

Article

Transimmanence and the Im/possible Relationship between Eschatology and Transcendence

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Academic Editor: Justin Sands

Received: 2 October 2016; Accepted: 8 November 2016; Published: 11 November 2016

Abstract: Although we live in a post-metaphysical age, there is a renewed interest in transcendence, especially at the intersection of philosophy, religion, and theology. There are several reasons for this: among others, the important link that the future (eschatology) has with the unknown or that which lies beyond (transcendence). In this article, this relation between eschatology and transcendence is explored by analysing different concepts of transcendence and their possible relations to the future. Jacques Derrida and Catharine Malabou's concepts of the future are used to shed light on the link between eschatology and transcendence as "impossible". Secondly, Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of *transimmanence* is introduced, in an attempt to find such a possible link. A reconceptualisation of transcendence as transimmanence and a reconceptualisation of the future of eschatology as something "outside within", facilitate a link between these terms, but the original or general meanings of these terms then become impossible. This outcome urges a rethinking of the meaning and role of transcendence, eschatology, and the future in our post-metaphysical age.

Keywords: transcendence; eschatology; immanence; transimmanence; Jean-Luc Nancy; Catherine Malabou; Jacques Derrida

1. Introduction

The question about the relationship between eschatology and transcendence forms part of a broader current interest in both these concepts. The actuality and problem of transcendence are discussed in the first part of this article, while eschatology and its link to the future are discussed in the second. Eschatology's future has a very unique character of "already—not yet". It becomes a complex process to link this with transcendence, because the concept of *future* itself is problematised in terms of Derrida and Malabou's understandings thereof, as is shown in the third part of this article. The outcome of this analysis is that it seems impossible to link eschatology and transcendence. In the fourth part of the article, Nancy's concept of *transimmanence* is introduced as an alternative to the dichotomy of immanence/transcendence, and also in an attempt to find a possible link between transimmanence (as the reconceptualisation of transcendence) and eschatology. The main aim of the article is to investigate the possible relationship between eschatology and transcendence. Nancy's transimmanence provides a possible link between these terms, but it implies that both eschatology and transcendence need to be reconceptualised. This is perhaps more acceptable and reconcilable within post-metaphysical philosophy than in theology.

2. The Problem of Transcendence

For the last decade and a half, the concept *transcendence* received renewed interest in philosophy and theology. This interest is especially apparent in Continental philosophy, but not restricted to it. In South Africa, for example, various philosophers and theologians have, for the last few years, engaged in exploring the concept *transcendence* ([1], p. 3). A strong stimulus for this interest was

provided in 2007 with the influential book, *Religion and Postmodernism 4: Transcendence and Beyond*, of which John Caputo and Michael Scanlon were the editors. This book was preceded by *Mutations culturelles et transcendance* [2]; *Transcendence in Philosophy and Religion* [3]; and *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond* [4]. After 2007, other important books followed, like *Homo transcendentalis* [5]; *Looking Beyond? Shifting views of Transcendence in Philosophy, Theology, Art, and Politics* [6]; and *Culture and Transcendence—A Typology of Transcendence* [7]. These books give an indication of the importance of the concept *transcendence* in contemporary philosophical–theological discourses, but also of the need to reconceptualise it.

One of the main reasons why transcendence is attracting so much attention is the fact that the understanding of the transcendence/immanence pair in the late modern period is determined by the critique of metaphysics. This must be understood in a broader historical context. The composition of the word *transcendence*, with the prefix *trans-* (from the Latin *trans*, “across”) and the action of ascending (from the Latin *scandere*, “to climb”), points to a type of “crossing over” to some place above or outside the world—an ascension to an “outside”. While the origin of the concept of transcendence can be found in Parmenides, Plato’s distinction between the world of phenomena and the world of ideas is better known ([8], p. 514). For Plato, the idea of the good is radically transcendent, beyond all being, and it is the cause of all right and beautiful things ([9], p. 316). In philosophy and religion, this question of being, and the cause of it, had been linked to the Supreme Being, the divine, and something outside this world. Such a metaphysical way of speaking about the transcendent (mostly as God) was immensely criticised in the modern period, by Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Martin Heidegger, amongst others. They indicate in their unique ways that there is no “true” foundation, no ontotheology, and no other reality that determine our reality. After this critique of metaphysics, the inevitable question arose if and how it is still possible to speak of *transcendence*.

There have been some resilient attempts in this regard. The phenomenologists Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Marion, for example, searched for a post-metaphysical understanding of transcendence in which transcendence does not refer to higher entities beyond our ordinary world of experience. Rather, transcendence can break through in our immanent reality in the face of the other (Levinas) or in the givenness of a phenomenon (Marion). Levinas and Marion, however, eventually sharply distinguish transcendence from immanence. In this they share an interesting commonality with Soren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth, who stress the difference between God and human beings ([8], pp. 516, 518). In contrast with this, theologians like Thomas Altizer and Sallie McFague stress that God was incarnated, that *kenosis* (emptying out) of God has taken place, and that the world is the body of God. They conflate the transcendent and immanent into a type of radical immanence.

In post-metaphysical thinking about transcendence, two positions became apparent, which is typical of the contemporary debate. On the one hand, there is the radical view of transcendence (Levinas, Marion, Kierkegaard, Barth), which Caputo and Scanlon call the move towards “hyper-transcendence”—a transcendence that is ever more beyond; a still more transcendent transcendence. The problems with hyper-transcendence (apart from the critique of metaphysics) are, amongst others, that it creates a “too distant” transcendent (unknowable, unreachable, and eventually irrelevant); it creates a nihilistic world because it is “the other/outside” world which has true meaning; it devalues the immanent on a bodily level (only the spiritual becomes important as it connects with the transcendent); and it locates the transcendent in brief moments of experiences (with the rest of our lives doomed less important). On the other hand, there is the radical view of immanence in which thinkers follow Spinoza, Hegel, and Nietzsche. These thinkers (Altizer, McFague, Deleuze, Vattimo, Caputo) are moving towards “post-transcendence”, with the emphasis on the notion that we should put transcendence behind us and be content with our mundane immanent world. For them, the concept of *transcendence* is redundant, has lost its power and meaning, and has virtually disappeared into immanence.

