious activity and setting ends for herself. No, it seems that I love my wife because she is *my wife* and there is a history of relations that are unique between me and her. That being said, it seems that we have to look elsewhere to account for such uniqueness of persons.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> For a different analysis than what I offered of Kant, see Christopher Gowans, "Intimacy, Freedom, and Unique Value: A Kantian Account of the Irreplaceable and Incomparable Value of Persons," *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1996).

## CHAPTER 2: FRIENDSHIP, LOVE AND THE UNIQUE VALUE OF PERSONS

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Referring back to the concrete situation found in chapter one in which my wife was lying unconscious on our kitchen floor, we would not say that I *ought* to attend to her care *because* she has the capacity for reason or self-consciousness, or even because she has the capacity to set goals for herself. No, it seems that a better explanation of why I ought to attend immediately to her needs is because *I love her*. This love does not seem to be directed towards capacities that she potentially or actually possesses, rather, it seems that my love is directed towards something deeper than anything said about her.<sup>34</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to explore the object of our love, the person *seen* as irreplaceable. We will explore (1) the phenomena of the close friendships we have with other persons, (2) the intuition of someone being irreplaceable due to our experiences of friendship with that person *qua* person, and (3) and the experiences we have of someone being unique in how we come to value the person for his/her own sake and not for the sake of another.

In our definition of dignity we ought to include not only the value that *every human person* shares but also the unique value which is found in personal, intimate relationships. In looking at the unique value found in these personal and intimate relationships, it will help us to better understand not only who persons are but what motivates us to love them for their own sake. In showing how human persons can be loved for their own sake we will also see what it would look like if the human person were not loved for his/her own sake but for another end.

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<sup>34</sup> It could be objected that it would not be possible to make that value judgment if I did not have the capacity to reason, judge, or be self-aware. But this objection misses the point, which is not whether it is possible to make such a judgment, but what is the object of our love.

In this chapter we will look at the various theories surrounding friendship and its structure. We will access and evaluate which theory of friendship seems to work best in accounting for this unique value and which one does not. The key here is trying to stay as close to our everyday intimate encounters with our loved ones; staying close to *the phenomena of love between persons*. For in doing so we do justice to not only our loved ones but to other human persons as well.<sup>35</sup> My goal in this chapter is to provide us with some concrete experiences which will testify to the uniqueness of persons, especially those who are closest to us. In exploring the different aspects of friendship and love, the following questions will arise: What is this irreplaceable element found in these experiences of friendship? Why ought I to treat this person as a *Thou* rather than an it? What does it mean to be a *Thou*?

## **I. Explorations on Love and Friendship: The Search for the Uniqueness of Persons**

### **A. Aristotle on Friendship: Loving Persons qua Persons**

When we speak about love we are referring to different loveable objects. Our attitude towards the loveable objects determines what our end or goal is. For example if I chose to be friends with someone *for the sake of* pleasure, then I am not choosing *them as persons* as the goal but rather I am choosing the pleasure that arises out of the friendship with him or her.

Aristotle makes this distinction when speaking about the different kinds of friendship,

Now those who love each other for their utility do not love each other for themselves but in virtue of some good which they get from each other. So too with those who love for the sake of pleasure; it is not for their character that men love ready-witted people, but because they find them pleasant... And thus these friendships are only incidental for it is not as being the *man* he is that the loved person is loved but in so far as he is useful or pleasant... Perfect friendship is the friendship of *men who are good and alike in virtue*;

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<sup>35</sup> For a good survey of various problems with the Uniqueness Thesis see, Christopher Grau, "The Irreplaceability of Persons" (Ph.D. diss, The Johns Hopkins University, 2003).

for these wish well alike to each other qua good, for they are good in themselves. Now those who wish well to their friends for their sake are most truly friends; for they do this by reason of *their own nature* and not incidentally; therefore their friendship lasts as long as they are good—and goodness is an enduring thing.<sup>36</sup>

Given the above, we can delineate three kinds of friendship. First, there is the friendship aimed at utility. For Aristotle, friendship is possible only on the assumption that there is reciprocity or exchange of goodwill, for no one can be friends with someone whom they do not know about. There must then be an exchange of good feelings and aims towards the loveable object. The reasons *given to the other* will correspond to the different kinds of friendship.

For the first kind, we see that friendship is based on utility/use of something and once that something is achieved then it follows that the friendship has no *other reason to exist*. For example, if I were to go to an interview for a potential job and during the interview the interviewer inquired into my talents and abilities, I would list every one that I would think apropos to doing the job well. Unbeknownst to me, I get the job and gain a good relationship with my boss. That friendship lasts only as long as the work is done well. In other words, the relationship with my boss is a *friendship* only insofar as I meet or exceed his expectations. The latter is an example of a friendship based on utility.

The second kind of friendship is one that is based on pleasure. Aristotle mentions that this type of friendship is usually manifested in younger people, for younger people tend to seek more after pleasure and are, generally speaking, more generous than old people. Whether or not the latter is true is not in question. We can say that the friendship is a friendship if and only if it produces pleasure for both friends; notice here that friendship is not for the *other's sake* but for one's own sake. In my younger days I had friends that had the same interests as myself and I

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<sup>36</sup> Aristotle NE 1156a-1156b (1060-1061).

found myself enjoying their company for the sake of the pleasure that arose from it. As a consequence, as my interests changed, so did my friends.

The third kind of friendship is one which I find most intriguing, especially in light of our discussion on the value of persons. What Aristotle calls the perfect friendship is a friendship that is aimed at each other as persons. The good sought after in this relationship is not pleasure nor utility but the person him/herself. The good found in the other is the good found in oneself. The difficulty we will encounter is whether Aristotle is correct in grounding the love of persons in their good qualities and virtues. For, can one not imagine a *good person* being replaced by another qualitatively good person, yet with something nevertheless missing from the friendship?<sup>37</sup>

There does seem to be something missing from Aristotle's account that is deeply ingrained in our phenomenological experiences of the person as a person. For my love of *this particular* person is qualitatively different from love of another person. Does it not seem that the love that I have for my wife transcends the qualities that she possesses, thereby requiring my full attention and fidelity? Whether she is virtuous or not I will love her, but then again we are at square one. What is it that I love, if not her character? If it is her character, then she seems to be replaceable and hence my intuition of persons as being irreplaceable is mere sentimentality. But maybe there is a distinction that is missing from our analysis of friendship, which takes us to a supplementary account of friendship by Badhwar.

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<sup>37</sup> George Nakhnikian in his article, "Love in Human Reason," points out what he calls 'undemanding love,' which is not found in Aristotle's account of friendship (with the exception of the unrequited love the mother has for her child), 293.

## B. A Supplementation to Aristotle? Badhwar on Friendship

In agreement with Aristotle, Badhwar wants to argue that pleasure and usefulness as effects of the friendship are *important* and provide a rich phenomenological description of what it means to be a friend in the most perfect sense. From our discussion above there still lurks the objection that the person loved is vulnerable to being replaced. For if the person is loved for her/his character, and if persons are only the sum of their qualities and character, then it would seem that they are replaceable.

Badhwar, who sees the above deficiency with Aristotle's understanding of good friends as ends in themselves, wants to substantiate the intuitions we have concerning our loved ones' irreplaceability.<sup>38</sup> This, our loved ones being irreplaceable, is a widely held intuition and one in which we want to say that we treat our loved ones (in Aristotle's perfect friendship sense) as ends in themselves and not as means to an end. Badhwar lays out a different way of thinking of the problem of replaceability of persons by saying that the essential qualities that are loved in a person are tightly bound up with that person's historical and numerical identity. The object of love, in other words, is the essential person herself and that is just the historical and numerical identity of the person. For what else do we love about the person apart from her *true* self?<sup>39</sup>

What then does the above have to do with the friend's being a unique and irreplaceable individual? Badhwar suggests that if we construe our understanding of love of the person as unconditional (that is, as independent of anything about her), then it would seem that the love has

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<sup>38</sup> Neera Kapur Badhwar, "Friends as Ends in Themselves," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 48, no. 1 (1987).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. She says here, "A personal essence is *not* a set of qualities detached from one's particular existence, but qualities which express, and are expressed in, this existence (19)."

a target but has *no object/focus*.<sup>40</sup>To put it more concretely; let us imagine a man walking down the street. Let us call this man Harry. Harry is interrupted by another man (let us call him John) who looks as if he needs some money. The homeless man, John, is startled and is thankful for the money being placed in his tin can. Harry made a choice, he acted out of love towards John for *no reason* other than to give money to a man whom he considered poor. The object/focus of his attention was *not John* himself as the individual person he is. In a sense, the object was nothing at all. There is no rich phenomenological description under which John could be understood as John.

Another problem encountered in the discussion on the unique value of persons is instrumental love. Badhwar makes a distinction between instrumental friendships and end friendships; end friendships are understood to be the highest form of friendship whereas instrumental friendships are based on incidental qualities the person has. The latter kind of friendship implies a means-type-of-friendship, and hence, the person loved in the friendship is replaceable.<sup>41</sup>

The main idea I find in Badhwar as regards our discussion on the irreplaceability of persons is the historical component to our definition of personhood. Badhwar is pointing out something that Aristotle seems to be lacking in his account of friendship, for a person is more than a mere sum of qualities—rather, it is *this* person's qualities and no one else's which make her unique. The point of disagreement I find with Badhwar is the final definition of what a person is; that is, I disagree that the *essential* qualities of a friend are merely her numerical and

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<sup>40</sup> She refers to Amelie Rorty here for the distinction between target and object of love.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.1-2. The friend in an instrumental friendship is replaceable because he/she is not loved for *his/her historical and numerical identity*. The key here is not the fact that the friendship is permanent or long-lasting in order to be irreplaceable, for the one loved could die and still be loved. Rather, the person is loved for himself/herself qua person. As we will see later in this chapter, the person needs to be more richly defined for our concept of dignity to account, not just for the particular individual, but for all persons.

historical identity. The important point here is that rich phenomenological descriptions of persons are *essential* for our loving them for their own sake, but not sufficient. Nonetheless, I think Badhwar is making an important point when she distinguishes loving someone unconditionally and loving the person by virtue of the particularity of her nature. The question is, what are those qualities that make a person loveable? Are all persons loveable by virtue of their uniqueness and unique history? The *essential qualities* as defined by Badhwar are those that make an individual an end in herself, but if a person is, as she puts it, “a mere vehicle for these qualities, [then] the concrete events in his life which give them shape and expression [are] mere accidents (21).” Hence, it would seem that a specific history, and the character forged by that history, are essential to the person whom we love and regard as irreplaceable, and that historical accidents have a role to play in this.

