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Gabriel Marcel, Master Of Mysterious Wisdom.

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GABRIEL MARCEL — MASTER OF MYSTERIOUS WISDOM

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The philosophic thought of Gabriel Marcel is impossible to categorize. He does indeed employ a phenomenological method of approach to being; and affirms that "today there can be no philosophy worth considering that will not involve an analysis, of a phenomenological type, bearing on the fundamental situation of man."[1] But his philosophical analysis does not have the character of Husserlian 'bracketing' or isolating in eidetic purification. It is an explication of the personal ground of thought, including its relationship to the 'other', human or divine, rather than an examination of isolated and purified experiences of consciousness: "By 'phenomenological analysis' I mean the analysis of an implicit content of thought, as opposed to a psychological analysis bearing on 'states'."[2]

Marcel is also assuredly 'existential' in his concern for people and for life's concrete problems. His existentialism no doubt has basic elements — e.g., subjectivity, the present moment of experience, an analysis of freedom — in common with other great modern existentialists such as Jaspers, Sartre, and Heidegger. But his existentialism will be seen to stress participation in being (but being concretized, particularized, not, in the

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[1]Gabriel Marcel, Man Against Mass Society, trans. by G. S. Fraser (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), p. 90. In further references to this work in this paper, the title will be abbreviated: MAMS.

[2]Gabriel Marcel, Being and Having, trans. by Katharine Farrer (Westminister: Dacre Press, 1949), p. 151. Hereafter, this work is abbreviated: BH.

Heideggerian way, with a kind of being-as-such) and personal relationship with others.

Marcel is, as Etienne Gilson has said, a "unique philosopher"[3] — one who refuses to schematize, to publish a definitive philosophy, even to formally teach a course to professional students in Marcellian thought. He is a philosopher of 'thinking thought' rather than 'thought thought'. His essays and lectures, one would suppose his personal daily reflection, assumes only one stance — 'my authentic situation in being now'.

It is frequently noted how difficult it is to summarize Marcel's thought. The only attempt that he himself has made in this direction, in the Gifford Lectures for 1949 and 1950, published under the title The Mystery of Being, was done "without too much success".[4] But we must not be tempted to deny the accuracy of Marcel's thought because of a certain intractableness of systematization. This impossibility to systematize thoroughly Marcel's views is very much like the mysterious quality of being itself, which he so often has told us cannot be systematically comprehended. We shall see that his digressive philosophy may thus in a way be more authentically and accurately descriptive of existence than many a more formally comprehensible philosophy. And his affirmation that we ought not to restrict our quest for wisdom to conceptual categories must be dealt with on his basis. For to depend exclusively on formal concepts to appreciate the accuracy of his thought is simply to miss the point. Rather, our acceptance or rejection

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[3]Etienne Gilson, "A Unique Philosopher," Philosophy Today, Vol. IV (Winter, 1960), p. 278.

[4]Ibid., p. 279.

of his assertions will have to be determined partly on the level of the concrete situation of our pre-conceptual experience authentically considered. At this level does Marcel's evocative philosophy speak properly or not of our experience. We shall be concerned in the latter pages of this paper to examine somewhat fully the authenticity of pre-conceptual experience.

The difficulty of not merely summarizing but even presenting such a thought is obvious — and perhaps obvious too why Marcel has never for long been attracted to the classroom. Objective philosophy may be clearly grasped by an instructor and repeated at will. But

> Existential philosophy is at all times exposed to a very serious danger; that of continuing to speak in the name of various kinds of deep inner experience, which are certainly the points of departure for everything that it affirms, but which cannot be renewed at will.... It should ... be very clear that a philosophy of this sort is essentially of the nature of a kind of appeal to the listener or the reader, of a kind of call upon his inner resources. In other words, such a philosophy could never be completely embodied into a kind of dogmatic exposition of which the listener or reader would merely have to grasp the content.[5]

Gabriel Marcel has attempted to situate the philosophic act of the human mind in the pre-conceptual depths of the spirit. All of his philosophical concerns — on human liberty, person-to-person relationships, man's situation-in-being, the existence of God, death and an after-life — involve what we may temporarily call an 'intuitive' approach as well as a conceptual approach. All of his central philosophical terminology — e.g., 'transcendence', 'participation', 'incarnation', 'ontological exigence', 'mystery' — have meaning to him only in the context of an 'intuitive' as well as a strictly rational approach to life.

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[5]Gabriel Marcel, The Mystery of Being, trans. by G. S. Fraser (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1960), Vol. I, p. 262. Hereafter, this work is abbreviated: MB.

Almost from the beginning of his philosophical career Marcel has had an antipathy for objective, purely rational philosophy, for philosophy as a science — whether science be taken in an Aristotelian or positivist sense. It is true that as a young student of philosophy, Marcel developed an affection for Hegel and the German idealists. "It was German philosophy of the most abstruse kind which first aroused my interest."[6] But this first stage was quickly supplanted by a greater interest in William James, F. H. Bradley, William Earnest Hocking, and in the concrete idealism of Josiah Royce.[7] Marcel's assertion that "Royce's philosophy ... marks a kind of transition between absolute idealism and existentialist thought"[8] precisely describes his own intellectual itinerary. It can be noted also that the lectures of Henri Bergson, "followed with a passionate interest and admiration",[9] were also influential in promoting Marcel's interest in concrete philosophy.

Marcel as a young philosophy student and teacher found it increasingly hard to be satisfied with any form of thought which did not take into account the uniqueness of situation and the 'openness' of thought. His reflection became more and more grounded in an existential analysis of the self in its spontaneous 'surge' to being other than itself. He found no

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[6]Gabriel Marcel, The Existential Background of Human Dignity (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 19. Hereafter, this work is abbreviated: EB.

[7]Cf. EB., pp 1 and 2.

[8]Gabriel Marcel, Royce's Metaphysics, trans. by Virginia and Gordon Ringer (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1956), p. xii. This work was first published in 1918-19 in La Revue de Metaphysique et de Morale. The foreword to the English edition, which is here quoted from, was written in 1956. Hereafter, this work is abbreviated: RM.

[9]EB, p. 19.

solution to living, or even to fundamentally comprehending life, through a system of structured, objective thought. He has repeatedly affirmed that the greatest and most common realities of the philosopher's concern (or, indeed, any man's concern) — life, love, truth, freedom, spirit, and such — cannot be handled as though the reality exists 'out there', separate from me, in an area which enables me to encompass it without considering myself as somehow in it or with it too.

> It would indeed be a profound illusion to believe that I can still maintain this same objective attitude when I undertake an inquiry, say, into the value of life; it would be a paralogism to suppose that I can pursue such an inquiry as though my own life were not at issue.[10]

Such basic realities of life, Marcel says, cannot be treated as a technical problem, as an objective scientific fact or experiment, as something utterly other than I, which I can manipulate as the workman his tool. Rather, he says, all such realities must be viewed with myself in the object of view also, since I am not separate from life, truth, etc. Particularly in reflecting on the fundamental question of 'being', it becomes absurd to attempt an analysis in the purely objective mode; for nothing can be more obvious than that I am in being, and thus cannot escape from the situation of the question of being. "There is not, and there cannot be, any global abstraction, any final high terrace to which we can climb by means of abstract thought,"[11] there to dispassionately and impersonally survey the realms of being. We "cannot without self-contradiction conceive the absolute as a central observatory from which the

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[10] Gabriel Marcel, The Philosophy of Existentialism, trans. by Manya Harari (New York: The Citadel Press, 1963), p. 30. Hereafter, this work is abbreviated: PE.

[11] MB, Vol. I, p. 164.

universe may be contemplated in its totality"[12] since this would mean I should be both observer and participant.

Marcel prefers to examine the life of the intelligence in its communal activities, rather than in its objective ones. He admits a great need for integrity and wholeness, and thus disputes the validity of an act of philosophic consciousness which does not issue from a concrete examination of one's present situation in being. Philosophical intellectualism (whether idealism, realism, or positivism) is dismembering, inherently isolationist precisely because it tries to treat existence and experience as something separate. The physical eye sees something separate from itself, and the philosopher utilizing what we may call the power of objective intellectual vision may comprehend in a way the being of the non-self. But this comprehension will only be partial. It will be partial not only in an objective sense of not being deep or subtle enough, but also because the philosophic act does not include the subject. It does not admit that an awareness of the reality of the object must include a tracing from the depths of the self in union with, in participation with, the object.

If the philosopher tries to comprehend the nature of man from an objective standpoint, his 'essential' vision will in some way distort what is closest to the essence of a human being, namely, its existence with others. Each philosopher is called to reflect on his existence with others, with whom he is in communion — if not affectionately and in person, at least in being. Beings in union, then, are the concern of the philosopher, the man of wisdom, for wisdom like poetry and mysticism is a groping for totality, for universality, and thus for existences in common.

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[12]Gabriel Marcel, Creative Fidelity, trans. by Robert Rosthal (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1964), p. 4. Hereafter, this work is abbreviated: CF.