According to Stoker, there is a third position in theology and philosophy that seeks a balance between transcendence and immanence. In this regard, he discusses the theologies of Paul Tillich and

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, which recognise God's transcendence, but connect it with his immanence in the world. These theologians argue that God or the absolute can be experienced in and through earthly reality. The "radicalism" of transcendence resides precisely in its having its traces, its roots, within the world. God (transcendent) remains the beyond in the midst of our lives (immanence). The movement to the transcendent is from the immanent, and Stoker describes this kind of transcendence as "immanent transcendence" ([7], p. 11). This means that one first has the experience of this world, as reality, as immanence, and then one may also have the experience of transcendence. Despite the emphasis on the immanent, here radical or hyper-transcendence remains evident—with all the metaphysical critique raised against it as applicable. However, transcendence as immanent transcendence is also criticised as being "too immanent". Merold Westphal ([10], p. 154), for example, states that *immanence* is the privileged term in immanent transcendence, which eventually results in pantheism rather than theism.

In philosophy, Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray are representative of this third "balance-seeking" position between transcendence and immanence. For Derrida, transcendence is not only about God as the wholly other, but "every other (in the sense of each other) is every bit other (absolutely other)" ([11], p. 78). In other words, the infinite alterity of the wholly other belongs to every other. The transcendent is therefore no longer found in a vertical relation to God, but in a horizontal relation to others as the Other. Irigaray also criticises a vertical transcendence of an absolute entity of the beyond, and she opts for a view of God (or the transcendent) as the horizon for human becoming—a horizontal transcendence viewed as alterity ([12], p. 189). Transcendence then becomes the experience of reality as a subjective force (Being, God, the Other, fate, etc.) that "surpasses one's expectations, demolishes one's self-centred autonomy and descends on one from an open future" ([13], p. 9). It is questionable whether Irigaray and Derrida succeed in balancing transcendence and immanence since, on the one hand, this alterity of transcendence leads to radical or hyper-transcendence (a totally otherness of the other), and on the other hand it degenerates into radical immanence, or post-transcendence, because transcendence is understood as nothing more than experiences of self-transcendence (*ex-stasis*) in the anthropological and psychological sense, with no real "outside". This transcendence is often described as "horizontal transcendence" ([14], p. 146, footnote 11) and it "remains thoroughly human" ([13], p. 9).

It thus seems that hyper-transcendence and post-transcendence are not only the main positions for thinking about transcendence in a post-metaphysical age, but it is difficult to move beyond this dichotomy of transcendence and immanence ([15], p. 425). This problem becomes even more apparent when the relation between the future/eschatology and transcendence is explored in this article. The immediate questions, however, are: Why is there this need to reconceptualise transcendence at all? Why did so many interpretations of transcendence develop in our post-metaphysical time? Why is transcendence apparently still important? And, can transcendence be "found"; and if so, how and where?

3. The Continuous Interest in and Search for Transcendence

To live in a post-metaphysical age implies, at least at face value, the end of transcendence, or "post-transcendence". The intriguing questions are: Why is there still an interest in and a search for a "transcendent beyond transcendence", a "hyper-transcendence", and even a "balanced or third way" of thinking about transcendence and immanence? Why are there these "recurring appearances of transcendence, wittingly or unwittingly" ([6], p. 1) in our apparently post-metaphysical landscape?

There are many reasons for this persistency of transcendence in post-metaphysical philosophy, theology, and even in our secularised Western culture. The following list identifies some of the main reasons, but it is not intended to be comprehensive:

3.1. *Self-Transcendence*

We humans cannot but transcend the world—simply because we are compelled to speak about it and value it. The same is true for our own being and life: we are self-transcending beings. This is an essential human characteristic that philosophy wants to account for ([16], p. 187). Real immanence

(radical immanence) or post-transcendence thus seems to be an impossibility in terms of this notion of philosophical anthropology. In other words, our human experience of “transcending our world” and of “transcending ourselves” needs to be accounted for, and the notion of having or living in radical immanence normally does not allow for the expression of this experience.

3.2. Value and Meaning of the World

The criticism of several traditional conceptualisations of transcendence as being nihilistic (as in Nietzsche’s critique, especially) points to the necessity of finding new ways of conceptualising transcendence. We need transcendence in order to understand the world, and to value our and others’ existence. Van Tongeren observes that “in an age in which God is supposedly dead, reflection on transcendence is not just interesting, but of utmost importance” ([16], p. 180). This does not imply a recovery of previous figures of transcendence, but rather the acknowledgement that there might be new forms of transcendence in our secularised culture which need to be identified as such. One such form of transcendence might even be radical immanence—described as the default position in contemporary Western society ([17], p. 509)—or “post-transcendence”, but then it still functions in this regard as transcendence.

3.3. Self-Referential Character of Immanence

It is a question whether radical immanence can be sustained, philosophically and existentially. The problem is that a valuation of radical immanence as the only and ultimate reality is “either circular (what is ultimate is immanent, because what is immanent is ultimate), and thus self-refuting, or clandestinely rests on some assumption of ultimate value or necessity” ([17], p. 509). This is visible in Western culture as the breaking away from the gods and their external order (transcendence), which found itself on itself (immanence). Western culture is thus described as essentially self-referential: it refers to itself for its foundation, and it therefore fundamentally lacks any foundation ([14], p. 141). The loss of a foundation, of a metaphysical anchorage, led to an infinite search for foundations. Metaphysics and its “ontotheological constitution” seems to be inevitable [18,19]. In the end there are, however, only foundational claims that found itself *on itself*. We thus find ourselves in a (often untenable) self-referential world, where the normativity of transcendence is still longed for.