### **C. Velleman: Love as Affirmation of One’s Value**

Badhwar’s analysis of friends being ends-in-themselves gives us reasons for why we love some persons rather than others but it does not provide us with an account of friendship that justifies us in saying that a person is *in principle* irreplaceable. The problem is this: if some persons are loved for their unique characteristics, or *style*, then what makes that particular person irreplaceable? Are not *all* human persons irreplaceable regardless of their unique characteristics? Even though we are historically tied to our loved ones in a unique way, that is, valuing them as irreplaceable, we have not argued to the conclusion that the loved one is in principle irreplaceable.

In response to Aristotle and Badhwar, Velleman argues that *all* persons are to be loved as self-subsistent ends; that is, all persons are to be loved by virtue of their capacity to set ends for

themselves.<sup>42</sup> Following Kant's lead, Velleman further develops his discussion of the dignity of human persons. Velleman analyzes the respect that is demanded by the ideal rational will/the law and draws an analogy with the attitude of respect towards the law with the attitude of love towards the person who is essentially the ideal rational will.<sup>43</sup> In other words, instead of understanding a person being irreplaceable by virtue of his unique characteristics grounded in the history shared with the lover, we instead should 'see' the person in his ideal rational will.

What are we doing when we love someone? The distinction between judgment and appreciation of value is apropos here.<sup>44</sup> For if we are to account for the particular person's value as unique, and at the same time that same value is applicable to *all persons*, then we need to understand how love is the way/mode by which we come to *appreciate* the person as a particular individual and judge him/her to have a dignity by virtue of his/her rational will.<sup>45</sup> What then do we mean by loving the beloved? Velleman suggests that love is "...the awareness of a value in

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<sup>42</sup> J. David Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion," *Ethics* 109, no. 2 (1999).

<sup>43</sup> This discussion can be found in Velleman, 344-349.

<sup>44</sup> Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion." "When Kant says that an object with dignity "admits of no equivalents," he is speaking about how to *appreciate* such an object, not how to judge it. Kant himself believes that each person has a dignity in virtue of his rational nature, and hence that all persons should be judged to have the same value. What he denies is that comparing or equating one person with another is an appropriate way of *responding* to that value. The value that we must attribute to a person imposes absolute constraints on our treatment of him, thus commanding a motivational response to the person in and by himself (367)."

<sup>45</sup> By rational will I mean what Kant means. Rational will is derived from his discussion on the person being respected as a law, in the abstract, ideal sense. The law is not merely a rule or code of conduct but rather for Kant is a rational will enacting or legislating the law. The rational will is the ideal (noumenal) and hence universal and applicable to all empirical persons. For in respecting the law I am respecting the person in him/herself. Why? Because in acting out of any other empirical motives (motives that stem from prudential or psychological desires) I am acting with a view to mere results and not out of respect for ends in themselves. For an end in itself is what Kant calls a self-subsistent end. The self-subsistent end cannot be subsumed under any other end because in doing so it would admit of a conditional understanding of universality. But of course for a maxim to be unconditional it must be grounded in the act of willing itself. For the will to be unconditionally good it must not be *determined* by any other motive other than one of respect for the law. For the law restrains the will to posit an end that it itself is positing. 4:400-403. Velleman nicely translates and explains on pages 344-349.

its object; and...an arresting awareness of that value (360).”<sup>46</sup> To push the point further, when we *encounter* the other as a person we do not *desire the* person and his unique qualities but rather we stand in awe of her personhood.

Velleman suggests love,

...arrests our tendencies toward emotional self-protection from another person, tendencies to draw ourselves in and close ourselves off from being affected by him. Love disarms our emotional defenses; it makes us vulnerable to the other.

Akin to respect, love is not an inclination towards a *conditional end* but rather it is an attitude towards the beloved, as an end-in-itself, that disarms our emotional defenses. The beloved, as an object, demands that they be loved in themselves. When we respect the person we come to ‘see’ the law/rational will in itself, and out of respect comes the arresting of our self-love. When we love the beloved, we hold back our tendencies towards emotional self-protection from being affected by him/her. The attitude of love towards another person is one that is moral because it is recognizing something that is unconditional and worthy of our love. This, the process of disarming our emotional defenses, allows the lover to ‘see’ what is loved in and of itself without appealing to any other quality that might allow for the possibility of replaceability of the him/her.

To ‘see’ and appreciate someone’s dignity is something that accounts for why we love those who *seem* unlovable. For we often say, in a familial context, how much we love our

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<sup>46</sup> Velleman points to Kant’s *GMM* to better understand what respect means. In the footnote of 4:401 Kant says, “But though respect *is* a feeling, it is not one *received* by means of influence; it is, instead, a feeling *self-wrought* by means of a rational concept and therefore specifically different from all feelings of the first kind, which can be reduced to inclination or fear. What I cognize immediately as a law for me I cognize with respect, which signifies merely consciousness of the *subordination* of my will to a law without the mediation of other influences on my sense...Respect is properly the representation of a *worth* that infringes upon my self-love.” Key to our discussion is the last sentence, for love is a self-arresting of one’s emotional defenses and hence is a submission to the person qua person and not for any other reason. The person forces himself upon me when I am vulnerable to him as a person.

impatient grandmother or our nagging wife. Love gives us a *reason* for why we feel obligated to keep our promises made to loved ones. If we had no epistemic access to our cantankerous grandfather as a self-subsistent end, then why would we feel obligated to love him by taking care of him? It seems that Velleman is on to something here.

## II. Problems? When Appraising Persons are we ‘Seeing’ Persons as Irreplaceable?

In response to Velleman, Linda Zagzebski tests whether or not Velleman accounts for the irreplaceability of *all* persons. She points out that if someone really is irreplaceable then it would follow that the dignity she has is an essential part of who she is. The loved one cannot *lose* that property in which she is not compared with anyone else, for if she could lose that incomparable property then she *could* be replaced by another person who instantiates the same property.<sup>47</sup> When we love our beloved ones, are we ‘seeing’ them as they really are – as irreplaceable – or are we ‘seeing’ them as irreplaceable *because* of their capacities to set ends for themselves?

Velleman is correct in saying that the person is irreplaceable but I think his solution is not sufficient to account for such irreplaceability. For to be irreplaceable, according to Kant, is to have *dignity*, which means to not *really* be compared with anyone else. If irreplaceability is grounded in the sharable nature of rationality that everyone has, then it seems the thing that is supposed to explain why persons are irreplaceable is also shareable and hence replaceable.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Zagzebski, "The Uniqueness of Persons." 415-416.

<sup>48</sup> If one were to look at Singer and his *Practical Ethics*, one can see why it is necessary to have *both* aspects of dignity. For if we just have the one aspect, infinite value, without the other, the irreplaceability aspect, then we can imagine a situation where an infant can be replaced by another infant. Peter Singer says, “At what stage in the process that passes from possible people to actual people does replaceability cease to apply? *What characteristic makes the difference?* If we think of living creatures – human or non-human – as self-conscious individuals, leading their own lives and wanting to go on living, the replaceability argument holds little appeal (125).”

Velleman's account does, Zagzebski thinks, ground the infinite value of persons but not the irreplaceability of persons. Even Velleman himself admits that uniqueness *cannot be* part of the definition of personhood because it assumes that dignity has a price – *qualitative* uniqueness admits of a price.<sup>49</sup> Linda Zagzebski suggests there is something deeper about the human person than the person's rational will and personal, historical qualities.

Even if we were to conclude that the rational capacities are necessary for dignity nonetheless we want to say they are not *sufficient*, for we can imagine a situation in which the capacities can be instantiated by another human person and hence the person being replaced by another person. This deeper property *cannot be* something that is sharable in nature. For the reasons given above, we need to account for the irreplaceable aspect of dignity by showing that the person is unique by virtue of not being compared to anyone else. What could this property be? Zagzebski suggests it is *non-qualitative* in the sense that it is incommunicable under the natural categories.<sup>50</sup> For if we could describe the person as unique in his/her qualities, the person would cease to be unique. It seems Zagzebski is correct here, for if a person is *reducible* to his/her qualities, then the uniqueness of that particular person would be missing from analysis.

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<sup>49</sup> Velleman says "Of course, some values do warrant substitutions among the objects that share them: that's the definition of a price. To assume that something will be irreplaceable *only if it is uniquely valuable* is thus to assume that its value is a price rather than a dignity (368)." He later defines something that has unique value as being something that is *qualitatively* unique in value.

<sup>50</sup> Zagzebski, "The Uniqueness of Persons." 415. More on what incommunicable means will be discussed in the next chapter. For this incommunicable aspect of persons seems to be reasonable from what we have said uniqueness means in the context of love and friendship.

CHAPTER 3:  
KAROL WOJTYLA, GABRIEL MARCEL AND THE IRREDUCIBILITY OF PERSONS

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Given what we have said thus far about the dignity of persons, it seems that we need to account for not only the capacities that all persons *share* by virtue of being a human person but also the irreducible aspect of all persons. What would dignity be if it had no distinguishing feature to set it off against the properties that all persons share? Why does having such-and-such capacities prohibit one from treating the human person as a mere means to an end? It seems that Kant is right, that one needs to account for not only the infinite value of the person but also the irreplaceable aspect of the person to have a full explanation of what dignity is.<sup>51</sup> For if dignity is grounded in the unique features of the person, then what gives those *unique qualitative* features their special status to prevent the person from becoming replaceable with another person who would instantiate the same properties?<sup>52</sup> We need to account for *something* deeper about persons that can explain why all persons are irreplaceable.

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<sup>51</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals.*, “In the kingdom of ends everything has either a *price* or a *dignity*. What has a price can be replaced by something else as its *equivalent*; what on the other hand is raised above all price and therefore admits of no equivalent has a dignity (4:434).” As seen in chapter one, Zagzebski interprets ‘raised above all price’ to mean ‘infinite value.’ Since it admits of no price it would not have a finite value. ‘That which admits of no equivalent’ means ‘irreplaceable’ since something that can be replaced is something that can be compared or shared. That which is ‘irreplaceable’ is something that cannot be shared or replaced.

<sup>52</sup> As I was thinking about this I could not but help think about the justification for foundationalism inasmuch as it pertains to the subject having foundational beliefs that cannot be *reduced* to other beliefs for their justification, for if such reduction is possible then an infinite regress of beliefs is possible. Thus beliefs must be grounded in something pre-theoretical – the belief must be *non-inferential* for it to stop the infinite regress. For example, the perception I am having seeing-a-tree is a perception and not a belief, for if it were a belief, it would have the property of being inferential. Analogously, we can say that dignity needs to stop at something irreducible to account for why we think persons are inviolable in nature. If dignity merely consists of one having the capacity to do x, then it seems that we could never get to the heart of what it means to be a person since a capacity is not a person, and vice-versa.