It might be expected, therefore, that love plays a significant role in the very notion of philosophical reflection for Marcel. The objective intelligence is separative. The scientist, technician, or logician neutralizes the self and 'freezes' the other into object. No doubt by this rupturing process he succeeds in grasping something of the characteristics of the being under view; but he misses its more fundamental reality and significance because this being, like all beings, is related, and most particularly, this being under view is related to me. And when it is personal being that is reflected upon (men or God), the element of situation becomes stronger, since love is more emphatically called for. Marcel's thought does in fact produce one of our most eloquent and considered defences of personalism since it is a metaphysics of love and of life, of personal, human, spiritual life, and a phenomenology of the self in all its rich spiritual density.

For all the richness of his reflection, however, we may question whether Marcel possesses a metaphysics. He admits that his thought is not a logical, demonstrable science of being. Is it, therefore, reducible simply to a phenomenology of being? Is it possible to include the innermost areas of subjectivity, analyses of the roots of personal intelligence and will, as knowable elements of wisdom and philosophy? If I reflect upon what I desire, what I feel, what I <u>tend</u> to know, has the uniqueness of my ground of reflection obliterated all possibility of science and thence of philosophy? Does not any genuine theoretic study absolutely require that an intelligible object have a certain universality — a certain eligibility to be viewed by many, not by one? Can there be any provable basis for universality in the individual subjectivity of the thinker? It seems that we have some grounds for asserting such a subjective universality in other areas, pre-eminently in creative art and religious experience. In these areas, large numbers of persons are able to

avow a basic similarity of experience; assuredly, the poet or mystic finds a kind of universality in the midst of his unique emotion or religious experience. If there is a basis for universality in the non-conceptual orders of human experience, presumably the mode of demonstration of such will have to follow the nature of the experience, independent of concepts in some way, but appealing to an additional, non-ideational mode of indentification, or meeting ground.

Here, of course, we encounter the affinity which Marcel's ostensibly philosophic thought has with his artistic creation — his drama and his musical composition and improvization. There is discernibly a poetic, even a 'musical' quality to his philosophic reflection. Few would deny that his expression contains insight as well as literary excellence, but the pertinent question is this:— Is Gabriel Marcel's intuitive, situational, descriptive phenomenology of man's yearning for being, life, and the plenitude of salvation, genuine philosophy? And if it is, would it not appear that our Western tradition concerning the domain of wisdom has generally been too narrow? May philosophy not only be richer, more articulated than we have yet dreamed, but also <u>greater</u>, have a larger outer limit as well as a larger inner one?

My purpose in the course of this thesis is to inquire into the question of whether Gabriel Marcel has in fact produced a philosophy. My answer to this question, in a word, my 'thesis', can only be given at the end of our inquiry. In order to achieve this purpose the most common and significant themes of the thought of Marcel will be examined in some detail. The main body of the thesis, then, will deal with Marcel's views as he exposes them. But two other philosophical positions will come to bear at times when I attempt an inquiry or judgment as to the significance of Marcel's thought. One is the position of

Aristotelian realism as it has been expressed through the Thomist tradition, particularly as found in the leading neo-Thomists, Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain. The other is the main current of Indian philosophy, as expressed pristinely in the Upanisads and interpreted by such present-day thinkers as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.

CHAPTER II

CRITIC OF CONCEPTUAL PHILOSOPHY

Gabriel Marcel has spent virtually all of his philosophic career developing his notion of concrete philosophy and fighting against conceptual philosophy. "The dynamic element in my philosophy, taken as a whole, can be seen as an obstinate and untiring battle against the spirit of abstraction."[13] This is not to say that he disregards the need for concepts and abstraction.[14] He recognizes that these ideal categories are necessary for our technical and scientific activity, which requires that we dominate and manipulate certain common or universally-seen characteristics of objective, material being. But he holds that authentic philosophic experience includes more than the conceptual and empirical and that philosophy which establishes itself on the conceptual-empirical alone promotes vanity in philosophy and the technocratic mentality in society.

Marcel accuses technocracy of being both cause and effect of a world in which personal values are in dissolution and conceptual thinking reigns supreme. Technique, he insists, is a genuine value, worthy of man as it is necessary. "It is evident that the mastery of the forces of nature by means of increasingly elaborate technical processes is a liberation which should be

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[13] MAMS, p. 1.

[14] Throughout this paper 'concept' will be understood as a being of the mind which expresses in a universal way some characteristic of particular, extra-mental being; 'abstraction' will be understood as the process whereby concepts are produced.

welcomed as such."[15] And the sense of mastery which the technician experiences is "not only basically innocent, but even noble."[16] But the absorption of man by technique is the technological 'sin', the crime which modern man is perpetrating against himself. Recognizing that "abstraction, as such, is a mental operation to which we must have recourse if we are seeking to achieve a determinate purpose of any sort"[17], modern man, absorbed with accomplishing tasks, has concentrated on abstract thinking. This hypostatizing of abstraction, this "spirit of abstraction" which Marcel feels characterizes the modern Western world, has even been a factor making for war. For abstraction, with its objective, vast, technical qualities, leads to detachment and unfeeling if it is not balanced by intersubjective, personal, and sympathetic vision.

Throughout his writings Marcel shows concern for the individual, or, better, the human person, who is able to achieve growth, freedom, and creativity only in an ambience of natural intersubjectivity, of exchange of personal riches and interior lives. He staunchly holds out for uniqueness, for singular human virtues and inspirations, for the peculiar character of small groups of people. Only by recognizing differences in men — noble, natural differences — are men allowed both to be themselves and to grow to a capacity to see the unique facet of truth lived by another person or group. But the abstract mentality tends to destroy such variety. Marcel severely distrusts the large organization, the enormous state, the big company, for, he asserts, such proliferation of numbers produces the statistical mentality, the

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[15] Gabriel Marcel, The Decline of Wisdom, trans. by Manya Harari (London: Harvill Press, 1954), p. 6. Hereafter, this work is abbreviated: DW.

[16] Ibid., p. 8.

[17] MAMS, p. 115.

un-imaginative mind, the abstract consciousness. Men can only act humanly when they can imagine, when numbers are sufficiently small that a sympathetic imagination can encompass the persons involved. Vastness produces the numerical mind typical of beaurocratic, technocratic life. People then become units, the mind is attached not to something real but to something ideal, that is, to abstractions from reality which then assume the primal focal point and concern of the technocrat. Life become abstract becomes joyless, for "technical development does, taken in itself, tend to create a world which is singularly barren."[18]

Marcel condemns the exclusively objectivizing mentality of the beaurocrat, who utilizes, through the understanding, facts taken abstractly and generalized from life, and manipulated for the purposes of government, hygiene, education, etc. Such behavior is supportable when we are dealing with things that must be treated objectively, as a disease which needs to be eradicated from an organism or the various physical laws operative in making a machine. But such approaches have no place in an analysis of human beings and their human needs.

Associated with the spirit of abstraction is the fiction that our time is tending towards greater and greater perfection because of the accumulation of techniques, the sheer number of humanity, the production of more rapid means of communication and transportation, and the rise of international organizations. Marcel finds ridiculous the assumption that all of this indicates that progress is going on, that wrong divisions are being broken down. In fact, not only is the idea of necessary progress through history an illusion, but history itself is an abstraction, an abstraction from living persons and real events.

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[18] DW, p. 12.

It is important to note this close association which Marcel's condemnation of the spirit of abstraction has with his distrust of a technological society. Both logical abstraction and technical domination are, in his view, apt to be disruptive of full, authentic human life. Abstraction and technical productivity are alike concerned with the objectivization and manipulation of life.

> According to Gabriel Marcel, there is a rigorous parallel between the possession of things and the possession of ideas, between the fact of having in cardboard boxes designs of X... which one will show to some visitor and the fact of having ideas or opinions on some question, which one will expose at the proper time.[19]

We must recall that Marcel's first association with philosophy was with the idealistic thinkers. His subsequent rejection of idealism was based on the tendency of idealism to impose logical categories on reality.[20] Such imposition is of course at work in technical production. We may question how deeply these two facts — the imposing tendencies of abstract idealistic thought and the requisite impositions of technical abstraction — have caused Marcel to suspect any conceptual and abstract philosophy. Has it caused him to mistrust or misunderstand, for example, the realistic view of the intelligibility of being, that is, that human intelligence can in some way in the conceptual order be adequated or conformed to being as it really is, that real being is knowable to the human mind? Of course, he has spent his life condemning the notion that life has no intrinsic meaning. He affirms that life does bear significance and that this is to be primarily discovered not manufactured.

> We see today establishing itself under our eyes a practical anthropocentrism founded on the absolute hegemony of technique. It consists in

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[19] Jeanne Delhomme, "Témoignage et Dialectique", in Existentialisme Chrétien: Gabriel Marcel, by Delhomme, Troisfontaines, Colin, Marcel, and Dubois-Dumée (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1947), p. 135.

[20] PE, p. 118.

> putting forth as unimpeachable evidence the fact that the human reason is alone capable of introducing meanings into a world which taken in itself signifies nothing at all, but which is treated as a sort of prime matter to which human genius comes to affix its seal.[21]

Though he holds to an intrinsic value and significance to life, it is not clear whether Marcel feels that this is discoverable only through a-conceptual or non-objective relations to life or whether we can also discover ultimate meanings in the conceptual and objective mode too. In his first published philosophical work, Metaphysical Journal, it seems that Marcel analyzed intelligibility only in idealistic terms. "Strictly speaking, intelligibility is not something that can become an object for the mind. It is only by an illusion that thought can believe that it posits the intelligible outside itself, confronting itself."[22] It is of course only fair to recall that this entry from 1914 was written at a time when Marcel was affected deeply by idealistic thought. It is interesting to note, however, that even his idealism at that period displayed a participative bent.