3.4. The Normative Character of Transcendence

Traditionally, transcendence has provided humanity with normativity and determined people’s orientation in life. In this sense, transcendence has an ethical character. The attempt and need to reconceptualise transcendence are thus an attempt and a need to find new normative frameworks for living ethical lives. Ethics itself is even proposed as the “metaphysical foundation”, as the “normative transcendence” we long for. This reconceptualisation of transcendence (to provide us with ethics and/or as ethics) is not necessarily an effort to create a new metaphysics or foundation in Western culture per se (e.g., Deleuze), although this does happen to an extent when ethics are developed as the realm of the absolute. Levinas and Derrida, for example, find an “infinite alterity” as transcendence (in every other is the *wholly other*), which finally guides one’s ethical responsibility and calling towards the other. This hyper-transcendence is described by Levinas as a riddle or enigma, a disruption of the order within the immanent world of phenomena. The face of the other is transcendence itself, the “proximity of the Other as Other” ([20], p. 74). The ethical character of this transcendence is clear, because “whatever goes beyond being, is the neighbour’s face ‘who tells me not to kill’” ([20], p. 74).

An ethical framework can be provided not only by hyper-transcendence, but also by post-transcendence or radical immanence. Gilles Deleuze, for example, notes that “only when immanence is immanent to nothing except itself, can we speak of a plane of immanence” ([21], p. 389) and that it is exactly this “pure immanence which allows one to be creatively ethical” ([22], p. 185). Pure immanence ironically functions in his philosophy as a type of foundation (there is only a plane of immanence) which can be understood as a type of transcendence (as mentioned in the previous point).

The point here is that the ethical creates a question with regard to transcendence, and vice versa, so that as long as we ask ethical questions, transcendence cannot be ignored in our post-metaphysical era.

3.5. Reductionist Nature of Immanence

Critique on immanence as our final and totally closed-off reality is expressed in different interdisciplinary countermovements and voices. In art and (post-)phenomenology, this critique hinges on an existential longing for or an experiential claim about “an ultimate sense of life breaking in from beyond human relations and history” ([17], p. 510). This “ultimate sense of life” and the experiences of reality as a subjective force (Being, God, the Other, fate) lead to the continuous shifting views or “frontiers” of transcendence ([13], p. 1) in philosophy, theology, art, politics, and literature. In phenomenological terms, transcendence is, for example, described as that which breaks in upon us through “saturated phenomena”—phenomena that exceed our intuition and our conceptual control ([23], pp. 124–33). Schrijvers says, for example, that this world is not *mere* world, it is not “merely passing”, because it is “in and through love that one encounters, embraces, and holds on to a sense that surpasses the endless finitude of things” ([24], p. xvii). In theology transcendence resurfaces as “the mystical” [25], and in literature it points to “that within representation that nonetheless exceeds representation” ([26], p. 212).

All these voices form a choir of critique against immanence as our only and closed reality. Even the purely physicalist or (reductionistically) materialist accounts of humankind and the universe, by many of the hard sciences, cannot adequately do away with transcendence. An example of such an effort is found in nonreductive biological materialism, which argues that our thoughts and ideas about transcendence are products of the human cognitive system and that transcendence is largely a neurofunctional process. Yet, this does not rule out the possibility of the transcendent, nor the experience of transcendence, because “the best neuro-scientific methodology at present can only cast light on our insights on how we transcend; it cannot shed light on the Transcendent or the possible source of religion” ([27], p. 37). Transcendence is thus not rejected or denied by neuroscience, but (neuro)science rather has the ability to contribute to our understanding of our “physical wiring for transcendence” ([13], p. 9).

3.6. Transcendence and Postmodern Thinking

There are other notable reasons why transcendence is still on philosophy’s agenda in this post-metaphysical era. Regina Schwartz points out in the introduction of the book *Transcendence* (2004) [4] that the dimension of transcendence is reintroduced by various philosophers in that book as “a crack in immanence, a resistance to it, a primordial inconsistency, a resistance to symbolization” and that even radical materialists rediscover transcendence in new guises like “the postmodern notion of transgression, the phenomenological notion of the other, the scientific notion of the impenetrable mystery of an infinite universe, the aesthetic notion of excess, the psychoanalytic notion of subjectivity, the political notion of revolutionary ecstasy” ([4], p. viii). Overall, Schwartz describes the urgency of interest in transcendence as an outcome of postmodern thinking. In this regards she is in agreement with John Caputo and Michael Scanlon, who explain the motivation for their book on transcendence as follows: “Our most straightforward intention was to see whether and how this classical idea of transcendence plays out in a postmodern context—what it would mean, how it would need to be rethought, and whether we need in fact to get beyond its classical beyond to a more postmodern beyond” ([28], p. 2).

In this postmodern context, the interest in transcendence is not to return to (or to rehabilitate) transcendence as principles beyond question or critique, neither as an authority beyond reason, nor as a totalitarian deity. Schwartz ([4], p. vii) rightly observes that too many crimes have been committed in the name of transcendence principles and even in the name of a transcendent God. Instead of the ground of oppression, transcendence is now reconceived as the ground of humility: epistemological, ethical, aesthetic, and political.