## I. The Irreducibility of the Person

Boethius, by defining personhood as one who is an individual substance of a rational nature, provides a good foundation for what it means to be a person, but the latter definition does not account for the irreducible nature of the person. Boethius's definition gives us the following characteristics of the person: (1) the person is an individual substance: this means that the person is *numerically* distinct from any other person. It does not say anything though about the uniqueness of that person in its concrete form. (2) The person is a rational nature: the person not only is numerically distinct from other persons and things, but has something that is shared by *all* individual persons, namely rationality. To be rational is not merely to reason but to have the potential to exercise all capacities that contribute to the being determining and acting towards its natural end viz., fulfilling its end as a human person.<sup>53</sup> The definition provides us with a good start since it individuates persons and also accounts for the general nature of what persons are qua human persons. What seems to be missing from Boethius's definition is the *irreducible aspect* of persons which calls for a reassessment of the definition. The definition can, I will argue, be supplemented by what Karol Wojtyla calls 'lived experience.'

## II. Karol Wojtyla on Subjectivity and the Irreducible

Karol Wojtyla argues, in response to the reduction of persons to the world of natural objects, that the definition of persons is in need of something to account for the uniqueness of persons and this, he points out, is *subjectivity*. What he means by subjectivity is '*experience lived*

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<sup>53</sup> I am inferring that Boethius is using "rational nature" in the sense that Aristotle uses it.

*through*’ – that which is irreducible to the act of cognizing.<sup>54</sup> If subjectivity or ‘lived experience’ were an object, then it could be defined explicitly and with precision. Wojtyla makes it clear that subjectivity is *not* the antithesis of the *essential* features that all persons possess, for example, those comprising “rationality” as Boethius conceives them, but rather, subjectivity builds upon those essential features that constitute persons.<sup>55</sup>

What then does Wojtyla mean by subjectivity as ‘lived experience’? He thinks it has to do with the *dynamic* structure of the human person; that is, the dynamic structure of self-possession and self-domination. The experience of the latter two features is experienced interiorly and forms the personal ‘I.’ The subject, in other words, is an *ethical* subject whose decisions made in response to conscience *reveal* the person, the ‘I’ who takes responsibility for such actions. The subject cannot be thought of as *part* of the process of self-determining action but gives rise to the action being a possible action – the subject/person is the condition for all moral actions to be executed.<sup>56</sup> The expression of such actions in concrete situations *reveals* the person as a subject; hence the subject can be epistemically accessed through his actions that stem

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<sup>54</sup> Karol Wojtyla, *Person and Community : Selected Essays*, Catholic Thought from Lublin (New York: P. Lang, 1993).110. “It is not only a question of metaphysical objectivization of man as the acting subject or the agent of his deeds, but *the chief aim* of this is to show the person as a *subject living through his own deeds and experiences*, and thanks to all this, his *own subjectivity*.” Subjectivity, according to Wojtyla, is *not* a capacity or object that can *reduce* the person to his or her qualities (as we have said earlier in the paper) but is the *dynamic* being of the person.

<sup>55</sup> Linda Zagzebski disagrees here, for she thinks that there is no solution in trying to tie the knot between the two aspects of dignity since something that is un-sharable in nature cannot be grounded in that which is shareable. Why? Because that which is shareable cannot be grounded in that which is un-shareable. But maybe there is a way out of this problem. This problem will be discussed at the end of the thesis paper. For now it suffices just to mention that there is not unanimous consent on the two aspects of dignity having any relation. See *Uniqueness of Persons*, 418-420.

<sup>56</sup> This sounds like Thomas Aquinas: “Of actions done by man those alone are properly called “human,” which are proper to man as man. Now man differs from irrational animals in this, that he is the master of his actions. Wherefore those actions alone are properly called human, of which man is the master. Now man is master of his actions through his reason and will; whence, too, the free-will is defined as “the faculty and will of reason.” Therefore those actions are properly called human which proceed from a deliberate will.” St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros, 1947). I-I, q.1, a.1.

from an intentional person. Wojtyla says, “*The “morale”* [by “morale” he means the decisions arising through the person’s reason and will] *is at the same time the fundamental expression of the transcendence proper to the personal ‘I’* (112).”

Wojtyla argues that if we abstract the human person from the situation in which we find him, then we are reducing him to that which is shareable in nature. Given what we have said on why we are looking for something that is un-sharable, it seems only natural to fall back onto the pre-reflective level of knowing. Wojtyla suggests that the method we ought to use in our search for this irreducible aspect of persons is the phenomenological method by which we ‘see,’ viz., by “experience lived through.” The *revelation* of persons through their subjective experiences is a key aspect of persons in understanding why persons are irreplaceable.

### **III. Gabriel Marcel and the Revelation of the Person in ‘Lived Experience’**

To build upon Wojtyla’s notion of ‘lived experience’ as providing us with the foundation for the uniqueness of persons, I suggest that we look at Gabriel Marcel’s understanding of subjectivity. More specifically, I wish to explore Marcel’s understanding of the level of what he calls ‘submerged participation’ or being-in-a-situation.<sup>57</sup> Up until this point, in our discussion of the dignity of persons, we have noticed that the definition of the person is not personal in nature. The person as defined thus far is not one in which I can say *that particular person* is in principle

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<sup>57</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being: Faith and Reality*, Gateway Edition ed. (Henry Regnery, 1960). 140. Marcel speaks about reflecting on the level of *submerged participation*. This is spoken of in the context of feeling as a mode of participation. By participation Marcel means something non-objective which persons involve themselves in without resorting to thought. Thought implies something shareable and hence something that is abstract; participation on the other hand reveals a level prior to thought. Feeling, Marcel argues, *bears witness* to such a level of existence. Marcel is on the right track. If feeling *reveals*, and is not thought of in terms of receiving data from the outside, then it can be said that feeling gives us epistemic access to such a level of existence. All I am pointing out when I refer to ‘submerged participation’ is a level of existence that is non-conceptual. Marcel also calls this level of existence being-in-a-situation.

irreplaceable. I can however say that *that particular person* is in *fact* irreplaceable. If we say, “Let us act in love towards that person as *if* he is irreplaceable,” then we are not satisfying the intuition that persons are in principle irreplaceable. This discussion of Marcel hopes to clarify *who* the ‘self’ is – the one who is asking the questions about dignity. Thus far we have been seeking necessary and sufficient conditions for the definition of personhood but failed to satisfy all of the conditions. The problem may lie in our *starting point*. Let us see how Marcel understands the person in order to clarify where we have gone wrong thus far.<sup>58</sup>

### A. Methodology: The Starting Point of Analysis

When we analyze a philosophical problem where do we start?<sup>59</sup> Do we start with concepts right off the bat? Or do we start with what Marcel calls ‘embodied existence?’ What is the relation between the self and truth?<sup>60</sup> If one takes the self to be something that is a ‘view from nowhere,’ then it seems that the relation between the self and truth is ‘clear and distinct.’ The latter is how Descartes viewed the self. Descartes argues that anything that is derived from

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<sup>58</sup> One should note that Marcel is unsystematic when developing these themes. A good example of Marcel’s way of doing philosophy is found in his introduction of the *Mystery of Being: Part I on Reflection and Mystery*. In delivering the Gifford Lectures in 1949-50 he said, “And, if pressed, I would expand that; I think the philosopher who first discovers certain truths and then sets out to expound them in their dialectical or *systematic* interconnections *always runs the risk* of profoundly altering the nature of the truths he has discovered (2).”

<sup>59</sup> In an article by Rodrick Chisholm, *The Problem of the Criterion*, he argues that either one is a ‘methodist’ or a ‘particularist.’ In the case of being a methodist, one starts analysis by using *a priori* commitments. For example, if one is an empiricist one would start with the *criterion*, a wide net, to catch all of the particulars to which “the good” applies. But, Chisholm argues, how could this work since we have no knowledge of which apples are bad or which are good? We ought to rather start with a particularistic approach and find principles by looking at the particulars. This latter approach sounds similar to Aristotle’s approach to knowing. Marcel is doing something quite similar; he is a particularistic in the sense that he does not start with *a criterion*, but starts with what we do know: being – in-a-situation, from which we know that persons exist, have value, and are ends and not mere means to an end. The goal now is to flesh out what principles can be derived from concrete examples exemplifying love, fidelity and hope.

<sup>60</sup> The term self and soul are to be understood interchangeably. The soul just means the self – that which is the subject or the *center of all human action/activity*. The self/soul/subject is the cause of all human action.

the senses, when subject to scrutiny, must be analyzed into its constituent parts. Thus, when Descartes turns this analytic method onto himself, he ‘sees’ his mind and its capacities as the *real* self. Instead of starting with what we already know to be true, by virtue of participation, Descartes uses experience, submerged participation, as a springboard to arrive at what is *really* real. In other words, the clear and distinct ideas for Descartes are *transparent* to reality, providing the philosopher epistemic access to what is *really* the case about the world and its objects. But Marcel raises a good question, is this how we *really* do encounter the world? Is there a bifurcation between life and the intellect? What defines our ideas? The distinction between what is *inside* and outside is a good example of the split between the person (the Cartesian self) and the rest of the world.<sup>61</sup>

The question is a methodological one in the sense that where we start our analysis will determine how we understand the self and its place in the world. For Marcel, the starting point will involve our fundamental situation in the world, which in turn will define our ideas of the dignity of persons. Any analysis or description of our ideas will necessarily involve a reference to the body and its being in a situation.<sup>62</sup>

The question Marcel is trying to answer is one in which *accounts* for the body and subject being one and whole before analysis. In Marcel’s book, *Mystery of Being*, volume one (hereafter *MBI GE*, Gateway Edition) he says,

body and soul...are treated as *things*, and things, for the purposes of logical discourse becomes *terms*, which one imagines as strictly defined, and as linked to each other by some determinable relation. *I want to show that if we reflect on what is implied by the*

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<sup>61</sup> Brendan Sweetman, *The Vision of Gabriel Marcel: Epistemology, Human Person, the Transcendent* (Rodopi Press, 2008). 10-13.

<sup>62</sup> By being-in-a-situation, Marcel means primordial experience, submerged participation, the experience we have before analysis of that experience. We will discuss this level of existence in more detail later on in this chapter. Not to get too deep into descriptions of what Descartes thought about the body, Marcel is going to critique Descartes in thinking that the body is *a body* and not my body.