> What we call the rationality of the world is only the fictitious projection of the life of knowledge, a life which consists at one and the same time of finding and constituting. In this sense, far from knowledge being a reflection of the world, the world is the reflection of knowledge; though it must be fully understood — I repeat — that knowledge implies not the idea of a perpetual creation by a pre-existing understanding, but the idea of a thought which is discovered in discovering the world and has its life in that very discovery.[23]

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[21]Gabriel Marcel, "L'Aspect Existentiel de la Dignité Humaine" in Proceedings of the XIIIth International Congress of Philosophy (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1963), p. 13.

[22]Gabriel Marcel, Metaphysical Journal, trans. by Bernard Wall (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), p. 110. Hereafter, this work is abbreviated: MJ.

[23]Ibid., p. 108.

Thus, early in his career Marcel was ambivalent about the nature of intelligibility. He saw intelligibility constituted in some form of participation or "dynamic relation"[24] with the world of thought outside the self and yet perhaps finding its source somehow in the self.[25] Later writings have not as such dealt with the nature of the intelligible. His perennial concern for concrete philosophy, however, plus his assertion that wisdom must deal with more than the conceptual and his distrust of the technical mentality may indicate a disregard for, or a misunderstanding of, intelligibility. Perhaps his turning from idealism was in some measure a turning from intelligibility more than idealistically conceived.

The first principle of Marcel's thought is not the conceptually knowable, the intelligible principle of identity, nor even the sensuously known order of material existence. Rather, it is that which either precedes or transcends the sensuous or conceptually intelligible order, and which may be called the given plenitude of being, being that passes beyond sensuous or conceptual knowing powers.

> I am not a spectator who is looking for a world of structures susceptible of being viewed clearly and distinctly, but rather I listen to the voices and appeals comprising that symphony of Being which is for me, in the final analysis, a supra-rational unity beyond images, words, and concepts.[26]

We are obliged, he feels, to see an order of wisdom which transcends "an objective realism like Perry's",[27] one that refuses to set up "abstractions in

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[24] Ibid., p. 104.

[25] Ibid., p. 107.

[26] EB, p. 83.

[27] Ibid., p. 47.

place of the concrete reality they are designed to illuminate."[28] In turning from an objectivizing thought which denies the personal and relational characteristics of being[29] we will not be tempted to think that "truth is in itself completely unaffected by our recognition."[30] Instead, we will come to know that in some way "truth is mind or spirit, that it is a mind or spirit."[31] The man of reflection can perform a service to truth positively by thought that bears upon the concrete while in the way of criticism "the philosopher can help to save man from himself only by a pitiless and unwearying denunciation of the spirit of abstraction."[32]

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[28] Seymour Cain, Gabriel Marcel (New York: Hilary House, 1963), p. 117.

[29] MB, Vol. II, p. 143.

[30] MAMS, p. 157.

[31] Ibid., p. 158.

[32] Ibid., p. 205.

CHAPTER III

PARTICIPATION, AND 'MELTED' BEING

Marcel, and 'Substantialism'

Marcel affirms that a personal approach to being, a concrete philosophy, cannot be accused of relativism. It may more truly be termed 'relationalism'. In the usual relativistic position, from Protagoras to the present, there is no possibility of really knowing anything beyond the self. Certitude about the 'other' cannot be achieved. All that we may speak of is how things look to me, my impressions, with no guarantee whatever that what I seem to know is really so. The skeptical mentality needs regularly to be purged from the philosophical world, and our western intellectual heritage shows a line of purifiers of reason from Socrates to Kant to present-day philosophers like Maritain. Each purging of relativism has meant that in some way philosophers have regained a confidence in the ability of human intelligence or, more broadly, of the human personality to really grasp something of what being is.

In the realist tradition from Aristotle to Aquinas to the neo-Thomist this re-assertion of the possibility of certitude has rested on the intelligibility of being (i.e., the reality of an essence that can be known) and on the solidity, so to speak, of substance. Concerning the solidity of substance, it is evident that an erroneous tendency sometimes develops in the realist position. It consists in, let us say, 'freezing' the substance,

making the substance static. No doubt this is done better to hold onto the reality of the intelligible object. But it is accompanied by a refusal to recognize the difficulties of complexity that come with comprehending substance in its dynamic features. Against such a static vision of substance Gabriel Marcel has been diametrically opposed. Being is indeed his concern, but not being in such a substantive sense. He has been far more concerned with the verbal and active features of being than with any real or imagined substantive or 'frozen' characteristics of being,[33] we may say more with being as becoming than with being as thing. Being cannot be made equivalent to substance or thing, not even fundamentally. Surely, existence is substantial, in the sense of having magnitude or "ontological weight".[34] But existence cannot be expressed by the category of substance, or in fact expressed by any form of human concepts.

> We cannot really lose ourselves in abstract discussions about the intrinsic characteristics of Being — as if Being were a thing, capable of being contrasted with other things, which are only its appearances and manifestations. From this point of view, the philosophical term Ontology, the Science of Being, is an unsatisfactory one and runs the risk of encouraging regrettable misunderstandings. For Being is, quite fundamentally, not something which one can discuss.[35]

What Marcel (as well as other existentialists) has succeeded in doing to substantial existences is precisely this: under the personal, concrete, and phenomenological light of his thought, Marcel has caused the all-too-static intelligible substances of certain realistic philosophers to 'melt'. This 'melting' allows the rich accidental features of individual being to

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[33] EB, p. 76.

[34] Ibid.

[35] MAMS, p. 129.

emerge, and also disinclines the philosopher to take up a position of himself as 'here' and the intelligible substance as 'there'. "It is against this idea of the fact as external to me that we must direct our polemic."[36]

Marcel's bringing to the field of philosophy the intellective experience we would normally designate intuition when referring to poetic and religious feeling indicates the possibilities of the philosophical object undergoing some new form of change in our day. In realistic philosophy, in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, perhaps it can be said that the substance has sometimes exercised a tyranny, and that this has been in a sense enhanced by the conceptual reason, adequate to intelligible essences. But with a greater admission of intuitive intellection into the philosophic act, the substance 'melts' and the realm of accidentality emerges with greater force. And of course with the 'melting' of both object and subject in the intuitive experience, with the appearance of the notion of 'being immersed in being', relationship assumes a greater role, for there is then more inclination to consider the interpenetration of substances than any subject-object dichotomy. We must understand that this participative relationship is not merely relationship as between two units. It is a relationship of inwardness, of mutual interiority, as between two persons in love. "If I construe participation as my insertion into a web of objective relations, I adopt with respect to the latter the presumptuous status of a pure intelligence which claims to survey the universe from above."[37]

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[36] MB, Vol. I, p. 78.

[37] CF, p. 56.

To the realistic consciousness, it may seem at times that Marcel is in danger of ignoring the intrinsic worth, truth, or objectivity of a being. For "the central theme of the Metaphysical Journal and, of course, of subsequent works, is precisely the impossibility of thinking of being as object."[38] Marcel holds that we cannot affirm the excellence, the value of a being, particularly a person, without necessarily involving the self in the affirmation. "Yes," the realist may reply, "in that judgments are by definition made by a self. But presumably the worth or truth of the other, his being, is something self-assertive, in the old sense substantial, inherent, and thus ultimately a fact to be recognized as well as promoted and enriched. But for Marcel it appears that relationship is the supreme reality and that a being has reality only as related. Thus, though disavowing the impersonality of idealism, his subjective emphasis similarly sees being as valuable and real only when related — not of course to mind as an idealist like Berkeley would have it — but to person and subjectivity." It is true that an objective, transcendental, abstract, and impersonal view of being has no significance for Marcel. His philosophy deals more with relations within being than with being-as-such, more with the path or trajectory of the self in transcendence to the other than with the other-as-such. He sees life in its interconnectedness more than in its discreteness. But he denies that his relational philosophy is either relativistic or pantheistic. "It is well to reject once and for all and in the strongest terms, the idea that in order to avoid pantheism it is necessary to cling to the idea of a human person as rigidly circumscribed as possible."[39]

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[38] MJ, p. viii. From the author's preface (1950) to the English edition.

[39] MB, Vol. II, p. 39.

Both the I and the other have melted, in Marcel's thought, not in that each loses his identity, but in that each finds himself somehow grounded in the other in ontological relationship. This relationship and participation in being that is the keystone of Marcel's thought doesn't mean relativism; it means that in genuinely knowing the other I must take into account my subjectivity and our (my and the other's) relationship to each other.

It should be noted that Marcel's philosophy of participation is concerned almost exclusively with relationships among persons; he has given relatively little attention to the question of participation with non-personal beings. Thus, as with other existentialists, we find little in his work of a cosmological interest, of a philosophy of nature. His is a personalist thought, as much or more because it is directed to union with other persons as with an analysis of the subjectivity of the self. For Marcel genuine human life is constituted only in the act of relating honestly and fully to others. Only through intersubjectivity can one achieve fullness of personality and the freedom of the self. In some real sense we are made by relationships. Only in the mysterious but certain area of intersubjective life can we discover ourselves and be discovered. Man may be said to really exist only when he is involved, when he is in immediate contact with life and other persons. For Marcel, the realistic or scholastic definition of existence — the first act of being, which enables us to affirm that a thing simply is, that nonexistence cannot be 'attributed' to it — is a very minimal one at best. Rather, his concern is with authentic existence in men — free, creative, faithful existence.