3.7. Transcendence and the Future

One of the main reasons for the persistence of transcendence in contemporary post-metaphysical philosophy, theology, and in our secularised Western culture, is the “inescapable link” between transcendence and the future. This is especially true when the future is defined as the unknown, the unexpected, the undefinable, and the unforeseeable—all terms which imply the transcendent as that which “lies beyond” or “surpasses” our experiences in terms of time and reality. Such an understanding of the future as the unknown can be contrasted to the more foreseeable future as part of the commonplace presumed linearity of time. In this regard, Derrida makes the distinction between the “real” (absolute) future and predictable future (the future present):

In general, I try and distinguish between what one calls the Future and ‘l’avenir’ [the ‘to come’]. The future is that which—tomorrow, later, next century—will be. There is a future which is predictable, programmed, scheduled, foreseeable. But there is a future, l’avenir (to come) which refers to someone who comes whose arrival is totally unexpected. For me, that is the real future. That which is totally unpredictable. The Other who comes without my being able to anticipate their arrival. So if there is a real future, beyond the other known future, it is l’avenir in that it is the coming of the Other when I am completely unable to foresee their arrival ([29], p. 53).

The future as the unknown (l’avenir) is described by Derrida in such a way that the transcendent nature of it cannot be escaped—this future is “impossible to figure” ([30], p. 18), it is the arrival of the unexpected, it is absolute. L’avenir is hyper-transcendence—totally beyond our grasp. This transcendence does not, however, entail that we “cross over” (*trans*) to an “outside world” (*ascendere*), but rather that l’avenir arrives from the unexpected (other unknown world) into one’s own world. This absolute future, and the breaking of it into our world (and not vice versa), is understood by Derrida as the concern of the “messianic promise”. For Derrida, the messianic promise has nothing to do with any particular messianism with a determinate content, but with “the form of any promise of something to come” ([31], p. 117). Derrida says: “every messianic form, every messianicity, is never absent from a promise, whatever it may be” ([32], p. 56). What precisely Derrida means by the *messianic* needs to be further explored and it will be the focus of the next section, where the connection between transcendence and eschatology is analysed.

In sum, seven reasons or explanations for the recurrence of transcendence in our post-metaphysical age have been discussed. All of these are important and valuable in their own right, but the latter reason, concerning the relation between transcendence and the future, is particularly relevant for this special issue of *Religions*, with its theme “In Anticipation: Transcendence and Eschatology in Contemporary Contexts”, and also for the main focus of this article. The other six reasons listed above will be briefly discussed later in this article, in terms of Jean-Luc Nancy’s transimmanence.

4. Transcendence, the Future, and Eschatology

As explained above, the link between transcendence and the future not only becomes apparent, but also inescapable when the future is defined as the unknown, the unexpected, the undefinable, and the unforeseeable. The logic is that the future as the absolute other (transcendent) breaks (transcends) into our world (the immanent) from an unknown “outside” world. Transcendence in this regard fits into the description of hyper-transcendence of the first section. The question then is how a different understanding of the future—not as absolute, but as eschatological—relates to transcendence. Is such a link possible or does it require a reconceptualisation of transcendence? To answer this, a clarification of eschatology is needed, as well as an analysis of the link between the future in general and transcendence. This analysis will be undertaken in terms of the differences between Jacques Derrida and Catharine Malabou’s concepts of the future, which result in either hyper-transcendence or post-transcendence. Eschatology does not fit comfortably into this dichotomy of immanence/transcendence and, therefore, the next section focuses on Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of transimmanence and its link with eschatology.

Eschatology involves the study of the last things. *Eschaton* is the Greek word for “end”, “the last day”; eschatology has traditionally been understood as the study of the end times. While the future as the absolute future (*l’avenir*) is described by Derrida as something completely unpredictable and unforeseeable and with no particular determinate content, eschatology—in contrast—is used in the Christian tradition to refer to specific expectations of the future and of the end times. Some major last things are foreseen or expected in Christian doctrine, namely the second coming, resurrection, judgment, heaven and hell. There is some uncertainty about what precisely these last things will entail because of different interpretations of scriptures and traditions, but eschatology refers predominantly to a predictable and a known future. It is about the awaiting and anticipation of a specific future.

Some theologians describe the *eschaton* as the kingdom of God which is not yet fully here (there is still the expectation of justice and peace to come), although it is also already here (inaugurated by the resurrection of Christ). This gives eschatology a character if “already—but not yet”: “the *eschaton* is understood as having already begun, but not yet being finished: as being already (here), but not yet (fully here)” ([33], pp. 2, 6). What we experience now (in this world and time) thus creates a longing, an anticipation and awaiting for what is to come. It is in this vein that Richard Kearney in “Sacramental Imagination and Eschatology” ([34], pp. 55–68), for example, recasts eschatology in terms of our everyday experiences rather than as a grand narrative of the end-times utopia. Kearney focuses on the “flesh” in its multiple phenomenological layers in order to show “that the mundane world is infused with divine depth” ([33], p. 9). Eschatology is thus about the awaiting and anticipation of a specific future from within our experience of the here and now. One can say there is a divine depth in this world, or that the kingdom of God has already begun on earth, or that the *eschaton* is inaugurated by Christ’s resurrection and it is yet to come—all these formulations are different nuances of the “future that is embedded in the presence” ([35], p. 249) and “that we can reach beyond the mere present into past and future” ([33], p. 7).

The type of future that eschatology entails is thus known from our here and now (already), but also anticipated and awaited (not yet). It is not a future as something totally unexpected, unknown, unforeseeable, and, therefore, not totally transcendent or absolute (*l’avenir*). Eschatological future, therefore, does not link to hyper-transcendence as in Derrida’s understanding of *l’avenir*. Rather, it links to a type of immanent transcendence, because on the one hand the eschatological future is immanent, already here, and something that we experience in this world—“in the person of Christ who has come, always already there” ([14], p. 145). On the other hand, the eschatological future is something we anticipate, something we await, the not yet, and the beyond—a future that is transcendent, but which is experienced and anticipated from the immanent. The movement to the transcendent is from the immanent: there is an awaiting (*transcendere*) from the present (immanent) to the future which is still beyond (transcendent), but a specific future as predictable. The “radicalism” of the transcendence of eschatology resides in its having its traces, its roots, within the world. The eschatological future remains the beyond (transcendent) in the midst of our lives (immanence)—an immanent transcendence.