*datum of my body*, by what I cannot help calling *my body*, this postulate, the body and soul are *things*, must be rejected; and this rejection entails the consequences of the first importance (115-116).<sup>63</sup>

In other words, the situation in which I find myself when I think about *my body* is one that *transcends analysis*. The relation between the body and the soul is such that they can become terms for logical analysis, thereby making them easily interchangeable and replaceable. The question of course is, what is the level on which the body and the conscious subject are one and undivided? How do we get this datum of *my body* without abstracting from the situation we find ourselves in?<sup>64</sup>

### **B. The Indubitable Datum: “There Is My Body”**

What, then, is a body in Marcel’s discussion of incarnate being? Before we answer that question I believe it would be best if we understand what he means by existence qua existence. He says, “This inquiry must be based on a certitude which is *not rational or logical* but existential; if existence is not at the beginning it is nowhere, for I do not believe that any transition can be made to existence which is not cheating or deception.”<sup>65</sup>

Existence is the level from which his analysis of a body makes sense because it is prior in *ontology* to the level of abstraction. When the ‘I’ is looked at under the aspect of existence Marcel says, “I exist: that means I have something by which I can be known or identified, either by person or by myself insofar as I assume for myself a borrowed otherness; none of these

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<sup>63</sup> Added Italics for emphasis

<sup>64</sup> In *The Vision of Gabriel Marcel*, Sweetman develops the theme of Marcel’s the human being as being-in-a-situation. The language of being-in-a-situation is not used by Marcel but is language Sweetman uses in order to describe what Marcel is doing when he talks about the relationship between the body and the conscious subject (24).

<sup>65</sup>CF Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, trans. Robert Rosthal (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002). 18.

characteristics are separable from *the fact* that “there is *my* body.” The key here is that the datum, the-body-being-one’s-own-and-no one-else’s, belongs to *me* and not to anyone else and, as such, it cannot be fully understood disassociated from embodied being. This is the starting point – the embodied being provides a way to account for the body as being ‘my body’ and no one else’s.

### C. What Does It Mean to Say “My Body”?

Marcel, in trying to account for the fundamental level of existence, argues that the analysis of the mind and body into subject and predicate as terms for logical analysis does not do full justice to our experiences and feelings of being one with ourselves. The reason is because of what we said earlier about Descartes’ understanding of the self. The self for Marcel is something that is *non-transparent*, whereas for Descartes the self is a clear and distinct idea. The self for Marcel is not *an object* at all; rather, the self is something that is felt and understood by just ‘looking at things.’ If the starting point of the phenomenologist is correct, then the body, if it is to be thought of as *my* body, cannot be thought of as something external to the self. For Descartes, the self is thought of as a *power* that extended itself through the body, the body being a means to an end. Something curious, though, happens when we conceive of our body as an instrument to the self. When we try to conceive an *external* relation between the body and the self we find ourselves in an *infinite regress* of selves (*MBI* 113-116). The body therefore cannot be thought of as merely an instrument to the mind. For when we say ‘*my body*’ we see it as a possession and not something we merely use. The self and the body seem to have an intimate relationship, so intimate that to conceive of the body and self as *two* distinct things is doing injustice to the person as a human being.<sup>66</sup>

If the body is not *really* distinct from the mind, then what is the self? How then do we come to know the self as this non-transparent datum? For Marcel the body is not merely possessed but felt as his own. The ownership of the body is not like the ownership of one's dog or car. This can be seen when Marcel says,

I shall say once more that *having*, possessing, owning, in the strong and exact sense of the term, has to be thought of in analogy with that unity, a unity *sui generis*, which is constituted by my body in so far as it is *my* body (MBI GE 120).

This notion of 'having' implies something that can be lost or misplaced. It seems absurd to say that I can lose my body or misplace it. The 'I,' so conceived, is something distinct from the body and thus is already abstracted from the level of just 'looking at things.' Marcel, in analyzing how we *speak* about the body, argues that we are getting to the negative understanding of my body. The closer we progress in coming to understand what *the subject* is, the more aware we become that something is missing from the abstraction – this analysis prompts a desire for the wholeness of the human person. This desire is what Marcel calls *ontological exigency*.<sup>67</sup>

The desire for wholeness is what is missing from abstract analysis of the self and the body. If, like Marcel, we were to conceive of a world in which the person were thought of in a functional sense, we could speak of the person as an object and not as a subject.<sup>68</sup> If the person is

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<sup>66</sup> Marcel would not be happy to use the word relationship since it implies two distinct things. Cf. *MBI GE*, 118.

<sup>67</sup> Some translations render the word "exigency" as need. In Marcel's book, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, he writes, "Rather than beginning with abstract definitions and dialectical arguments which may be discouraging at the outset, I should like to start with a sort of global and intuitive characterization of man in whom the sense of the ontological – the sense of being – is lacking, or, to speak more correctly, of the man who has lost the awareness of this sense (9)."

<sup>68</sup> Marcel by no means disagrees with Descartes that the distinction *can logically* be made, "In so far as I am a body: but not at all in so far as I am a consciousness. For, in a word, whatever the ultimate nature of consciousness may be, it obviously cannot be considered as a body, even a bodiless one. On this point, Descartes was right and with him all the forms of idealism that are derived from his thinking. Consciousness is essentially

thought of as one object among others, then it would seem that the human person is *replaceable*. This is the problem: The person cannot be seen as distinct from his/her body, in the natural sense of being a human person, because in doing so one is taking away the uniqueness of the person.

#### **D. Problem and Mystery**

Before we speak about the relation between *my* body and myself qua subject, I think it would be apropos to flesh out the distinction between ‘problem’ and ‘mystery.’ For Marcel, the word ‘mystery’ refers to the level of reflection in which the *questioner* is intimately involved in the question being asked. In asking the question, the questioner finds himself reflecting upon a reflection. This act of reflecting upon reflection is what Marcel calls ‘secondary reflection.’ By the concept, ‘problem,’ Marcel is referring to the level of abstract of objects. This latter level situates the questioner as a disinterested spectator. In other words, the level of problematic reflection is a level of abstract thought which does not involve per se the questioner.<sup>69</sup>

A ‘problem’ is something that is thrown in front of the person, thrown in such a way that it causes the person to reflect upon it as an object. If a ‘problem’ is something that involves the person’s attention, then it also implies a solution. The problem, therefore, is something that can be publically discussed, understood and solved.<sup>70</sup>

To understand the notion of the problem, let us find a concrete example. A couple of days ago, when I was driving my car to work, I noticed the ‘maintenance needed’ light was illumined

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something that is the contrary of a body, of a thing, of whatever thing one likes to imagine, and given that fact it is permissible to think that the expression ‘state of consciousness’ involves a contradiction in terms (MB 50).” Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, trans. G. S. Fraser (Harvill Press).

<sup>69</sup> *The Mystery of Being: Faith and Reality*. 102-103; *The Philosophy of Existentialism* (Citadel Press, 2002), 18-19.

<sup>70</sup> Sweetman, *The Vision of Gabriel Marcel: Epistemology, Human Person, the Transcendent*. 56.

on the dashboard. Thinking nothing of the orange light indicator, I continued to drive to work. A few minutes later, my car's engine suddenly came to a complete stop on the road. In a panic I pulled the car over to the road's shoulder and got out of the car waving my hands for someone to stop and help. This situation, of my car's engine breaking down, required my full *attention*, causing me to step back from the submerged level of existence into analysis.

The problem was something that stepped in front of me, requiring me to pay attention to it.<sup>71</sup> What Marcel calls reflection is the activity of directing one's attention to the break in the chain of habit (MBI GE 96). In the act of reflection I am focusing on a problem that needs to be solved. In the case of my car breaking down, I was surprised and taken back when my car broke down because I was not anticipating it to breakdown anytime soon.

Notice something here. 'Problems' are something that requires reflection and hence it involves a public language and communication to get the problem solved. I go to the mechanic shop and find myself needing a part that the mechanic and all mechanics understand to be the correct part. The fact that my mechanic can ask his friend next door for a part he is looking for requires his neighbor to have the same concept that he has. But notice that my way of being, living, the 'lived experience,' was interrupted by my car breaking down. Distinctions began to arise in my mind as soon as my car broke down; I did not feel with myself one with the car but rather I saw my car as a project to be solved. When one reflects upon a problem, the problem becomes for him an object which is shareable in nature. This is what Marcel calls *primary reflection*.

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<sup>71</sup> Marcel uses an example of putting his hand in his pocket to find that his watch is *not there* when it usually is there. The shock felt of the pocket watch not being there breaks the habit and requires reflection. This activity of reflection is essentially attention directed towards a break in the chain of habit. Marcel, *The Mystery of Being: Faith and Reality*. 95-96.

Problems, as we saw above, are things that require our attention and problem solving skills. The mechanic, who fixed my car, could have been replaced by another mechanic; as long as the other mechanic was a good mechanic, then it would follow that my car would get fixed. My car did not have to get fixed by *any particular* mechanic in order for it to be fixed. If we were to think about this and reflect on the dignity of that person, something would be missing. *This* mechanic is *not* just any mechanic; he is a person who happens to be a mechanic. What Marcel calls “mystery” is that realm in which the mechanic is a particular person. The realm of the mysterious is not to be understood as something being unintelligible; rather, it is a level which primary reflection cannot account for by means of reason alone. The level of mystery is one in which fills in the gap between the abstract and the particular.

#### **E. ‘My Body’ as Mystery**

In developing Marcel’s understanding of the starting point of inquiry, we need to understand what he means by ‘my body’ as a mystery. For Descartes, the self initiates the inquiry, not with *experience* or being-in-a-situation, but rather on the level of abstract reflection. The act of primary reflection, Marcel argues, is not *the end* of inquiry wherein we seek after the full explanation of reality. As has been pointed out, the description of the body as an instrument *fails* to follow with our intuitions about our body being intimately our own in the felt sense and not the ownership sense. What, then, is this felt sense of the body and subject? What would be the relationship of the body and subject on the level of pre-reflective experience? Given the *insufficient* picture of the body as external in relation to the subject, what then does the relation look like on the level of mystery? In response to the latter Marcel says,

This philosophy [Incarnate Being/My Body] is based on a datum which is *not transparent to reflection* [primary reflection], and which, when reflected, implies an

awareness *not of contradiction but of a fundamental mystery*, becoming an antimony as soon as discursive thought tries to reduce or problematize it.<sup>72</sup>

That is, mystery is opaque when the questioner is intimately involved in the questioning or reflecting because “a mystery is a problem which encroaches upon its own data, invading them, as it were, and thereby transcending itself as a simple problem.”<sup>73</sup> If I were to inquire as to whether I have a body, it would be absurd to even *ask the question* because it is ‘you’ *asking the question* and not someone else!

Other examples of mysteries for Marcel would be: Love, Fidelity, Hope and Freedom. To understand love and fidelity, the person must *act* on the promise as if it were unconditional; otherwise, promise-making does not make any rational sense. In *Being and Having*, Marcel makes this point about the realm of mystery and how it relates to the embodied context: “A mystery is something in which I am myself involved, and it can therefore only be thought of as a 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.” What is important here is the *ontological irreducibility of the embodied self*, as it situates the person in a context where meaning is found for the person. “Meaning for the person” does not *imply* a pure relativity in meaning, but rather is the reference point for the reflective *act of secondary reflection* to recover the experience of the being-in-the-situation.

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<sup>72</sup> *Gabriel Marcel's Perspectives on the Broken World*, trans. Katharine Rose Hanley, Marquette Studies in Philosophy (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998). 23.