This concern for relation among persons, which, as we shall see, includes also the personhood of God, was one of the characteristics which Marcel felt

superior about Royce's idealism. In Royce, and even more in Hocking, Marcel found a theory of participation in Being. Unlike the German idealism he had associated with earlier, Marcel found Royce's philosophy

> a less systematic, but more faithful and profound, interpretation of our spiritual life. A philosophy of this kind, which ceases to demand from reality guarantees that inevitably turn into fetters, tends expressly to acknowledge an order of freedom and love in which the relations of being to being, far from integrating in a single rational system, which after all, will never be more than a convention, would remain the expression of separate but social persons who partake of God to the extent that they believe in Him.[40]

The metaphysics of a dialectic of the spirit, which Marcel found outlines of in Royce,[41] enables man to recognize his involvement in a community of being, an engagement which guarantees a man's uniqueness at the same time he is aware of a melodic participation in the entirety of being.[42]

Marcel, and The Sartrean Absurd

Marcel has asserted with regard to the knowable value of life that his personalist viewing does not assume the enigma and despair of a new type of skeptic like Jean-Paul Sartre. The sometimes 'staticized' world of the realist needs to 'melt' if we are to proceed from philosophy as a science to philosophy as a human widsom which admits the knowable riches of relationship — a relationship which, we must recall, does not imply relativism. But the existentialist like Sartre has done more than 'melt' the false and simplistic solidity of essentialist thinkers. His atheistic despair, has, according to Marcel, turned the world into an incomprehensible and meaningless 'goo'. This

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[40] RM, p. 155.

[41] Ibid., p. 148.

[42] Ibid., p. 43.

of course occasions the pervasive nausea of the typically Sartrean existentialist; a nausea which

> seems to be bound up in its origin with an experience of fluency — not fluidity, but fluency — in so far as what is fluent slows down and assumes a kind of soft and spurious solidity. The sensation which this suggests is admittedly repellent. To understand and to sympathize with Sartre's basic experience I need only recall the disgusting feeling of coming on a 'gooey' lump in a purée. 'Gooeyness' is indeed the key word, but it is, for Sartre, gooeyness on an enormous scale: only an insignificant part of what he means to convey would be grasped if it were not understood that, for him, the whole of life is, if not actually gooey, at least tending towards gooeyness.[43]

Marcel points to the cause of this final pointlessness and instability in the Sartrean view of beings: because Sartre admits of no infinite Thou, there is bound to be insecurity and absurdity at the center of existence and no possibility of even a finite Thou. Contingent beings who acknowledge nothing beyond their own contingency sense an absurdity in existence which could not have produced itself, is not destined for itself, and while existing in an ephemeral way is without ultimate attachment. Sartre's analysis of the final absurdity of love and the impossibility of meaningful existence

> rests upon the complete denial of we as subject, that is to say upon the denial of communion. For Sartre this word has no meaning at any possible level, not to speak of its religious or mystical sense. This is because in his universe, participation itself is impossible: this, philosophically, is the essential point.[44]

'Essence' and 'Existence' in Marcel

Besides sometimes 'staticizing' substance, realistic philosophers have

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[43] PE, p. 50.

[44] Ibid., p. 76.

also at times been guilty of an over-essentialism, and Marcel has waged a continual war on the essentialist errors of much philosophical reflection. It is of value in this connection to note his understanding of the word 'existence'. Like other existentialists he is not inclined to hold to the typical realist understanding of existence as indicating that condition operating when we say that a being 'is', nor in the fuller analysis of existence as the first act of a being.[45] He uses the term existence in its etymological sense of 'standing forth' or 'being manifest',[46] and therefore finds its appropriate use with personal being which is deliberately and responsibly tending along the lines of its fullness. There is not a 'factness' or 'actness' of being but a fullness, a dynamic fullness of being, that the term existence signifies for Marcel.

Marcel's hesitancy to accept the substantialist positions of philosophers like the Aristotelian-Thomists stems from the whole character of his philosophical tendencies: to accentuate the unique rather than the objectively common, to examine existence more than essence, to place a high value on the necessity of action. He prefers to comprehend being in its existential rather than essential significance, as an on-going, dynamic state rather than as a thing.

> My effort can be best described as an attempt to establish a concept which precludes all equation of being with Ding while upholding the ontological without going back to the category of substance which I regarded with profound mistrust.... Perhaps I can best explain my continual and central metaphysical pre-occupation by saying that my aim was to discover how a subject, in his actual capacity as subject, is related to a reality

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[45] Cf. Etienne Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1949), p. 179.

[46] MB, Vol. I, p. 112.

> which cannot in this context be regarded as objective, yet which is persistently required and recognized as real.[47]

For Marcel, then, being is understood and explicated in its dynamic, existential, personal, and subjective meanings rather than in its essential ones. Existence experienced, rather than things conceptually known, assumes for him the supreme ground of reflection. And of course the concept holds relatively little fascination for him, since the concept as such cannot comprehend existence but only essence in some way. Concepts are concerned with characterizing, and "existence properly speaking is incapable of characterization."[48] Just as surely, existence is incapable of being demonstrated, for "existence is primary or it is not ... in no case can it be regarded as capable of being reduced or derived."[49]

Though Marcel feels that existential concern and concern for the existential is the supreme call for the philosopher, he would not have us ignore essence altogether.

> One cannot protest too strongly against a kind of existentialism, or a kind of caricature of existentialism, which claims to deprive the notion of essence of its old value and to allow it only a subordinate position. But this does not mean that the notion of essence does not need to be thought out again, on the basis of a philosophy which affirms the primacy of a kind of subjectivity, or more exactly of a kind of intersubjectivity, whose rights the philosophy of the schools has too often failed to recognize.[50]

It is not clear whether or not Marcel holds to an ontological essence constituting the definable reality of a being. He does deny that we can have any clear conceptual understanding of the nature of a being. Metaphysical

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[47] PE, p. 127.

[48] "Existence and Objectivity", in MJ, p. 330. This article was written in 1925 and added as an appendix to the English edition of the Metaphysical Journal.

[49] Ibid., p. 324.

[50] MAMS, p. 85.

speculation cannot deliver to us any perduring forms of beings. Nevertheless, we can grasp something of the intrinsic reality of beings, though we need to recognize that "in the order of concrete philosophy the essence is always liable to be defective."[51] Ordinarily, though, Marcel's treatment of essence is not that of a definable reality in any being but rather of a source or significance in personal being. As source, essence may appear as a mode of a "light-giving principle rather than as an immaterial content which is illuminated."[52] Essence thus is associated with spirit, with the life and light of personal existence. At other times, Marcel understands essence as that which is most central and significant to human existence. "Probably, in seeking to discover what we mean by essential, it is best to start by seeking to discover what we mean by important."[53] Such analysis leads, in Marcel, to the conclusion that the essential is not merely what is important but what is most important, the "one thing needful",[54] and like Augustine, Marcel suggests that this can only be some kind of inner personal reality which binds me to the Absolute, to a Transcendent Other.

Just as essence is seen to have less of an ontological-objective character in Marcel's thought and more of an ontological-personal character, so too the notion of universal assumes a subjective trait. "There can be no wisdom without at least the veiled presence of the universal. To the extent that the universal is debased or driven out, wisdom becomes eclipsed."[55] We are reduced to solipsism if there is no universal whatever, and even the

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[51]Gabriel Marcel, Homo Viator, trans. by Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper & Brothers, Harper Torchbook edition, 1962), p. 119. Hereafter, this work is abbreviated: HV.

[52]DW, p. 36.

[53]MB, Vol. I, p. 267.

[54]Ibid., p. 268.

[55]DW, p. 51.

concrete philosopher recognizes the need for relating to the common features of existence. Marcel's way of achieving this universal grasp or bearing is in keeping with the character of his subjectivist-personalist thought. The universal is not discovered primarily in the objective realm, but in the subjective. Somehow, man discovers a commoness and universality in experience in appreciating the depths of the self. But we shall reserve treatment of the question of subjective universality for a later section of this paper.

Dynamic Being, and Intelligibility

We need to note one more point in Marcel's treatment of questions concerning the essence of beings. This is the fact that in the order of real, not ideal, existence, essence is involved in process and movement.

> The only thing that does not move, that cannot move, is the concept, the abstraction, which is treated as if it were a real thing, that is, hypostatized. It is part of the intrinsic nature of the abstract as such that it resists any attempt to introduce into it the flow of succession.[56]

Now man certainly seeks stability and permanence. But he cannot achieve the stability of the lifeless concept, which though it first appeared at a given historical moment has ceased to have a temporal character. Nor can he reduce his being and inner life to the pure succession of events in the order of the physical and of sensation. He is led necessarily to posit a kind of ontological, not logical, permanence in a realm of his life which transcends "the opposition between the successive and the abstract, between the endless changing flow of sensation and the static eternity of the concept".[57] This higher reality is of course the spiritual; not yet the divine, but the personally spiritual, the center of the self, the source for all the acts of contemplative wisdom and love.