As explained earlier, immanent transcendence—as the transcendence of the eschatological future—is at risk of either converging to hyper-transcendence or to post-transcendence. If the emphasis of eschatology is on the unknown future, we move in the direction of Derrida’s *l’avenir* and eventually hyper-transcendence. If the emphasis is on the here and now—as Kearney puts on the flesh and imagination—we move to an immanence and possibly a post-transcendence. It becomes more complicated and untenable to uphold this “in-between” or balancing position of immanent transcendence when the “absolute” future as hyper-transcendence (of Derrida) is brought into relation to Malabou’s concept of the future as post-transcendence.

Derrida’s understanding of the absolute future is devoid of a determinate content, of a specific messianism, in order to keep it absolute (unpredictable and transcendent). The absolute future, however, has a “messianic promise” for Derrida, but this is a formal messianicity as the form for any promise of something to come. It is about the “coming of the other in and as time” ([36], p. 3) which disrupts or opens up the horizon of time itself. Time as such gets deconstructed in this process, which

is structured by a promise: time is “committed” to an open and indeterminate future. For Derrida, this messianic promise is concerned with the absolute future which is necessarily devoid of any determinate content; otherwise, time will be committed to more than the messianic (the promise of *something*) as “the other in and as time” to come. All to which time can be committed, is the coming of the future itself (empty of specific promises, unpredictable), not a specific future. This awaiting of the messianic future—our anticipation of the future to be at least committed to this structure of the promise itself—is something Caputo understands in Derrida’s work as a “religious rendering of time—deconstruction is driven by an affirmative religious passion” ([36], p. 3). As the title of Caputo’s book (1997) [31] indicates, Derrida has a religion (a belief in the promise of the future) without any specific religion (future or eschatology)—a “desert-like messianism (without content and without identifiable messiah)” ([37], p. 28). It is an anticipation of the future that does not allow for anything specific (as in eschatology) and which links the absolute future to hyper-transcendence.

Eschatology has a specific expectation of the future, an awaiting and prediction of the future in terms of past (e.g., Christ’s resurrection) and present (e.g., Eucharist) experiences. In terms of Derrida’s distinction between “real” (absolute) and “predictable” future, this specific anticipated future of eschatology can be described as a “predictable” future (the future present). Eschatology’s anticipated future is known and foreseeable, and in Derrida’s scheme it is also not real, because it is not totally unpredictable. The real future is the future as hyper-transcendent—the Other as the totally unforeseeable. The predictable future of eschatology is therefore deprived of a link with transcendence as the unknown or absolute future. It even becomes problematic to link eschatology to immanent transcendence, because the transcendent part of this future (as the unknown) is per definition denied by eschatology’s predictable future. All that is left is immanence—the here and now of our expectations and anticipations. From a phenomenological point of view these concepts—awaiting and anticipation—are mere characteristics of human experience of the world in general. The link to transcendence is lost, and eschatology seems to only play a role in structures of human experience and behaviour. The predictable nature of the future, what eschatology is fundamentally all about, cuts the link to the real or absolute, and eschatology therefore remains “stuck” in the here and now, in immanence. This outcome is a consequence of Derrida’s distinction between the future (the predictable) and *l’avenir* (the unpredictable). It leads to questions about other understandings of the concept *future*: do they not allow for a connection between eschatology and transcendence?

In contrast to Derrida, Malabou attempts to propose a decidedly nonmessianic conception of the future, and disagrees with Derrida that “it is impossible to figure (the) *à-venir*” ([38], p. 12) or that is “totally unpredictable” ([29], p. 53). For her, the future is not the unknown or the unknowable, but rather the malleable and transformable. It is not only possible to figure the future (*à-venir*), but it is always already figured and refigured ([39], p. 212; [1], pp. 347–48). This type of continuous reciprocity of time fits into the double meaning she ascribes to plasticity—to be capable of receiving and giving form. Malabou explains: “Plasticity has the double meaning of what is susceptible to receive form, like clay or marble, and also to be able to bestow form, to give form, as we can hear in the expressions of plastic arts or plastic surgery. Plasticity also characterizes what is about to explode” ([39], p. 211). This type of plasticity is found par excellence in the human brain, and Malabou accordingly derives this concept from neuroplasticity:

It is not by chance that the notion of plasticity today operates in the domain of cell biology and neurobiology. For example, the ‘plasticity’ of the nervous system or the immune system means their ability to tolerate modifications, transformations of their particular components which affect their structural closure, or modifications and transformations caused by perturbations from the environment. Thus, the possibility of a closed system to welcome new phenomena, all the while transforming itself, is what appears as plasticity ([40], pp. 192–93).

Plasticity characterises for Malabou the subject’s temporal mode of being in relation to events that both give form to it and are formed by it. It is this concept which gave her an alternative way of

speaking about time and the future, other than the messianic (the unknown, the “outside”), and which helped her to understand that time is not something that comes from the outside, or something to be assimilated to transcendence. Plasticity is for her “the mode of being and meaning of the future in a world deprived of transcendence, breaches, or holes” ([39], p. 213). With this concept of plasticity Malabou moves to the functioning of a biological system and thereby enters the world of untainted materiality. In doing so, Malabou rejects a messianic (unknown and unknowable) understanding of time and proposes a dialectic understanding of time based on Kant’s “Epigenesis of Reason”.