<sup>73</sup> *The Philosophy of Existentialism*. 19.

## F. Second-Degree Reflection as a Realist Way Out

How is this indubitable *datum* of incarnate being found by virtue of reasoning? Is Marcel in a solipsistic circle of questioning and reasoning? If Marcel is a realist with respect to reality, how does he ‘access’ being if he is a being, himself? For Marcel, reflection is not only abstracting from the existential situation, of primary reflection, but also that of secondary reflection. Marcel explains “secondary reflection” as

[t]he recognition of mystery.... [Secondary reflection] is an essentially positive act of the mind, the supremely positive act in virtue of which all positivity may perhaps be strictly defined. In this sphere everything seems to go on as if I found myself acting on an intuition which I possess without immediately knowing myself to possess it – *an intuition which cannot be, strictly speaking, self-conscious and which it can grasp itself only through the modes of experience* in which its image is reflected, and which it lights up by being thus reflected in them...by means of this [reflection upon reflection], thought *stretches out* toward the recovery of an intuition which otherwise loses itself in proportion as it is exercised.<sup>74</sup>

It seems from the above passage that Marcel is using *intuition* not as a concept but rather as something *non-conceptual*, a way of the questioner recognizing being in its mystery. Thomas Michaud in his discussion on ‘secondary reflection’ takes Marcel to be saying that it is a reflection that is *guided* and illumined by intuition but is silent when it comes to speaking in terms of concepts. The key here for Michaud is the close kinship between the problem/mystery distinction with that of primary/secondary reflection since it reveals the goal that Marcel is essentially after; that is, the goal of *recovering* experience as it is experienced by the person.<sup>75</sup>

The essence of what Marcel desires to show is that, via primary reflection, experience is *not something* one can grasp in its entirety, nor is one’s body *my body* via primary reflection. The

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<sup>74</sup> *Being and Having*, trans. Katharine Farrer (London: Dacre Press, 1949). 118.

<sup>75</sup> Thomas A Michaud, "Secondary Reflection and Marcelian Anthropology," *Philosophy Today* 34, no. 3 (1990). 223.

work of intuition, the guide in restoring the person who has been bifurcated by the body/consciousness distinction or identification, is to see the person as experienced or felt in her/his existential embodied state. The nature of what an intuition *is* cannot be revealed conceptually, but only non-conceptually. To illuminate the discussion, let us refer to an experience with which I myself am intimately involved. Taking my body to be distinct from my consciousness, I could say that there seems to be a disconnect from the reality I perceive in my everyday experience. My body *seems* to exist at one and the same (paradoxically so) along with my consciousness. In other words, the abstraction process does not account for the whole of myself as body and consciousness – these are not, as Descartes would say, two distinct substances; rather, they are to be seen as a holistic communion between two *aspects* of myself. The body, if conceived as a body, cannot be *my body* since it is disconnected from who I am. The assertion, “I am my body,” is not a materialistic assertion but an existential one.

The *act* of second-degree reflection is a sort of indeterministic understanding of what it means for my soul and body to be one. A good example of the latter is the Holy Union of a husband and a wife in marriage where the husband is one and the same with his wife, and contra. The fact that the two married persons are of one flesh cannot be fully accounted for via primary reflection. Hence, secondary reflection supplements the explanation of fidelity of the married couple by referring to the concrete experiences of their commitment to each other. For marriage is usually understood to be a commitment to the other even when the other does not reciprocate. In the mode of primary reflection one could analyze the relationship as being conditional, and give justification for one spouse to give up on the other without contradiction. But we all know that marriage would not be marriage if the commitment were conditional. I chose to love my wife even if she does not reciprocate my love. The love is for the other as a person and not as an

object. Thus, love for the other can be unconditional. Secondary reflection pieces back the abstract notion of reciprocity with the person who is a mystery. Marriage would not make sense if it were only to be analyzed in the reductive sense.

How then does this act of secondary reflection give us *knowledge* with respect to the unitive aspect of the union between the body and the soul/mind? According to Michaud,

Marcel's response might be that secondary reflection's expressions *merely index* a disclosure of metaphysical truth. The expressions are heuristic guides which can lead to a lived existential assurance of their truth.... Metaphysical truth finds its fullest and most satisfying philosophical adequacy as that which leads on and is disclosed through concordant lived-assurances with intersubjectively shared expressions...<sup>76</sup>

In other words, Marcel is not dismissing truth as something objective in itself; rather, he is dismissing an approach to the truth that regards it *only* as object. The latter is misguided since truth is not grasped in *one essential* definition.

The *orientation* towards truth deals with how the person is *situated*, rather than with propositional truth that reason can determine or put boundaries upon; Marcel would not deny that we can have propositional truth, but would argue that truth in its fullness is found in Being with which the questioner is intimately involved. The latter is a mystery because the intellect cannot fully grasp the *objective* relation since it is itself enmeshed in that relation.

Truth for Marcel is not entirely propositional and abstract but rather is also found by virtue of intuition. The process of secondary reflection thereby brings together, or unifies, that which was lost in the process of abstraction and tries to clarify, in light of the embodied being, what it means to be a body that is mine. It seems that Truth, like Being, is that which the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. pp.227

individual strives after, viz., a unity of that which has been analyzed into its constituent parts.<sup>77</sup>

In other words, truth is not just a correspondence between a proposition and how the world really is; rather, it is that *plus* other forms of evidence that are available only through intuition and mystery by virtue of reference to the primitive situation from which, alone, one is able recognize the evidence in whatever form it may take.<sup>78</sup>

### **G. Why is the Embodied Situation the Primary Mode of Being?**

Why is Marcel so keen on putting the body back into its primitive situation of existence rather than in its abstracted mode of being? For Marcel, the body, as found in the embodied situation, is primary because it avoids the problem of solipsism, for which reality is the abstracted self and nothing more. For the self to get outside itself, it must be presupposed that the self is already in contact with the world and its relations with other persons. For Marcel, the body as embodiment plays a big role in getting outside oneself and located in one's existential situation. The latter became a novel idea in French Philosophy, for until Marcel, philosophy dealt with an egocentric reality that provided no good framework or philosophy to account for the *Other*.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Interestingly enough Kenneth Gallagher in his book on *The Philosophy of Knowledge* says, in regard to truth, that there exists evidence for which the neutral observer cannot account since, as subject, or embodied being, he is intimately involved with it: "The knower of mystery is *not* a spectator but a participator: *some* evidence is only available to the participant and not to the neutral observer...The participation is the foundation for my subjectivity; my knowledge is posterior to participation...participation is *the ground for* evidence (242)." Kenneth T. Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Knowledge* (New York,: Sheed & Ward, 1964).

<sup>78</sup>Seymour Cain, *Gabriel Marcel's Theory of Religious Experience*, American University Studies Series VII, Theology and Religion (New York: P. Lang, 1995). "There can be no truth about what transcends space/time, what does not exist for immediate consciousness, but there can only be *truth*, which is beyond existence, just as freedom is the condition of verification, though itself unverifiable (25)."

<sup>79</sup>Erwin W. Straus and Michael A. Machado, "Gabriel Marcel's Notion of Incarnate Being," in *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel: The Library of Living Philosophers*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Lewis Edwin Hahn

The body, as a participant, provides a way for accounting for community and other minds. Marcel makes clear in *Creative Fidelity* that sensation should not to be seen as a faculty receptive of data, for if such a conception is accepted then one is already presupposing an external world of which one is not a part.<sup>80</sup> Sensation for Marcel is *not* a passive receiving but rather communication or sensation itself; that is, sensation/feeling is immediate and is essentially manifesting itself in the world of which, by virtue of participation, it is intimately a part.<sup>81</sup> Sensation, feeling, and body are all on the basic level of embodiment which constitutes the person and his/her communion with the external world. This makes it *possible* for one to *know* other minds and to have sympathy for another state of being than our own. This basic level does not account for the *I-Thou* relation but nevertheless plays a key role in making possible for the *I-Thou* relation in which only persons can participate by virtue of their being *free*.

In the above analysis, one can quickly see that there does seem to be something odd about this non-objective relationship between the body and the world. Marcel would probably respond by saying that the existential situation is *pre-cognitive* and, as such, one needs to resort to the realm of mystery by using the method of secondary reflection to account for the above intuition. Another way to put it is this: in order for one even to have a concept of what a body is one needs to ‘step back’ from the existential situation of which is one intimately a part and then think about “a body” in its universalized form. Once one has ‘stepped back,’ as it were, then the

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(La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Pub. Co., 1984). “The centrality of the body in Marcel’s thought makes possible an even more broad-based conception of human reality. The process of embodiment works downward as well as upward: it feeds the hidden roots of our *active community with beings*, it nourishes our transcendental relation with being. Human embodiment connects us to both physical and metaphysical reality (136).”

<sup>80</sup> Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*. 24-25.

<sup>81</sup> Due to the constraints of this chapter I chose not to focus on sensation per se but I do want to make clear that it is vitally important on the basic level of embodiment since sensation, feeling, and body all together constitute that level as such.

person can rationally analyze what body we talking about and what it *means* to say *my body* as opposed to someone else's! This last step is reflection upon reflection, secondary reflection whereby the person 'sees' or is illumined about the situation from which he/she derived the concept of 'a body.'

The above reflection, in turn, is not *a proof* which all reasonable people are obligated to assent to, but rather, is based on an intuition of what it means to say 'my body' as opposed to 'a body.' This last point can be substantiated by *phenomenological descriptions* of what it means to exist in 'my body.' To take a concrete example of what Marcel means, let us look more closely at the previous example of my car breaking down. Soon after my car broke down I was able to get hold of *a mechanic* who had the knowledge of how to fix my car's engine. This mechanic I called was a dear friend of mine whom I trusted, and with whom I had a shared history. This mechanic's name was John. Now is it possible that another mechanic could rebuild my engine in the same way John could? Sure it is possible, for *any mechanic who has the concept of rebuilding engines* could fix my car. But would we say that John is replaceable by anyone? It does not seem so. If John, as a particular subject, were not taken into consideration, then I would not, by Marcel's standards, understand John as a subject who is more than just 'a body' that could be substituted by any other person's. The latter example shows *why* the embodied level of existence is primary, for with the particular subject, John, and the concept, 'mechanic,' we can understand what it means to be a 'someone' as opposed to an 'object.'

#### IV. Is Marcel's Embodied-Situational-Existence Sufficient to give us the Second Source of Dignity?

The distinction can now be made between a 'someone' and a 'something.' The subject can be understood on the level of being-in-a-situation. This level of existence is one that *cannot be conceptualized* and hence cannot be shared in nature. Though the *concept* cannot be shared, the intuition given by the *act of secondary reflection* can illumine the *insufficiency* of mere conceptual analysis. By conceptual analysis we can only get to the capacities of the person and not the person him/herself! The reason why we need to account for the person is because personhood is what needs to be defined.