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[56] MB, Vol. I, p. 234.

[57] Ibid., p. 235.

Permanence, then, salvation from the absurdity of pure becoming, can be discovered, according to Marcel, in a profound recognition of the spiritual in personal existence. Just as Marcel has seen a place for meaningful essence in his philosophy only when it is related to subjectivity, so with respect to the need for stability, he finds a genuine resolution only in the depth of the self. Of course, in both instances we need to remind ourselves that when Marcel speaks of subjectivity he does not mean isolated subjectivity. The permanency found in subjectivity authentically considered, no less than essential significance found in the self, bears upon a kind of interior universality and a communion among subjectivities.

Nonetheless, with regard to the essential discoverable in the objective order Marcel perhaps shows a disinterest, and this may stem from his associating intelligibility more with the logical construct of idealism than with the intellectual discovery of realism. In Marcel's comprehension of the essence of beings, there is greater interest in the accidentality of being than is shown by the pure essentialist thinker. Insofar as he relates to any objective analysis, Marcel may be said to show more concern for essence in its becoming than in its actualized features. It is unfortunate that contemporary existentialism has identified essence with absolute permanency. We may recognize that the 'vocation' of existentialism is precisely to give attention to the filigree of dynamic reality. But the general disregard of essence which existentialists have had has unfortunately turned them from a balanced view of being. The disenchantment with essentialism in philosophy which characterizes many existentialists, including Marcel, proceeds partly from the failure to recognize that in finite reality the essence is never completely actualized. Those who deny the assertion of realism that objective being has essences which are knowable often rest their refusal

> upon the assumption that essence and becoming are incompatible, whereas the very reverse is true. Far from being incompatible with becoming, essence is both the final cause of becoming and the formal condition of its possibility. Where existence is alone, as in the case in God, Whose essence is one with His existence, there is no becoming. God is, and, because He is no particular essence, but the pure act of existence, there is nothing which He can become, and all that can be said about Him, is, He Is. On the contrary, as soon as essence appears, there also appears some otherness, namely, the very otherness which distinguishes it from its own possible existence and, with it, the possibility of becoming.... The question never is for a soul to become what it is (it is such qua form) but to become that which it is.[58]

Marcel's philosophy of participation rejects any essential viewpoint which involves formalism or systematization. The philosopher's concerns, no less than the tensions of daily life, bear upon the changing and unfinished features of life. For Marcel, the philosophic life is centrally a journey, a quest, a process of discovery. "One thing that is not deceptive, one thing that cannot deceive — and this is truly my most profound conviction — is discovery."[59] Attempts to systematize in any finished way the truth which one has perceived is to inevitably tend to distort it.

> Philosophy will always, to my way of thinking, be an aid to discovery rather than a matter of strict demonstration.... I think that 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.[60]

Marcel thus identifies any systematic presentation of philosophic wisdom with that kind of art-ful, technical necessity that an expert on a subject will utilize in expressing a complex reality to a group of novices. In fact, the technician or scientist has to deal with reality in such a way

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[58] Gilson, op. cit., Being and Some Philosophers, p. 180.

[59] Gabriel Marcel, in the Introduction to De L'Existence á L'Etre by Roger Troisfontaines, as reproduced in Philosophy Today, Vol. IV (Winter, 1960), p. 282.

[60] PE, p. 2.

that he gives a certain form of order to it. Since he is not dealing with the concrete subjective area of experience but with an objective and ostensibly universal area, he is bound to some form of imposition to make the world not only manipulable but also intelligible. "With the scientist, the self has, in so far as it possibly can, vanished away. His task is to bring order into a world which is as little as possible his own particular world, which is as much as possible the world in general."[61] It is significant that once again Marcel sees scientific knowledge or intelligibility as possible only if there is some kind of "bringing" as well as finding, some kind of invention as well as discovery.

Marcel seems to feel that any systematizing can be no more than tentative, never even in part definitive, since a synthesis would require an Infinite Intelligence. Such a position contains at least one characteristic that is notable and has bearing and one other which may be suspect. In the first place, the Marcellian emphasis on relationship, on my being with others, my being immersed in being, etc., points to the almost unending interconnectedness of reality. With this factor in mind, vast, definitive assertions concerning objective reality, concerning anything other than my subjectively authentic act right now, become difficult because of the subtlety of being. Subtle, not just because of the internal complexity of any being, but also and even primarily because of the virtually infinite relational associations of any being with all other beings. A second characteristic of Marcel's relational thought, however, is, in a realistic view, mistaken. When the philosopher presents a systematic analysis of a number of concepts and judgments in a large view of reality, there is a way in which the exposition may be not merely technically successful or pragmatically fitting, but genuinely

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[61] MB, Vol. I, p. 265.

adequate, that is to say, true. It will be true if the presentation follows the actual lines of intelligible being precisely in so far as the rational evidence unmistakably and demonstrably allows.

Marcel, of course, demurs at suggestions such as these, since for him being is not profoundly intelligible in a conceptual way. The Marcellian view prompts us to ask if we should continue to situate the philosophic act in the realm of conscious reason or allow it to deepen, to include also, and even pre-eminently, the life of the unconscious. There have been some notable examples in the history of western philosophic reflection of what we may call pre-conceptual and post-conceptual forms of philosophy. We may recall in this regard the mystical schools, both ancient ones such as the Pythagorean and neo-Platonic and Christian ones such as the Augustinian and Franciscan. And of course we are keenly aware of the contemporary influence of the voluntarist and existentialist 'revolt'— from Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard to Marcel and Sartre. But generally speaking western thought has firmly established philosophic enterprise in the realm of the conscious, cogitative, conceptualizing intellect. Oriental philosophy, particularly Indian thought, shows us something of the opposite tradition. Perhaps the philosophical extensions of thinkers like Marcel give us an opportunity to reach new understandings and unions with the 'wisdom of the East'. But concerning this possibility we will have more to say later.

Primary and Secondary Reflection

Two other characteristics of Marcel's philosophy of participation require analysis here. One is his understanding of 'reflection'; the other concerns his notion of 'presence'.

Marcel distinguishes between primary reflection and secondary reflection. Primary reflection, he says, is the objective vision and understanding that we take of things separate from ourselves.[62] It is separating, and involves an implicit assertion of my identity, that 'I am and am not that', 'that is out there and not of me'. This is the mode of our usual academic learning processes. Primary reflection comes to birth in the child who has once sensed his real distinction from being beyond himself. It is not the most ultimate form of reflection. This is what Marcel designates 'secondary reflection', whose task it is to en-group again our perception of being, to holistically relate to the great questions of life: what is being, freedom, fidelity, etc. Life cannot be appreciated, and in the deepest sense truth cannot be known, unless the person is able to enter the realm of secondary reflection and the non-objective area of experience. The world is broken, that is, men have lost a sense of unity, and this unity may only be regained through the process of secondary reflection, on ingathering the elements of experience so as to dwell once more with oneself in the ground of being and truth. Whereas "primary reflection tends to dissolve the unity of experience which is first put before it, the function of secondary reflection is essentially recuperative; it reconquers that unity."[63]

This intimate form of knowing called secondary reflection, which is "the special high instrument of philosophical research",[64] is a handling, in a conscious and critical manner, of the form of participation in being that we once possessed as children in an un-conscious and un-critical manner and

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[62] Cf. MB, Vol. I, pp. 95 ff.

[63] MB, Vol. I, p. 102.

[64] Ibid.

which was lost through the self-assertiveness and objective learning conditions of primary reflection. Secondary reflection is

> a reflection whereby I ask myself how and from what starting point I was able to proceed in my initial reflection, which itself postulated the ontological, but without knowing it. This second reflection is recollection in the measure in which recollection can be self-conscious.[65]

This form of reflection is a process which is not self-contained; it depends on a personal depth beyond reflection and a call beyond the person. Perhaps reflection, "interrogating itself about its own essential nature, will be led to acknowledge that it inevitably bases itself on something from which it has to draw its strength."[66] Secondary, recuperative reflection thus requires the mediation of another; it is not self-contained.[67] It is the method of inquiry used by the philosopher of participation, who is interested in personally relating to others in the community of being, in healing philosophic vision and making it whole again, "in re-establishing in all its continuity that living tissue which imprudent analysis tore asunder."[68]

Secondary reflection has enabled Marcel to philosophically treat matters which are in part closed to the methods of objective philosophy, utilizing, as it does, primary reflection almost exclusively. Marcel has tried to meet the demands of a philosophy which can deal with historical existence through a personalist thought which involves "the meeting of an epistemology and of a metaphysics founded on reflection."[69] Reflection sighted through subjectivity, or, better, through participation and intersubjectivity, necessarily is deeply related to the concrete and historical. Similarly, by the totality of

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[65] PE, p. 25.

[66] MB, Vol. I, p. 47.

[67] Ibid., p. 209.

[68] "Existence and Objectivity", in MJ, p. 334.