Malabou argues that for Kant, the Epigenesis of Reason (*Critique of Pure Reason* §27) meant that there is an epigenesis of the a priori which implies that reason itself is the creative power of the transcendental. There is no other origin than reason—“the a priori is neither a gift from God nor a result of experience” ([39], p. 216). The a priori or transcendental does not come from outside, but it is formed and, therefore, reason appears to be the power of fashioning its own possibilities. The future, one can thus deduce, coincides with the self-shaping of reason. The future, as with all our transcendental and “a priori concepts or categories, are malleable and transformable, both determined and transformable” ([39], p. 216). Consequently, for Malabou time is not “the opening of a messianic horizon, but the immanent development of the transcendental” ([39], p. 216). On the one hand, a dialectic understanding of time as the development (plasticity) of the transcendental (as determined and transformable) is historical (in that the truth is nothing outside the genealogical composition thereof), and on the other hand, it is biological (in as far as we must keep the natural character of the creative power of reason in mind). In this dialectic position, humans are themselves responsible for the forming of their rational products, convictions, and values (like transcendence and time), while knowing that all of this is deconstructable. Therefore, transcendence or the future is just another concept (like time), conviction, or value that is part of the plasticity of the human brain and thus is malleable, transformable, and deconstructable. There is no absolute time, no *l’avenir*, because: “What can an absolute *arrivant* be when there is no outside, no ‘elsewhere’?” ([39], p. 217). Transcendence in any metaphysical sense is hereby totally rejected by Malabou. Time is radically situated within the biological, with “no outside, no transcendence, breaches, or holes”.

Malabou’s concept of plasticity and her understanding of time and future as malleable and transformable do not only reject Derrida’s notion of the absolute future and the possibility of hyper-transcendence (or of any transcendence), but also imply that the anticipated or predicted future of eschatology is nothing more than a “plastic” concept of time which we form and reform. In other words, any concept of the future—Derrida’s *l’avenir* (unpredictable) and eschatology’s predictable—is truly “stuck” in the immanent and there is no link to transcendence. There cannot be an unknown transcendent future, because there is not an *arrivant* from the “outside”—we only have the “inside”, plasticity. The same applies for a predictable future: it is part of one’s plasticity, part of one’s beliefs, values, and projections from the “inside” as moveable, mouldable, and deconstructable. Such an understanding of eschatology deprives it from its expectation that there is “something more” to come: the kingdom of God, Christ’s second coming, heaven and hell. All these notions of something from “the outside” to come remain part of our “formable concepts”, part of our plasticity, part of our brains; and that is all we have according to Malabou. Time itself is mouldable in our brains and there is no guarantee, no “commitment” (messianic promise) of even the future to come as time itself. How can there then be anything more to be expected from the future, as in eschatology?

If Malabou is right, it seems that a point of post-transcendence (or radical immanence) has truly been reached here. This is problematic in terms of the continuing need to reconceptualise transcendence in our post-metaphysical age, as discussed above. A link between transcendence and the future (which includes eschatology) as a reason why transcendence persists (as in Derrida’s *l’avenir*), becomes a complete impossibility with Malabou’s plasticity. Are we, however, obliged to accept Malabou’s radical immanence? Does the problem not perhaps lie with the opposition of immanence and transcendence? Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of transimmanence might be of some help here, because he rethinks the dichotomy between transcendence and immanence.

5. Transimmanence (Open-Immanence) and Transcendence/Immanence

We now return to the problem which was identified at the end of Section 1, namely the problem of moving beyond the dichotomy of transcendence and immanence. The main positions for thinking about transcendence in a post-metaphysical age—hyper-transcendence and post-transcendence—are a continuation of this oppositional thought. The question is whether there is an alternative way of thinking about this dichotomy, especially with regard to its relation to the future and eschatology.

Jean-Luc Nancy presents such an alternative when he deconstructs immanence as a mere opposite to transcendence. Immanence and transcendence are for him both inadequate for understanding existence and our being in this world. Existence has to do with multiple textures, movements and relations in this world as an “absolute immanence”—“a world joins, plays, speaks and shares: this is its sense” ([41], p. 78). This “absolute immanence” is not a simple positing of immanence against transcendence, but rather what Nancy calls *transimmanence*. Transimmanence is not about a tension or balance between the world (immanence) and its “outside” (transcendence), but it is “absolutely immanent” in that it is about the tensions and relations among modes of being and existing in the world (an open-immanence). Immanence and transcendence is “sublated (from the Latin meaning “to take away from below”)” or assimilated by Nancy “within the greater complexity of a multi-refracted, diverse, ever-moving kind of immanence” ([42], p. 115). Although it looks as if immanence is prevailing, this transimmanence of Nancy can be set apart from mere (reductive) immanence, radical immanence, and post-transcendence, in two key dynamics.

First, Nancy recognises an “outside of the world” (that there is something more than the world and that it might get its sense from it), but in transimmanence he locates this in “the inside” of human experiences. Our experiences of the world, where otherness prompts a will to posit a transcendent outside, are for Nancy really nothing more than “the extension of the world, with no possible appeal to another world” ([43], p. 143). Our experience that “the sense of the world must lie outside the world” ([43], p. 142) should be understood as an “outside within” ([44], p. 12). In other words, the experience that the world might have or be something more, that its meaning can be found from outside it, or this “outsideness of the world”, should be understood as the inside of this world. The outside is found within the world because the world “is lacking exteriority” and only has sense which “circulates in the exposure of singular beings” ([45], p. 168). Nancy suggests that the world has really “no present entities, only spacing of presences, always plural, always co-appearing, in co-existence” ([46], p. 73).