The person as defined by Kant can now be accounted for in its two aspects: irreplaceability and infinite value. *The person is irreplaceable because he/she is irreducible to conceptual analysis, thereby making him/her a thou rather than an it.* We can now say by means of Marcel's existential analysis that persons are in principle irreplaceable and not merely so in fact. Given Marcel's analysis of *my body* we can say that the person is not *whole* in being if analyzed into his/her constituent parts. This does not mean that we ought not to do conceptual analysis by means of reflection – *no*; what we can say is that mere conceptual analysis is not sufficient to account for the person in his wholeness. In other words, we do not end our inquiry at persons having x,y, and z capacities. Rather, as we have seen throughout this thesis paper, capacities do not suffice for a full explanation of the dignity of the person. The 'who' was not distinguished properly from the 'what.'

## A. The Irreplaceability of Persons in light of Marcel's Understanding of Subjectivity

Up to now we have explored several accounts of persons and their value. Boethius's definition of persons we found was insufficient since it failed to give us persons as distinct from their nature. The person was *reduced* to a natural object of inquiry for the knower. Given that natural objects *admit of a price*, we cannot say that persons have dignity. Locke's account showed how there is a *personal* component to the definition of dignity but failed to show that persons are more than their self-consciousness or reflection. Kant's analysis of persons found that they are only as valuable by virtue of their capacity to set ends for themselves. Up to this point the problem was our starting point of analysis. This starting point was insufficient to give us a definition of dignity that would account for our experiences of friendship and love. Given the above analysis of Marcel's understanding of subjectivity, we can now say that persons are irreplaceable because of their being embodied. His analysis of the body and mind showed that persons *are not naturally* thought of as being two distinct things. This non-conceptual level of existence gives us the reason why the notion of irreplaceability of persons is *not merely a sentimental attitude*. We can now explain our experiences with a certainty of feeling and intuition. Of course we can never *prove* such premise but we can *show* it by appealing to concrete experiences. Marcel would say that such *proving* is a misunderstanding of the nature of things. Persons cannot be analyzed into a problem without serious harm to how we understand the love between ourselves and our loved ones. As we have seen above, analysis of persons that results in their being replaceable fails to give us the correct understanding of our experiences. Apart from analysis, when, habitually, I walk down the road on which I live, I can distinguish

between a human person and a brick building. The person is a mystery in the sense that she/he cannot be reduced to the level of an object.

If our philosophy does not take into consideration the rich, concrete experiences that cannot be fully conceptualized, then what do we have left to work with? Our concepts are derived from this primordial experience – why, then, do we not inquire into that level of existence? It would only seem human to take into consideration *all* of the data. Given that we make friends with persons as ends in themselves, would it not follow that the friend is really a person as found in our concrete experiences? Our concrete experiences ought to give us *guidance* as to where we are wrong in our analysis. If we cannot account for the love and fidelity that we experience between ourselves and our loved ones as subjects, then I am not sure what philosophy is good for. Even those who are not religious can recognize the concrete experiences of love and fidelity that exist between two irreducible subjects. How then can one say that dignity is an empty concept? To understand the dignity of the person is to understand that persons are *not* reducible to conceptual analysis.

### **B. Critique of the Person as Being Irreplaceable in ‘Lived Experience’**

One could respond to Marcel and ask, what exactly does it mean for the subject to be found in the embodied context of being? Are we not conceptualizing this level of existence on which the subject is found? Are we not using concepts in describing the level of being-in-a-situation (‘lived experience’)? Are we not using concepts in describing our concrete examples of love and friendship? Marcel would probably respond by saying that you do not understand the process by which we get concepts. The concepts of love, dignity, and fidelity are not concepts that can be *fully explained* by abstract thought. The recuperative act of secondary reflection,

intuition, looks back upon where the concepts were derived and asks, “What is that?” The mode of being, in other words, does not start with concepts but rather *something else*. This something else can be *best* explained in terms that are negative, but nevertheless is *real* by virtue of our feelings and sensation. The feelings do not generate concepts but they do provide us with some sort of grounding of experience as something *indeterminate*. To argue in conceptual terms is to fail to realize what Marcel is actually doing when he says that subjectivity or experience cannot be determined.

Thus the irreplaceability of persons can only be understood by reflecting back upon subjectivity itself and trying to put the pieces together by means of feelings and concrete examples. The concrete examples serve to piece the intuitions together with the concepts. For example, to understand the dignity of the human person we look at the concept of the capacities that all persons possess along with the intuition that persons are in principle irreplaceable. This intuition is not arrived at haphazardly; rather, it is arrived at by virtue of who we are as questioners. We as questioners are the ones asking the question about ourselves and, as such, it will involve something unique and un-shareable in nature. The question of uniqueness of persons can only be asked by we who are persons. Our uniqueness is found in the fact that our experiences and subjectivity cannot be shared by any other person. If it were shareable, it would *not be me, my body and my being a subject*.

This critique, though a good one, fails to understand the different ways of understanding a person. One can understand a person to be a thing by primary analysis, but this fails to account for the definition of a person. A person is not another object in the world. If he/she were, then why do we emphasize human rights issues in our culture? Why is it that we are appalled and

disgusted when we see Coptic Christian heads severed on the Mediterranean beach by ISIS?<sup>82</sup> Why is it that we feel outraged when we see parents neglect their autistic daughter by caging her in their basement?<sup>83</sup> These emotive responses are not unwarranted since our response is to these persons' dignity (their infinite value and irreplaceability) being *violated*. Why would we get upset about someone's head being cut off if that human person were not one of us (referring to the example of the Coptic Christians being executed)? To say that those violations of dignity are nothing more than violations of civil law is ludicrous. If we were to reject the irreplaceable aspect of persons in our definition of dignity, how could we account for the sorrow we feel over the death of the Coptic Christians who live in a different country? It would not make sense if we were to say that it is *because* they have rationality and can consciously set goals for the future. The latter reasons do not carry *the ontological weight* we are looking for. Again, Marcel is pointing out the *emptiness* of a functionalized world, that is, a world without the recognition of all persons having dignity. In such a world we have definitions of persons that leave out the subjectivity of the person, leaving us with nothing but a conditionally valued object.

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<sup>82</sup> CNN Staff, "Isis Video Appears to Show Beheadings of Egyptian Coptic Christians in Libya," <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/15/middleeast/isis-video-beheadings-christians/>.

<sup>83</sup> Meghan Dwyer, "Charged: Brookfield Couple Accused of Locking Teenage Daughter in Basement, Forcing Her to Wear Diaper," Fox6 News, <http://fox6now.com/2015/03/25/charged-brookfield-couple-accused-of-locking-teenage-daughter-in-basement-forcing-her-to-wear-a-diaper/>.

CHAPTER 4:  
THE TYING OF THE KNOT: HOW ARE WE TO COHERENTLY UNDERSTAND THE  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO SOURCES OF DIGNITY?

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Given that we have argued up to this point in the thesis for two sources of dignity, infinite value and irreplaceability, what is the ontological/logical glue that holds them together? Linda Zagzebski argues that insofar as one of them is shareable and the other is not, they cannot be put together into a coherent whole. For how can something shareable, viz., the person's capacities, be grounded in something un-shareable in nature? The *property* of being-a-rational-being cannot ground the *property* of being incommunicable in one's subjectivity.<sup>84</sup> In other words, the two sources of dignity are incompatible with each other and cannot both be found in the same thing, such as an individual substance.<sup>85</sup> If I understand Zagzebski correctly, she argues that the two aspects of dignity are to be understood separately without being *essentially* united to one thing since a *thing* can have one property without having the other. But what if we were to argue that the thing is a human person and cannot, by virtue of *being a human being*, be understood apart from either aspect of dignity? In this chapter I will argue that the two sources of dignity discussed thus far cannot be seen apart from the same subject. For if our concept of the human person is an individual subject who is a person, as we have argued throughout this paper, then it would follow that one cannot *recognize* that subject without the subject having both infinite and irreplaceable value.

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<sup>84</sup> Zagzebski, "The Uniqueness of Persons." 418. In a footnote she says, "My position here is that it is *possible* for the same thing to have both aspects of dignity, *but not in virtue of the same thing*. Human persons have qualities in addition to possessing subjectivity. Some/one of the former grounds their infinite value; the latter grounds their irreplaceable value."

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 420. "Kant is right that it takes both infinite and irreplaceable value to explain the value of persons, but he is wrong in thinking that one aspect of dignity entails the other. They are in fact incompatible kinds of value; hence they cannot attach (directly) to the same object."

Taking Boethius's definition of personhood, we can say personhood is derived from nature, which *distinguishes* the human being from other natural things, while subjectivity is what makes *action, existence and experience* possible. When a human person *acts* in the Thomistic sense, *actus humanus*, it follows that the person is revealed in experience. The action is human in the sense that it is derived from an *intentional* or deliberate act. We can, with Marcel, say that subjectivity is indeterminate or the grounds for reflection. Nevertheless on the level of existence we can say that actions are revealed to us, such as *acts of love* and fidelity, which reveal the subjectivity of the person who is the *author* of those acts. We would not say that the two aspects of dignity are incompatible since they are *unified* in the subject's actions. The *experience* of the act in freedom and the uniqueness of the act grant us the two aspects under the same subject.<sup>86</sup>

#### H. Problems with thinking of the two aspects of dignity as two *distinct* properties

In a paper given by Paul Kurcharski to the first U.S. conference of the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas, he argues that Zagzebski is mistaken in thinking of the *two aspects* as *two* properties.<sup>87</sup> Kurcharski positively argues that the correct way of thinking about the two aspects of the person is in terms of an individual substance of a rational nature. Though Zagzebski does

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<sup>86</sup>Thomas Aquinas defines human action as follows: "[O]f actions done by man those alone are properly called "human," which are proper to man as man. Now man differs from irrational animals in this, that he is the master of his actions. Wherefore those actions alone are properly called human, of which man is the master. Now man is master of his actions through his reason and will; whence, too, the free-will is defined as "the faculty and will of reason." Therefore those actions are properly called human which proceed from a deliberate will." Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I-I, q.1, a.1.