[69] Delhomme, op. cit., p. 118.

participation which secondary reflection requires, affective and volitional as well as cognitive analyses are required. Through secondary reflection the philosopher relates to being through all of his personal powers, not merely through his conscious intellectual power. Because of this fact, Marcel's philosophy seems to become at times a metaphysics of love. His emphasis on secondary reflection illustrates his concern for a response to being, a dwelling with being. Primary reflection, reflection that we might ordinarily call objective, and even childlike in a good sense, situates being 'out there'. This discloses interesting, even wonderful features of being, but somehow it does not engage the whole person, including the affections and the will. But secondary reflection en-wraps, en-groups the object, recognizes it as a subject, and calls for the activities of affection and will and commitment. The psychological and metaphysical topography of these acts is in good measure what Marcel is concerned to describe. Not only does secondary reflection offer a mode of expressing philosophically the nature of love and virtue, but in some way it offers a basis for their emergence and development.

> I do affirm that it is through ingatheredness only, through recollection in the highest sense of that word, through a concentrated recalling of ourselves to ourselves, that those powers of love and humility can be born and can be grouped in strength, which alone, in the long run, can form an adequate counterpoise to the blind, and blinding, pride of the technician, closed in by his techniques.[70]

Presence

A philosophy of participation, which focuses on subjectivity and intersubjectivity in order to attain the universal, which largely denies an objective relating to universality, will still find it necessary to express,

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[70] MAMS, p. 75.

in non-objective terms, common characters of being. One notion which Marcel uses to achieve this end is that of 'presence'. It is here particularly that his language shies from any definite conceptualization, in trying to give us some insight into what presence can possibly mean. In fact, he says,

> it is certainly impossible to give a rigorous definition of it. Presence can only be — not grasped, for that would be contradictory — but evoked through the aid of direct and unchallengeable experiences which do not rise from the conceptual apparatus which we make use of in order to reach objects.[71]

Marcel's notion of presence is that of an inescapable but non-objective reality — like life and love and being itself. It is a reality which transcends the subjective-objective order. Presence is the positive weight of authenticity. It cannot be apprehended and, strictly speaking, it cannot be comprehended. "A presence can, in the last analysis, only be invoked or evoked."[72] It denotes something less concrete but somehow more inclusive than just being there, being merely physically present. It is most nearly "the sense of existing, of being in the world."[73] Presence is relational being in its deepest character; it is that "particle of creation which is in me, the gift which from all eternity has been granted to me of participating in the universal drama."[74] It will be for us to consider later the significant similarity which Marcel's notion of presence has to the teaching regarding Atman and Brahman in Indian philosophy.

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[71] EB, p. 67.

[72] MB, Vol. I, p. 256.

[73] HV, p. 15.

[74] Ibid., p. 132.

CHAPTER IV

CONCRETE, SITUATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

As we have seen, Marcel's existential philosophy centers on the relational or participative nature of being. His concern is to explore, through concept, no doubt, but also through what we may temporarily call 'intuition and authenticity' the richness and depth of interconnected existence. Marcel believes that this filigree of reality related cannot be handled by objectivizing, universalizing reason, for this breaks living communion among beings and reduces the richness of being. For him, philosophy must proceed out of the concrete situation. It is absurd to attempt an abstract, separated appraisal of life and being, when both obviously are contacted only in the concrete and singular experiences of personal existence.

Marcel's penchant for specific human experience illustrates itself marvelously again and again in his examples from life. These examples are often telling, apposite, and utterly human, as his analysis of one's fidelity to promises. Marcel comes to grips with this experience by reflecting on the man who says to a friend lying incurably sick in a hospital that he will return to visit him and later finds that he no longer <u>feels</u> like going to see him again.[75] Such examples, Marcel assures us, are chosen not so much to exemplify his philosophic meanings as they are to show us the ground of real situations from which his meanings have issued. Of course, his gift for the dramatic and his insight into human sufferings shows itself in such illustrations

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[75] Cf. CF, p. 159.

and discloses again Marcel's dual vocation as poet-philosopher. But, Marcel asserts, imagination is integral to philosophy. Just as it is the death of sympathetic imagination in our modern technocratic society which has enabled us to actually think in terms of mass manipulation and annihilation, so keeping philosophy from the 'stain' of image and the pre-conceptual has meant its final irrelevancy to the situation of man.

Concrete philosophy, calling as it does for the utilization of all the powers of man, affective and volitional as well as cognitive, active and social as well as reflective and personal, necessarily involves an examination of the details of my relation to existence now. The singular, therefore, emerges as not only eligible but requisite for philosophical reflection. The universal attributes which philosophy has traditionally been held to have, is for Marcel as for Kierkegaard an illusion to which genuine philosophy must not succumb. Wisdom, as existence, is in the concrete. Therefore, in addition to conscious reason, with its formulating of universal notions, philosophy must allow admittance to the particularizing powers of man. Imagination (dealing as it does with the singular) and affection (directed as it is to union with concrete goods) are as meaningful for philosophy as is the universalizing reason. For "there is a much closer connection between reflecting and imagining than is usually admitted."[76] Marcel's philosophical writings involve imagination even in his central definitions or descriptions. In such matters as his phenomenological description of the trajectory of the self in its relationship and transcendence to the other (and is this not the central point of his philosophy?), Marcel uses words which necessarily involve spatial images and relationships. For example, in analyzing the similarity or bond between natural impulse and pure gift, he says:

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[76] MB, Vol. I, p. 44.

> It is instructive to observe that the spontaneity of subconscious life as it spreads out beyond a world where the Calculable triumphs, corresponds to a vow which only becomes conscious of itself infinitely above this sphere, in a zone where thought, disengaging its special essence, proves to be pure generosity or utter disinterestedness.[77]

Obviously, we can grasp such thought only if we concretely and imaginatively follow its incarnate mode of description.

Marcel says that philosophy is called to involvement, in the ways of total knowing, with the concrete, passing events and experiences of daily life. These experiences must not be thrown on the ash-heap as being irrelevant to the philosopher. Perhaps especially the truly desperate situations of life are material for the philosopher's speculation, situations like that

> of the prisoner, alone in the depths of his cell, of the exile, lost in a strange land, or finally, of the incurable invalid.... It seems to me that a philosopher worthy of the name can never consider these extreme cases with too great anxiety and insistence.[78]

No doubt such events partake of the becoming and fluid quality of existence which many western philosophers from Parmenides and Plato have been disinclined to admit as worthy of metaphysical reflection. But, Marcel says, there is

> a gravely erroneous conception of philosophy, a conception which for too long has weighed heavily on philosophy itself, and has helped to strike it with barrenness; this erroneous conception consists in imagining that the philosopher as such ought not to concern himself with passing events, that his job on the contrary is to give laws in a timeless realm, and to consider contemporary occurrences with the same indifference with which a stroller through a wood considers the bustlings of an ant-hill.[79]

Marcel's concrete philosophy emphasizes the need to philosophize in a situation. Philosophy requires a "phenomenological examination of concrete situations of which it seems to me thought cannot make abstraction without a

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[77] HV, p. 107 (underlines mine).

[78] Ibid., p. 146.

[79] MB, Vol. I, p. 45.

danger of being lost in words."[80] A dehistoricized position which does not take into consideration place, time, and the person enervates genuine philosophy as much as it would art and literature.[81] The uniqueness of each philosophic exploration or trajectory does not seem to allow, from Marcel's point of view, any systematization. The presumed many-sidedness of philosophic understanding is an illusion, and philosophy "to the extent that it attempts to elaborate syntheses, risks always losing contact with the individual as such."[82] Generalities and groupings must be used at times in the pursuit of wisdom, but in the final analysis abstraction is of value "only in order to come eventually upon the genuinely concrete."[83] This attachment to direct concrete experience has been an unfailing characteristic of Marcel's thought almost from the beginning of his career. "By an initial proceeding that he has never since betrayed, this philosopher has written nothing which has not been taken from his own depths or directly proven in his experience."[84]

It may seem odd to some that though his philosophy has a concentration on human relationships, and though he displays an admirable courtesy in philosophic discussion and search, Marcel does not advocate a collaboration among philosophical scholars to prepare even an adaptable and temporary summary of wisdom. This fact, of course, stems not from any isolationistic feeling but from his conviction that the pursuit of wisdom is a decidedly singular activity and that men cannot achieve an agreed upon adherence to the same vision on the basis of principles drawn up and democratically voted upon.

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[80] HV, p. 101.

[81] MB, Vol. I, p. 197.

[82] Gabriel Marcel, "The Finality of the Drama", The New Orpheus, Essays Toward a Christian Poetic, edited by Nathan A Scott, Jr. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), p. 334.

[83] EB, p. 20.

[84] Etienne Gilson, op. cit., Existentialisme Chrétien, p. 3.

> Whereas the temptation for a congress man is always to refer to an earlier congress where it was established that... This perpetual beginning of real philosophy again, which may seem scandalous to the scientist or the technician, is an inevitable part of all genuinely philosophical work; and perhaps it reflects in its own order the fresh start of every new awakening and of every birth. Does not the very structure of duration and of life show that philosophical thought is unfaithful to reality whenever it attempts to proceed from conclusion to conclusion towards a Summa which, in the end, needs only to be expounded and memorized paragraph by paragraph?[85]

Marcel's existentialism is a philosophy of process, but a process that does not tend to relativism, since the process is obscurely but certainly recognized to have a point. His philosophy of 'thinking thought'

> has nothing in common with subjective idealism; in a way, it is the inverse of such a doctrine... the pensée pensante can be developed only if it is constantly replenished in such a way that its uninterrupted communication with Being is guaranteed; it cannot really break off that communication but it can abolish it in thought.[86]

His philosophy is thus one of contingency — but to be precise, not contingency in its limitation, but, rather, contingency in its dependence on the other. This dependence is expressed sometimes in our search for a point to life, a point which is in the nature of things, not a point which I purely bestow by myself in the manner of contemporary atheistic existentialism,[87] a manner of self-making to which Marcel's thought is absolutely opposed.