This “outside within” of the world can be compared and explained in the way Nancy understands human bodies. What we might term a body—yours or mine—has for Nancy “its outside in its ways of opening out toward a sharing with other moving and weighing bodies” ([42], p. 116). Nancy speaks therefore not of a body, but of corpuses which relate within an “ontological materiality” ([47], p. 103). Our sense of “outside this world” is thus not denied, but understood as fundamentally part of how this world is “within”—with the sense of it as continually taking place, joining, sharing, playing, circulating between one another, cutting across in being-with. This interplaying dynamic of the sense of the world as the “outside” is not something to which we cross over (as in transcendence, or to another world), but rather is something to which we are unceasingly exposed in our existence with others “in this world” (immanence) where meaning circulates (cuts across, trans-). Transimmanence captures this experience of the sense of the world as “outside within”.

Second, transimmanence has a labile tension between its “outside within” (as the unceasing opening of existence to itself) and the congealing of existence into presences that are “immanent and enclosed, self-constituted” ([44], p. 72). It is a tension between “closed immanence”, where the interior of being is “determined in relation to an exteriority, a transcendent source of meaning”, and “open immanence”, where there is a “totality of infinite relationships without exteriority” ([45], p. 167). Closed immanence is a move back to the immanence–transcendence dichotomy, while open immanence is the alternative as transimmanence. According to Nancy, transimmanence as this ever-opening immanence is especially exposed through art:

... art is the transcendence of immanence as such, the transcendence of an immanence that does not go outside itself in transcending, which is not ex-static, but ek-sistant. A transimmanence. Art exposes this. Once again, it does not 'represent' this. Art is its ex-position. The transimmanence, or patency, of the world takes place as art, as works of art ([48], pp. 34–35).

The transiting or "crossing" character of transimmanence is highlighted in this extract. In short, transimmanence does not imply a "crossing over" that entails an ascending to an "outside world" (as is the case with transcendence), but a crossing entirely within the world. Why is this not mere immanence? The distinctiveness of the crossing of transimmanence lies in the notion of "ek-sistant" in contrast to "ex-static". "Ek-" (ek-sistant) is from the Greek "eik-", which refers to the point from where action or motion proceeds, while "ex-" (ex-static) is about standing out. With his preference for "ek-sistant", Nancy indicates that the unique crossing of transimmanence is in the motion of "moving into 'outer', always other *within* the world" ([45], p. 233). Transimmanence is not an "ek-stasis" (ecstasy) as a standing out from the world (or yourself as in self-transcendence). This will create the immanence–transcendence dichotomy again. Transimmanence as "ek-sistant" is rather a movement within the world (as sense), where meaning circulates (cuts across) through existence. The "outside of the world", the meaning and sense of it, can thus be found through existence (the movement of "ek-sistant" and through sharing this exposure) "within the world"—it is an "outside within". This crossing of "ek-sisting" entails that "to be" is a continual transiting through the complexities of the world. It is to be exposed (open) in a world (immanence) which lacks exteriority and through which sense circulates (cuts across, trans-). The crossing is a motion that does not actually go outside, but pass toward an outer within world. This "ek-sisting" of transimmanence is a resistance to closure (as the self, as the world, as something outside the world), with the emphasis on the world in extension, "continually extending, coordinating separation and relation" ([49], p. 95).

In sum, Nancy does away with the dichotomy of immanence–transcendence by recasting both in the discursive milieu of transimmanence. Transimmanence is "the dynamic, ceaselessly flowing of the world, which evolves and revolves into ever more textured and artfully ex-posed complexity" ([42], p. 234). Two important subsequent questions need to be asked now: Is transimmanence tenable as a concept? In other words, does it successfully overcome the immanence/transcendence dichotomy? And, how does transimmanence link to the future? What are the implications of transimmanence for eschatology and its relation to "transcendence"?

6. Transimmanence, the Future and Eschatology

Is Nancy's transimmanence a viable alternative to the dichotomy of immanence/transcendence? If so, how does it help us to understand the link between transcendence and eschatology? The answer to the first question is very important in terms of the main focus of this article (the second question). To answer it, however, is not simple. To overcome the dichotomy would entail neither a hyper-transcendence nor a post-transcendence. Both these positions are still oppositional to and dependent on each other. An example is Deleuze's radical immanence (as the plane of immanence) which functions to ground the true or real world—with the dichotomy of immanence/transcendence created again. Attempts to find middle ground in immanent transcendence or alterity (Derrida, Levinas) are also working within this dichotomy; transimmanence must, therefore, be something other than this.

What Nancy does well with his concept of transimmanence, is to move away from the extremes of hyper-transcendence and post-transcendence found in post-metaphysical thought. Transimmanence is definitely not a form of hyper-transcendence—for Nancy, the world has no exteriority. Neither is it an immanent transcendence, nor an in-between position such as alterity, because Nancy rejects transcendence completely. With immanent transcendence, there is still a notion of "radical" transcendence, which has its traces and roots within the world. Nancy maintains that we only have this world, "there is no other world" ([43], p. 47). All the traces or roots of some outside is found inside and

stay inside the world. It is an “outside within”. The same applies for alterity as transcendence where the other is experienced as the “totally O/other”. Such an experience of alterity will for Nancy be a type of ex-stasis where I stand out, or you stand out, as a closure and opposition to the other. For him, existence cannot be enclosed and self-constituted in such a way, because the interior of being will then be determined in relation to an exteriority. Such a notion is not possible within his understanding of the world as a totality of infinite relationships without exteriority.