<sup>87</sup> Paul Kurcharski, "What Does It Mean to Be "Incommunicable" and Why Does It Matter?," in *Thomas Aquinas: Teacher of Humanity: The First U.S. Conference of the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Houston, Texas 2013).

admit of building upon the definition of person given by Boethius, nevertheless it seems from her discussion that she sees the person as a mix of properties without anything unifying those properties.<sup>88</sup> The reason why Zagzebski thinks the two aspects are two properties of the human person is that she thinks that one can have one without having the other. For example, Aristotle's unmoved mover might instantiate rationality but not subjectivity. Or there might be a uniquely incommunicable ugly spider that is irreplaceable but nevertheless does not instantiate rationality. These examples only work if one does not take into account human nature and its essence. Instead of talking about instances of rational nature, Kurcharski suggests that we look at Aquinas and his account of human nature. In response to Zagzebski, Kurcharski suggests that,

A person is not a collection of properties, but rather a unified and concrete substance whose nature and properties can be isolated and considered in abstraction, however this nature and these properties should not be treated as concrete things themselves, which I take Zagzebski to be doing (implicitly, if not explicitly). A person's incommunicability finds its *ultimate metaphysical explanation* in his or her human nature, but simply because human persons share a nature in common does not mean that what flows from this nature cannot be radically unique (8).<sup>89</sup>

In other words, what Kurcharski is pointing out is this: the two properties, the two sources of dignity, are *not* incompatible properties if they are grounded in the human person. It does not follow that from human nature must flow *only* shareable properties. The question is not *who exhibits* properties x and y, but rather, who is that particular human person? In other words, even if certain properties are *not instantiated by the human being* it does not take away from *the 'who.'* If we were to see the two sources of dignity as two properties in themselves, then how could we respond to Peter Singer and his criticisms? Singer would ask, "What makes a human being special without the property of being-irreplaceable?" It would not suffice to say that the

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<sup>88</sup> Zagzebski, "The Uniqueness of Persons." 420, as mentioned in the previous page.

<sup>89</sup> Kurcharski, "What Does It Mean to Be "Incommunicable" and Why Does It Matter?."

human person is special, has dignity, *if* she/he instantiates such a property. If we are correct about the second source of dignity being *essential* to being human, then it would follow that all human persons are incommunicably their own, implying that they are *irreplaceable*. But if those properties are not unified in an individual substance, then we fail to realize the incommunicability of someone who does not exhibit rational properties. Singer asks a good question, that is, *what makes* human beings so special? It is *not sufficient* to say with Boethius that persons are individual substances of a rational nature. For rationality is *not sufficient* to ground the irreplaceability of persons. Though it might set apart *human beings*, it nevertheless does not account for the uniqueness of persons. The problem here is *not* what particular human being is a person, but rather, how are we to understand such a connection between the human nature/personhood and the irreplaceable aspect of dignity.

### **III. Gabriel Marcel and Substance**

If Kurcharski is correct, how then are we to understand the notion of substance? Can something unique and shareable live in the same ontological house? Is substance the glue and the base that can account for the grounding of the two aspects of dignity? To flesh out Kurcharski's suggestion in more detail, I propose to look at Marcel's and Karol Wojtyła's philosophical framework. By doing so, we will better grasp the grounding for the two aspects of dignity in the human being him/herself.

As seen the previous chapter, Marcel critiques Descartes' understanding of the ego as substance. Though he critiqued Descartes on his abstract concept of the person nevertheless Marcel seems to want to say there is something that grounds ontology of being. Marcel scholar, Thomas Michaud, suggests that,

For Marcel, being is not some disconnected, completely self-standing substance but involves all existents, and thus its relatedness is intrinsic to its nature. Being cannot be duly appreciated without including its relations, and similarly, human being cannot be properly appreciated without including its relatedness, especially to others.<sup>90</sup>

Being, in other words, is the ground for relations with others. Being human is essentially being related with others, that is, inter-subjectivity. Though Marcel seems to think there are no self-standing substances, he is responding to Descartes and his view of the ego as a substance. Remember that for Marcel, the body connects us with the world and the relations within. The body, for Descartes, was something that was not *known* with clear and distinct perception and therefore was not the starting point of inquiry. For Marcel, on the contrary, the body is what grounds our subjectivity, 'lived experience.' The body is *my* body and as such it is *not* a substance that can be shared by another. This, then, does *not* rule out substance per se but rather it rules out the Cartesian understanding of substance. For how else can we talk about *this* person as opposed to another person? The uniqueness can be found in the individual substance, but that substance must be understood to be the whole person, not just his/her ego. The uniqueness, as Wojtyła will argue, is found in self-knowledge of being unique. Self-knowledge is the *activity* of reflexivity, that is, being aware of oneself as a subject and not an object. Similar to Marcel, but instead of leaving us on the level of phenomenological descriptions, Wojtyła wants to argue that when we are aware of our efficacy, then it follows that we are more than just our actions. For any activity we undergo, whether it is intellectual or consciousness, we are still more than our activities. Who does these activities is this human being and not another.

What the discussion on Marcel accomplished, in chapter three, was to point out the universal intuition of human persons being unique and irreplaceable. Given that we have a glimpse into

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<sup>90</sup> Thomas Michaud, "Introduction: Gabriel Marcel and the Postmodern World," *Bulletin de la Société Américaine de Philosophie de Langue Française* 7, no. 1/2 (1995). 14-15.

what it looks like via concrete situations of ‘lived experience,’ how now do we put the two aspects together? That is, how do we unify the phenomenological descriptions of the person as unique with the metaphysical discussion of persons as infinitely valuable? My suggestion will be to look at Karol Wojtyła’s Thomistic metaphysics.

#### **IV. Karol Wojtyła and the Relation between Human Nature and the Person**

Taking a Thomistic view of the human person, Wojtyła explains, in his article *Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man*, that the person as defined in the classical Aristotelian sense does not consider man in his subjectivity. When we do not consider man in his subjectivity, then it follows that we reduce man to the natural order. The question we want to answer is what, then, is the relation between man as a subject and man as an object? We do not want to say that man is merely a subject, for then it leads to the conclusion that there is *nothing* communicable about man considered as an object, i.e., as possessing attributes that constitute a nature. On the other hand, if we say that man is only an object then it would follow that he is in fact not unique and is reduced to another thing in the natural order. Is there no answer to this problem as Zagzebski pointed out above? Karol Wojtyła finds the answer to lie in the scholastic approach to consciousness, that is, in rationality in the broadest sense of the word.

##### **A. Consciousness qua Rationality as Understood by Karol Wojtyła**

In the Scholastic approach, the aspect of consciousness was on the one hand only implied and, as it were, hidden in “rationality” (this refers to the definitions, *homo est animal rationale* and *persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia*); on the other hand it was contained in the will (understood as *appetites rationalis*) and expressed by *voluntaries* (30).<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. A. Potocki (Dordrecht/Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979).

Wojtyla explains that our experiences are formed *because* of consciousness and that without this *aspect* of the person we have no experience. There are many manifestations of the human beings' actions, and thus, there are many potentialities that the person has. This can all be *explained* by widening the Boethian definition of person, an individual substance of a *rational* nature. This being conscious of one's actions *is* living through one's actions. When I experience guilt for lying to my co-worker, I am experiencing something that would not be possible without myself as myself. This is what Wojtyla calls *the reflexive consciousness*. We might ask, how is this different from Locke and his definition of a person? This is the difference: my being aware of my human actions (in the Thomistic sense) gives me a glimpse into my subjectivity. Locke, as we saw in chapter one, reduced the person to a mere consciousness, to being a self-reflective being. But Wojtyla is saying that through our actions we come to glimpse this irreducible aspect of the person. We can then say with Locke that we are self-conscious beings but this does not mean that we are *merely* so.

## **B. Distinction between Reflective and Reflexive Awareness**

Given that it is not *clear* what Wojtyla means by reflexive consciousness, I thought it would be apropos to refer to John Crosby.<sup>92</sup> To make clearer what we mean by subjectivity or coming to know ourselves as subjects rather than objects, we refer to the intentionality of consciousness. Crosby, following Brentano, sees consciousness as always being conscious of something. Without this act of understanding the object could not be known. Seen thus, the act of

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<sup>92</sup> John Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996). 84-123.

understanding is something *dynamic* and cannot be separated from its intended object. Thus, there is a subject by virtue of its relation to the object outside oneself.<sup>93</sup>

Crosby, in his discussion of intentionality, sees that Brentano is missing something from the analysis of consciousness. Crosby sees that there is another dimension to consciousness that is not outward directed but rather inward directed. This is what he calls self-presence. The relation I have to myself as subject that constitutes the interiority of my existence is what he calls self-presence. Let me explain. If what Crosby calls self-presence were another intentional object, then there would be an infinite regress of selves. This is similar to what we said in the last chapter on Marcel's discussion of the Cartesian self. Once we objectify the self, we then have another self and so on *ad infinitum*. To stop this regress we must admit that there is a subject at the pole of intentionality. In every conscious act the self is present to the object.

What about when I describe my life story to someone? Am I not objectifying myself as an object in telling the story of something that cannot be objectified? No, for in objectifying myself I am still a self who is telling the story and making it *intelligible* to the other person. That is to say, I include myself as subject in the telling of the story. If I, *myself*, were not included, there would be no grounding for such story telling. Again, this self-presence is being present or experiencing myself as a subject and not an object. This is clearly a given when I speak about experiencing myself inwardly. Again, in telling someone else a story of something that happened to me, there will always be something missing from the story. There is something that is *irreducible* to analysis, for if the self were reducible to another self then, again, there would be an *infinite number* of selves to which we would be referring.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 83.

This is the difference between reflective and reflexive consciousness: to experience ourselves from within as subjects is to have a reflexive awareness or consciousness of the self as subject and not as object. To experience the self as an object is to reflect on the experience of the self and objectify the self. Let us now see how this reflexive *aspect* of consciousness that makes self-presence possible relates to the whole picture of the human person as a substance.

### **C. Man as an Actor**

How then do we unify these aspects of the person? If we do not want to absolutize any one aspect, then we need to find something to unify these aspects of consciousness. To reduce the person to any one aspect is to do injustice to the concept of dignity of persons. As we have seen, if we reduce the person to *any* capacity, then we have lost the person to a part rather than being true to the whole. For the purposes of this chapter I only will seek to find how to unify these activities of the human person.<sup>94</sup>

Being influenced by the philosopher Max Scheler, a phenomenologist, Wojtyla recognized the objection that a person is more than a rational being participating in rational activity.<sup>95</sup> Given that persons are irreducible to any one activity, Wojtyla wanted to find a basis for such diverse activities. Focusing on the phenomenon of action, Wojtyla corrects Scheler by pointing out that the person experiences himself as the cause of his own action. This experience

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<sup>94</sup> Wojtyla speaks more about the ends than the activities man participates in. The ends are not merely objective ends that each person is destined to fulfill, but rather, are personalized by virtue of his or her uniqueness. This personalization of ends does not detract from the objectivity of the Good but rather it amplifies and builds upon what is already in nature. Most contemporary philosophers do not speak about nature and its end, but Wojtyla accepts a Thomistic understanding of causes. Personally, I do not see why we cannot speak of the classic four causes as explanations of reality.