The idealist philosopher supremely, and in some ways, the realist philosopher, has tried to achieve a comprehension of being beyond change and time, through understanding the essences of things. But Marcel sees his vocation to be an illumination of the temporal. Of course he recognizes that this would be a senseless task if the temporal did not somehow rest upon changelessness, spirit, the unlimited and inexhaustible. Marcel's concentration

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[85] PE, p. 125.

[86] CF, p. 13.

[87] MB, Vol. I, p. 213.

upon situation, the concrete, and the passing has been saved from solipsism because he senses that the passing hangs upon a supreme Presence. The tendency of Marcel's thought is ever to seek the absolute — but always through the present. For him the present is most significant because it alone offers the possibility for a kind of participation in the eternal.

To Marcel, man's problem in a search for wisdom and truth, for life and being, even for faith, is far more to learn or re-learn immediacy than to attempt to transcend to an a-temporal level of existence. To be immediate, to be concrete, to be really present to the existential moment — only through such can one hope to touch the depths of the self or the source of Being. Because of this, Marcel attaches considerable importance to the sensing of one's body, to an incarnational sense. For in deeply experiencing my body, and its contact with the physical environment, I am radically experiencing the historical moment, the now. The world and my body are so intimately united that one is seen almost as an extension of the other, not in the way of materialistic monism, but in the way of living mutuality, of participation in being.

> For me all existence is constructed on the model of and in prolongation of my body.... My body is in sympathy with things. And in this way a certain mode of vision becomes possible.... I am really attached to and really adhere to all that exists — to the universe which is my universe and whose center is my body.[88]

The sense of incarnation, which is the beginning of the fullest existential sense, is on the line of immediacy which reaches its culmination in the mysteriously immediate contact with God in faith. Nearly fifty years ago Marcel realized that a sense of infallibility in the spiritual realm was not dissociated from the world of sensation, with its own level of immediacy and

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[88] MJ, p. 274.

certitude, that in a way sensation is "infallible, that there is no place in it for error"[89] and that thus "faith ought to participate in the nature of sensation."[90]

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[89] MJ, p. 131.

[90] Ibid.

CHAPTER V

SUBJECTIVITY, AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Philosophy and Subjectivity

Marcel's philosophy bears a great deal upon a relation to the self, though it is necessary to note that in its subjectivity his philosophy attempts mainly to 'catch' or note the self in its contact with others.

A philosophy that explores subjectivity may be called by some no philosophy at all. For example, Maritain has continually affirmed that philosophy as such cannot deal with singularity and subjectivity. For this leading neo-Thomist, philosophy really does give us knowledge and "we really do attain the things of the world of existence when we attain the world of intelligibility, but we do not attain them in their singularity nor in the contingency proper to the flux of their singular occurrences."[91] "Subjectivity marks the frontier," Maritain says, "which separates the world of philosophy from the world of religion.... Philosophy runs against an insurmountable barrier in attempting to deal with subjectivity, because while philosophy of course knows subjects, it knows them only as objects."[92]

Subjectivity, according to the philosophical realist, is the realm not

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[91]Jacques Maritain, The Degrees of Knowledge, trans. under the supervision of Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 131.

[92]Jacques Maritain, Existence and the Existent, trans. by Galantiere and Phelan (New York: Doubleday & Co., Image Book edition, 1956), p. 79.

of philosophy but of poetry and mysticism, even 'natural mysticism',[93] which, in Maritain's view, constitutes the interest and activity of Indian philosophy. To the Thomist philosopher, though one may develop a mysticism of the self, even, in the Marcellian mode, a phenomenology of the self, it cannot be called a metaphysics of the self because metaphysics, as all science, employs the universalizing concept, which cannot handle subjective singularity. A philosophy of the person cannot be a philosophy, intelligible and communicable in philosophical language, of my person or any one person. A genuine philosophy of the person can only establish the essential, general characteristics of what a person, any person, is, in substance, power, action, possibility, and relationship. To express the uniqueness of my person or singular personality we are inevitably inclined to use symbolic language, evocative and connotative terms rather than definite and denotative language. In Indian thought mysticism and philosophy have not merely tended to collaborate and compliment but to fuse and be indistinct. Similarly, Marcel's personalist thought, employing as it does imagination and concrete imagery in analysis of authentic selfhood, confuses at times the tasks of philosophy and mysticism. However, while the realist may question that Marcel's thought represents genuine metaphysics, it cannot be doubted that his meditative but deeply critical reflection is an outstanding example of philosophic wisdom considering the bases of spiritual life. At one time Marcel intended writing a doctoral thesis, never actually begun, which was to have been

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[93] In brief, Maritain distinguishes 'natural mysticism' — that absolute experience of the substance of the self which is available to any man in virtue of his nature — from 'supernatural mysticism', which is the experience through charity and infused grace of the life of God, which is beyond man's nature. Cf. pp. 268 ff. in The Degrees of Knowledge.

> something like 'the philosophic foundations of mysticism.' Truthfully, the thesis was not lost, because, as things have developed, all that he has published since then has spoken of nothing else. It seems in any case certain that this first philosophy of the spiritual life aims at lived union rather than at abstract speculation, and that to sound the density of the mystery in which one is engaged interests him more than to extract a problematic in which its concrete character would be fatally lost.[94]

An instance of Marcel's personalist concentration is in his handling of the 'question' of individual existence. In all cases, he notes, where the skeptical doubt about self-existence is uttered — "I am not certain that I exist" — a subtle but radical disruption of reality has already occurred: "because the 'I' cannot in any case whatsoever be treated as a 'that', because the 'I' is the very negation of the 'that'".[95] It thus is an "existential indubitable",[96] not merely cogitative as Descartes would have it, or sensible, as certain forms of realism would apparently try to establish, but existential, that is, bound up with man's total experience of being — rational, sensory, affective, and fundamentally, intuitive. The self, whatever it is, obscurely yet certainly and really forms the basis for every thought or act, but it is a datum which "is not transparent to itself."[97] We cannot see or comprehend rationally what we are, anymore than we could have caused ourselves to be. "To recognize the non-transparency of the self is the supremely philosophical act: it is the intellectual counterpart of ontological humility."[98] The relating to or apperception of the self has been the fundamental concern of a number of philosophers in the idealist tradition, such as Immanuel Kant. The problem cannot be objectively treated, however, since this means a splitting of the self.

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[94] Gilson, op. cit., Existentialisme Chrétien, p. 8.

[95] MB, Vol. I, p. 110.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., p. 113.

[98] Kenneth T. Gallagher, The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel (New York: Fordham University Press, 1962), p. 7.

The question we need to ask is "Who am I?"

> But in the form, Who am I, the 'I' becomes objectively irreducible, but only self-consciously analyzable. This analysis is not into bits or parts because the 'I' has no parts, but into grounds or bases of the 'I'. It is elucidation of the structure of the 'I' without losing the identity of being in the distinctions.[99]

Marcel has given himself to such an elucidation of subjectivity which has maintained the integrity of the 'I'.

This inability to really objectify the self includes the bodily aspect of the self. It is incorrect to say that "I <u>have</u> a body", for having is in the mode of objectivity, of grasping something 'out there' which is separate from me. But "for me my body is not an object... rather, I <u>am</u> my body."[100] My body is not fundamentally an object (though it can, and sometimes must be treated by me as an object) but a subject.[101] It is precisely this attitude with regard to one's body that one needs to have extended to the entire realm of being. For none of us can merely be said to 'have' being, but rather to be, and to be in being. And just as an objective position with regard to one's body is for Marcel impossible, so an objective attitude towards being and existence is absurd. He doesn't say that "Being out there is such and such..." but "I find myself in Being, with Being, and this is what I find..." His emphasis on subjectivity inclines him to the philosophical position that 'being' is for me a subject, and that my relation to others is not in the mode of a knowing subject towards a known object, but somehow in the way of an exchange of subjectivities.

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[99] Poola T. Raju, "Life's Ideal's: East and West", <u>Proceedings of the XIIIth International Congress of Philosophy</u> (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1963), p. 219.

[100] MB, Vol. I, p. 123.

[101] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 124.

Personal Communion

Everyone knows that philosophers are concerned with truth. For Marcel it is not a process of discovering 'objective truth', but one of finding subjective meaning and truth, perhaps we could say of being profoundly truthful. And yet, though subjective truth is the philosopher's domain, Marcel would have us recognize that subjectivity may be extended beyond the realm of the individual self, and that we may somehow relate to the universe of people and things in a subjective manner, that is, in the way of inwardness and "encounter".[102] Subjectivity is the philosopher's concern, but it must be a participated subjectivity.