Is transimmanence not just another form of radical immanence, or post-transcendence? The composition of the concept itself (trans + *immanence*) seems to imply a definite choice for immanence. Transimmanence is, however, not a closed-off immanence (or radical immanence)—there is an “outside within” and a type of “crossing over” (*trans*) that takes place, which is the reason why transimmanence can also be described as open-immanence. This openness within immanence is existential in nature; it is to be continually exposed in a world which lacks exteriority and through which sense circulates. This is how we exist, in our infinite relationships where sense cuts across (trans-) between others, not as a crossing that goes outside, but passes toward an outer within world. Nancy remarks that “What ‘is not of this world’ is not elsewhere: it is the opening in the world, the separation, the parting and the raising” ([43], p. 48). In other words, with transimmanence there is no dichotomy between immanence and transcendence—because there is no transcendence, but it is also not the case that we are only left with immanence. Nancy keeps this immanence open with his concept of *transimmanence*.

This leads to the question of how the concept *transimmanence* relates to the seven reasons (discussed in Section 2) for the recurrence of transcendence in our post-metaphysical age. The first six will be discussed very briefly in order to get to the seventh, which directly relates to the main focus of this article.

Transimmanence allows for (1) the experience of self-transcendence, or of transcending our world, not in “ek-stasis” but as “ek-sistant”. There can be an experience of “not of this world” or “outside this world”, but it remains inside—an outside within. To find (2) value and meaning of the world is fundamentally part of transimmanence. It is a continuous process where the sense of the world circulates through existence; “it passes along being without issuing from within it or from outside it” ([45], p. 168). Transimmanence would have been guilty of (3) being self-referential, but it does not present a “closed immanence” or a “within world” that is reserved for and creates meaning for the “rest of the world” or existence. Transimmanence is open. That means the world’s meaning (sense) is coextensive with the world in its plural singularities. There is thus no “outside of the world” (transcendence) which can function as a (4) normative or ethical framework, but the “outside within” of transimmanence allows for a “cutting across” of sense between human beings, where ethical meaning can be found. Transimmanence enables a “decentring of the subject and opens the way to think the other as co-originary in creating meaning of the world” ([50], p. 89). The (5) reductionist nature of immanence, its positing as our final and closed reality, is contradicted and opposed directly by the openness of transimmanence. Lastly, in (6) postmodern thinking, various dimensions of transcendence are reintroduced, like the aesthetic notion of excess. Transimmanence will accommodate such thinking, as Nancy, for example, argues that art is the transcendence of immanence as such, but that it does not go outside itself in transcending, but “ek-sistant”.

What are the implications of transimmanence for (7) understanding the future and eschatology? Transimmanence cannot uphold the concept of the future as something absolute or radically transcendent, as Derrida does, because there is no “outside the world”. Neither can it uphold the concept of the future as something radically immanent, as Malabou does, because this would imply a “closed immanence”. Time and the future are in transimmanent terms part of the sense and meaning of the world. This means it is something that emerges and is present in our innerworldly encounters with one another as something “outside inside”. It is part of our existence, part of this ceaseless flowing of the world as sense which evolves ever more in complexity—a world in extension. Time and the future, understood in these transimmanent terms, are not found completely “outside the world” as

something from another world (Derrida), but the experience thereof as “outside the world” should be taken seriously (as opposed to Malabou). The “outsideness” of time is something to which we are unceasingly exposed in our existence with others in this world. In other words, the meaning of time which circulates continuously as the extension of the world is at the same time “outside the world” (the world has no present entities) and “inside the world” (there is no other world, only the extension of this one). Time and the future are to be found nowhere else than in this “outside inside” of the world as sense. It is not just a concept in our brains which is part of plasticity (malleable and transformable) as untainted materiality and radical immanence, but it is also something “outside the world” in the sense of being always plural, always coappearing and in coexistence. The openness of transimmanence lies in this totality of infinite relationships without exteriority.

What does this understanding of time and the future in transimmanent terms imply for the relation between transcendence and eschatology? Transimmanence rejects any “outside of this world” as another world. This means eschatology’s anticipation and expectation of a specific future cannot be understood as waiting for something “radically” transcendent to arrive or to break into our world from somewhere else. We only have this world, according to Nancy, but it is not totally closed. In transimmanence there is an “outside within”. The predictable future of eschatology might then be understood as an experience of the world’s “outside”, as the meaning and sense of the world which circulates ceaselessly between us in our existence. This outside of the world is, however, always inside the world as part of the extension of the world and not as another world.

Although eschatology can find a space in transimmanence (as opposed to hyper-transcendence, post-transcendence, and immanent transcendence), its claim to a specific future is in this context very restricted and much more relativised. The future, also the predictable future (or “already-not yet” future), is in transimmanence nothing more than the “outside within”: the ceaseless product of coexisting and co-originating, where meaning cuts across our existence with others. In this sense, transimmanence indeed involves a reconceiving of transcendence in our post-metaphysical age, which forms the ground of humility and not of authority, certainty or oppression. Eschatology can in this light be much more open, inviting, preliminary, and meaningful.

7. Conclusions

Eschatology’s link to transcendence is complex. Firstly, the concept of *transcendence* itself is undermined in a post-metaphysical age and the reconceptualisation of it tends to result in either hyper-transcendence or post-transcendence. Secondly, eschatology’s future of “already—not yet” does not fit into either of these, and even an in-between position is untenable. With the reconceptualisation of transcendence as transimmanence, eschatology finds an im/possible relation to transcendence. It is impossible in the sense that there is no “radical” or real transcendence left in transimmanence, but it is also possible in the sense that there remains an openness within transimmanence. This openness remains “outside within”, which limits eschatological access (or anticipation) of the future, but at least an openness is granted here, whereas it is denied by post-transcendence or radical immanence. To understand eschatology in terms of transimmanence might, therefore, require a reinterpretation of eschatology as a more uncertain, preliminary, and fluid concept, although it can still play a meaningful role in our world.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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