<sup>95</sup> Jameson Taylor, "Beyond Nature," *Review of Metaphysics* 63, no. 2 (2009). 421.

of oneself as efficient cause permits the *inference* to the human person as a substance in the Thomistic-Aristotelian sense. By substance, we mean the metaphysical subject of these diverse acts – man’s existence is a *suppositum*.<sup>96</sup> The term, *suppositum*, is to be understood in the context of man’s existence and experience of himself as subject, not as object. Yet this is what unifies man as subject and object – this experience of one’s efficacy makes possible the inference to man as a metaphysical subject. The condition for being a person is the metaphysical subject – it which makes possible the *experience* of one’s subjectivity! The definitions of the person as seen throughout this paper have mistaken the condition of the person with the reality of personhood itself. In other words, the metaphysics set up the conditions for the person’s activities but it does not provide us with a abstract definition of personhood – the necessary and sufficient conditions of personhood. To ask for an abstract definition of personhood is *asking the wrong question*. As we saw with Marcel’s analysis of primary and secondary reflection, the person is not *merely* an object of abstract thought. We have to allow for a level of pre-reflective experience to fully account for our experiences of ourselves as subjects.

The next step in trying to tie the knot between the two aspects of dignity is to ‘see’ the principle *operari sequitur esse* – “for something to act it must first exist.” Conversely, a thing’s operation or activity is the appropriate avenue for knowledge of that existent. The actions of the person – as opposed to what merely happens to the person – make the most sense if we trace it back to a human person.<sup>97</sup> What other *metaphysical* explanation could there be? Would it make sense that the action has no origin in the subject? From our discussion of intentionality, we saw that the subject is not without its object – in this case, an action. Actions do not make sense apart

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<sup>96</sup> Taylor points out that while Wojtyla uses the word “ontic structure” he also uses *suppositum* in the classical sense. In other words *suppositum* is the subject of being in the metaphysical sense. Cf.422.

<sup>97</sup> Taylor, "Beyond Nature."426.

from their causes. Hence the action refers to the whole person and not just pure consciousness, as Husserl would like us to think, or Locke's self-consciousness. The actions are activities and, as such, involve the whole person, which includes the capacity to set ends for oneself *and* experience oneself as a subject. The grounding is found in the structure of the person as a human being. Boethius is correct in his definition of the person being a substance of a rational nature but wrong in thinking that the person is conceptually closed ended; subjectivity is something that we do in fact grasp in our experiences, being self-present. This aspect is incommunicable and not shareable but nonetheless is a *mode* of knowledge.

To say that man is an actor is to distinguish him from man as an individual substance (in the Aristotelian sense) and man as a subject of experience. Man is rather an actor – an agent. One cannot act without being an individual substance and being conscious of the action. For a human action to be such it must not only be performed by a human being, but the consciousness of acting is necessary. Analysis of an action such as giving oneself to another requires not only that the necessary conditions for human action be met, but also a personal awareness of the action as one of love.

## **V. Response to Zagzebski**

Instead of seeing the two aspects of dignity – infinite value and irreplaceability of persons – as two properties that are independent of the species human being, it seems more reasonable to see these values as *aspects of the acting person*. The capacities that make up the human person are not mere capacities that can be applied to anything in logical possible world scenarios, but are to be understood as essential to the nature of being human. If we are not to leave the analysis

on the level of conceptual analysis, we ought to say that the human being has by his/her nature infinite value and is irreplaceable.

Given what we have said about the structure of the human actor – we can say that the human person is an individual substance of a rational nature whose activities or capacities admit of infinite value, and who is also a subject who is irreplaceable. The structure *is not* a part, but a pattern of relations between its parts and elements. How could we distinguish between one thing or another if there was no pattern of relations to be found? The key here is functionality.<sup>98</sup> The person cannot be identified with any part – for if he/she were identified with a part, then he/she would not be *a* subject. This is human nature – “the sum total of potentials for action.”<sup>99</sup> Not to delve too deeply into Thomistic metaphysics, it suffices to sketch reasons for why we need to unify actions in the actor and not do mere conceptual analysis.

In response to Zagzebski, I would say that what we have here is a paradox and not an inconsistency. Given that the human person is both communicable and incommunicable, it follows that the human person and his/her dignity cannot be spoken of with complete conceptual precision since the subjective aspect of dignity, by its nature, cannot be analyzed into its constituent parts. If we were to analyze the human person’s dignity into two concepts, then, yes, we would have an inconsistency. But, subjectivity, as seen in chapter three, is not something that we can fully conceptualize – we can grasp this aspect of the human person, but not surround it with our intellects. We touch subjectivity but we do not fully conceptualize it, for if we did, we

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<sup>98</sup> Glowienka Emerine, "Person as 'That Which Is Most Perfect in All of Nature'," *Southwest Philosophical Studies* 20(1998). 56-57.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* 58.

would not have the problem of understanding what dignity is. Therefore, the human person has two aspects of dignity grounded in his/her human nature without any inconsistency.

Zagzebski, in arguing that something un-shareable cannot be grounded in something shareable is not allowing for the possibility of another starting point of analysis. As we have said above and in the previous chapter, it seems that we *know* what is irreplaceable about persons but we also know about what is infinitely valuable about persons. As has been argued throughout this thesis, one cannot have *dignity* without both aspects. Not only would dignity be unintelligible with only one of these aspects, it would also seem *ad hoc* to claim that anyone *actually* has it without the proper metaphysical framework of the human person. The argument throughout this thesis attempted to show that our friendships, love towards our loved ones, and concrete experiences all point to human beings as being in-and-of-themselves special. It would be absurd to take the above experiences and say, “I love my loved ones *because* they seem to possess something loveable in themselves.” No, on the contrary, it seems that we do ‘see’ our loved ones as ones who really do have dignity. Therefore, it seems most reasonable to conclude that all human persons have dignity and not merely some of them.

The knot that ties the two aspects of dignity together is the human being as an individual substance of a rational nature. As seen above in Karol Wojtyla’s analysis, rational nature should be seen not merely as calculation, but as a grounding for *all* activities – one is of which is being aware of oneself and others as subjects and not merely objects. Wojtyla pointed out that there is no inconsistency between something being un-shareable and shareable in nature since these are two aspects of the same thing. Analogously, we could say that this computer is unique and shareable in itself. This computer can be replaced by another, but it has its own unique identity – it is *this* computer and not another. The two aspects of the one thing do not contradict each other,

but are a paradox. If they were to contradict, then we could not speak of this computer being unique and shareable in nature – we would have to say one or the other. But again, the terms, unique and shareable, are *analogous* in language and not univocal. The terms themselves are conceptual and non-conceptual and, as such, we can say many things about one thing without inconsistency. The same thing can be one and many – ‘many’ referring to what we can say about the thing, and ‘one’ about that which holds the many properties together. The one is the many – the copula refers to an analogy – and, as such, we can speak without inconsistency.

Similarly, we can speak about the human person being both unique and shareable in dignity. Given that the subjective nature is such that it cannot be objectified except on pain of infinite regress, we can say that we are speaking analogously when we attempt to objectify what is subjective. Access to the knowledge of subjectivity occurs through a different human activity than if one were to introspect and conceptualize all of the capacities we have as persons. Once we understand both aspects to be true, we can say that the human person is both a subject and an object. If we spoke reductively about the concept of subjectivity it would cease to be subjectivity! As Marcel showed, we start with *existence, the level of being*, and then work our way to the concepts derived therefrom. Zagzebski, seems to assume that un-shareability and shareability are concepts arrived at by analytical reduction – clear and distinct ideas. But given what Marcel has shown us, we can see that we need to start out with something indeterminate to arrive at something determinate – this is what Karol Wojtyla calls *lived experience*. If this experience is reduced to something determinate, then we do have a inconsistency.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

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Throughout this paper I have tried to show that the person is much more than the sum of his capacities. In grounding the person in the human being, we found that it is by the paradoxical nature of the human being that he can be said to be both subject and object, judged by *different aspects*. By being a subject the human person is irreplaceable, and by being an object the human person has infinite value. *Both are aspects of the same human being.*

The question that needs to be answered by Peter Singer and Ruth Macklin is this: If a person is the sum of his/her properties (that are instantiated) – in particular, are self-reflective and rational – then what happens when they themselves who are asking the question, “Who is a person?” find themselves not exemplifying the properties of rationality or consciousness? Referring to what Marcel said about the mystery of the person, the questioner who is asking the question is “a problem which encroaches upon its own data, invading them, as it were, and thereby transcending itself as a simple problem.”<sup>100</sup> The problem becomes personal when it is asked about oneself, for when the question “*Who* is a person?” arises, we are creating a view from nowhere whereby we are exempt from analysis.

Our intuitions seem to point to a realm of mystery when it comes to friendship and love between two persons. I am not sure how one could ignore such concrete examples. From what we saw with Aristotle, Badhwar and Velleman, the desire was present to account for such unique experiences, but in the end their analyses failed to give us what we were looking for. In not understanding experience as ‘lived experience,’ we could not get past abstract analysis of the

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<sup>100</sup> Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*. 19.

instances of friendship and love. Badhwar, I think, came the closest in understanding the person in his/her dynamism, but did not have any metaphysical subject to ground the unique qualities of the person.

The concept of dignity needs to be approached from both standpoints: the phenomenological and the analytical. I would argue though, with Wojtyla, that the person is not identical to any function or part. If analysis is the act of breaking things down into their constituent parts, then it follows that we can do that with the person and his/her body. But analysis is not sufficient, as we saw with Marcel, to account for the feeling we have with our bodies and the world around us via experience. Thus we ought not to *start* with analysis, but rather with ‘lived-experience’ to develop a more human understanding of the self.

The significance of Wojtyla’s philosophy is that he was able, through a Thomistic understanding of efficient causality, to infer from such conscious experience of actions the author of those actions. The agent/actor/author provides the dynamic structure to ground such access to ‘lived experience.’ This author of the personal action is grounded in the Boethian definition of person as an individual substance of a rational nature. It would be interesting to analyze the differences between substance in the Aristotelian sense and substance in the Cartesian sense – it seems Wojtyla is *not* using substance in the Lockean sense of matter – ‘that I know not what.’ Substance, as seen in the previous chapter, is the ontic structure or *suppositum*.

A goal for future research is to develop a better understanding of Thomas Aquinas and his metaphysics. More specifically, I would like to look closer at Norris Clarke’s synthesis of the existential/phenomenological philosophy with Thomism.<sup>101</sup> It is my conviction that the

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<sup>101</sup> More specifically, the books I found in the course of my research but have not had time to delve more deeply into are: W. Norris Clarke, *The Creative Retrieval of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Essays in Thomistic Philosophy, New and Old* (Fordham University Press, 2009); *Person and Being* (Marquette University Press, 1993); "The

existentialists were correct in pointing to the human person as being irreducible to analysis. It is also my conviction that contemporary analytic philosophy is right to analyze things into their constituent parts – to make what is obscure clear. The problem is one of methodology and not the concept of dignity per se.

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