> It is probably true to say that the only metaphysical problem is that of 'What am I?' for all others lead back to this one. Even the problem of the existence of other consciousnesses is reducible to it in the last analysis. A secret voice which I cannot silence assures me in fact that if others are not there, I am not there either.[103]

Marcel thus situates the essence of philosophical inquiry in subjectivity, but in subjectivity bound, through 'presence' and transcendence, to other subjectivities. A human being who can speak about situation, personal circumstance, 'my position',"is not an autonomous whole, is not, in your expressive English phrase, self-contained; on the contrary such a being is open and exposed, as unlike as can be to a compact impenetrable mass."[104] The 'I' is not a self-contained, self-enclosed reality, but is founded and constituted in relationships with others. We become conscious of ourselves as persons only under circumstances which are "essentially social".[105] My very urge to inquire into existence is based upon a bond in being in which I find myself:

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[102] Ibid., p. 169.

[103] HV, p. 138.

[104] MB, Vol. I, p. 178.

[105] HV, p. 18.

"I concern myself with being only in so far as I have a more or less distinct consciousness of the underlying unity which ties me to other beings of whose reality I already have a preliminary notion."[106]

Marcel insists that the subjective character of his thought does not mean being purely, privately subjective. Pure subjectivism is the assertion only of the ego-maniac, and as such is barely distinguishable from hallucination. "Instead of subjectivity, we should think of intersubjectivity."[107] His thought is thus "a metaphysic of we are as opposed to a metaphysic of I think."[108] Self-enclosed thought is, strictly, irrelevant. But whereas too often in the past we thought the only escape from solipsism lay in objective thought, we need to recognize the superior character of discovering commonness in being through relating personally, familially, communally in intersubjectivity. Marcel holds that his philosophy cannot be called subjective in a pejorative sense because it escapes solipsism as man escapes aloneness in intersubjectivity.[109]

It is true of course that the authenticity of intersubjective experiences and concerns — as love, fidelity, creative presence — cannot be treated in the demonstrable way of empirical, scientific data. We touch here, in part, the area of the incommunicable and inexpressible. The philosopher's task is to attempt an honest expression, no doubt indirect and partially metaphorical, of his deepest subjective experiences and tendencies, and thereby to invoke in the hearer a recognized identity with his own experience. The

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[106] MB, Vol. II, p. 19.

[107] MB, Vol. I, p. 255.

[108] MB, Vol. II, p. 11.

[109] Cf. Gabriel Marcel, "What Can One Expect of Philosophy", Philosophy Today, Vol. III (Winter, 1959), p. 255.

recognition, as the expression, involves a humble admission, and illustrates how wisdom is not restricted to the intellectual realm but somehow bears upon the moral and spiritual dimensions of the person as well.

> We must, it is true, keep well in mind that intersubjectivity can never be looked upon as a mode of structure which can be stated or verified in any way; that would be to make it into a spurious sort of objectivity. The positive corollary of this is that the intersubjective can only be acknowledged freely, and that implies further that it is always within our power to deny it.[110]

A philosophy of intersubjectivity, which seeks 'answers' to being through subjects, will naturally enough bear almost exclusively upon being which is human or supra-human. The infra-human world of the physical cosmos will attract little attention for such a philosophy, though we may have the barest outlines in Marcel's thought for extending an intersubjective view to include, mutatis mutandis, all purely physical beings too. As our human life is made happy rather directly in proportion to our capacity to relate to persons, so philosophy or wisdom is authentic when its chief interest is persons. Whether my metaphysical vision is turned inward to reflect on the creative source of my being or outward to the needs of others, the significance and sustenance of personality is the philosopher's concern. Marcel says that his philosophical development

> has been dominated by two interests which at first seem contradictory; the first of these is more directly expressed in metaphysical terms, but still lies in the background at least, of almost all of my plays without exception. The latter is what I shall call the exigence of being; the first is the obsession with beings taken in their individuality but also affected by the mysterious relations which link them together.[111]

This exigence or authentic thrust of my spiritual being finds both its source and its fruition only in some form of communion or participation. Being tends to being; if being is anything it is participated and related. In speaking of

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[110] MB, Vol. II, p. 119.

[111] CF, p. 147.

significant personal friendships in his own life, Marcel notes:

> These encounters always appear in retrospect as having been called for from within my very self so that in such a domain the distinction between external and internal ultimately becomes irrelevant, or, more exactly, becomes absorbed into an harmonically richer reality.[112]

A Philosopher of Love

As we may expect, a philosophy in which persons are the supreme concern for reflection will be a philosophy which does not ignore considerations of love, and the moral order. Marcel's personalist metaphysics conceives an intimate relationship between the cognitive and moral areas of man, akin to that condition achieved in faith of "a kind of paradoxical synthesis of what we normally mean by the rather inadequate terms, intellect and will."[113] The philosopher who has not only an open mind but also an open 'heart' is the one who will perceive reality most truly. The philosopher who insists on reflecting on reality apart from the moral ground of his being will only reach the level of 'technical' philosophy, since his philosophic activity is restricted to the purely conscious, externalized, and manipulable area of thought. Moral disposition, then, is essential to philosophic wisdom. And a defective moral intention, particularly a disposition of vanity, is centrally damaging to the vision of philosophy.

> The metaphysical problem of pride — hubris — which was perceived by the Greeks and which has been one of the essential themes of Christian theology, seems to me to have been almost completely ignored by modern philosophers other than theologians. It has become a domain reserved for the moralist. Yet, from my own standpoint it is an essential — if not the vital — question[114]. For pride consists in drawing one's strength solely from oneself.

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[112] EB, p. 65.

[113] Gabriel Marcel, "Philosophical Atheism", International Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. II (December, 1962), p. 505.

[114] PE, p. 32.

As the principal fault of man finally is pride, so a principal failure of philosophy is to neglect a consideration of the nature and effects of pride. But of course philosophy cannot be chiefly given to examining defects, anymore than a man can reach maturity simply by recognizing his failures. Life and being is fundamentally sound, and it remains for the philosopher, as for any man, to positively promote being, my own and others', through love and a reflection upon love. To Marcel, intersubjectivity, which constitutes the center of true philosophy, points to the primacy of love. In fact we may say that to be intersubjective is to love. "Intersubjectivity, which it is increasingly more evident is the cornerstone of a concrete ontology, is after all nothing but charity itself."[115]

Transcendence

Marcel's analysis of the family of being involves a search or transcendence to others. Transcendence may, and often does, bear upon a relationship with human beings. It also signifies the unique form of other-relatedness to the Infinite, the Supreme 'Other'. Profound recognition of and dwelling with other human persons leads to the discovery of Divine personality which surrounds and also dwells within the human order. "It is impossible to think of personality or the personal order without at the same time thinking of that which reaches beyond them both, a supra-personal reality, presiding over all their initiative, which is both their beginning and their end."[116]

Marcel's ultimate metaphysical concern is not, as we have seen, with substance or with transcendentals ('being-as-such', 'beauty-as-such', etc.). He is concerned throughout with persons, and finally with God, the transcendent

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[115] MB, Vol. II, p. 191.

[116] HV, p. 26.

and infinitely personal Other. Being, no being, can be unless Being Itself is ultimately personal. The deeper one comes to the ground of his own existence, the more one discovers the interior riches and drama of others, the more one is led not to posit but to recognize a supreme and personal Presence within all. In this domain ordinary terms fail us almost entirely and we are led to the language of negative theology, or to positive affirmation in the way of imperfect metaphor, or, most perfectly, to an attitude of witnessing the indefinable but certain Presence, the inexpressible but concrete Person. In this most sublime and important of the philosopher's experiences definitive language fails totally and our usual sense of boundary is transcended. But, Marcel insists, the experience of personality at its primal source does not consist in a fusion of identities, one temporal the other eternal, one limited the other infinite. Persons, all persons, are permanent. There can be love and union only when there is perpetual distinction. Mutuality and marriage means duality embracing; it does not mean that the source of being absorbs beings. Union with the divine while retaining self-identity is explicit in Marcel's thought just as surely as he felt it was the main point in the metaphysics of Royce.[117]

It is of course possible to say that Marcel's philosophy is really just a disguised religion. His description of the ontological sources of personality, and of the necessity of personal transcendence does anticipate the religious order. It proceeds we may say to the threshold of mystical experience and the life of infused grace, as understood in Christian theology. The creative, participative quality of such realities as presence and fidelity gives a plausible reference to the religious order. But Marcel affirms that his thought <u>is</u> philosophical, not religious or theological as such. The certitude of Divinity which philosophical wisdom, as he approaches it, can

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[117]Cf. for example, MJ, p. 211, and RM, p. 36.

give us is to recognize at the basis of finite human life the existence of an infinite Personal Presence, whose countenance may be unveiled, however partially, only by religion. In fidelity to concrete being, his own and others', Marcel is led to affirm the existence of Being personified. Marcel

> is awake to being, attentive to being, bears witness to being, is faithful to being — attitudes that are similar enough to him and none of which he can talk about very long without attributing to it creative power. And right here we touch the threshold of 'ontological mystery'. Here we are at the point where the initial interrogation of man the pilgrim — a question about his own being — becomes a call and invocation. In recollection the I discovers something other and more deep than self. The I discovers an absolute Thou whose true name religion alone knows but toward whom philosophy can orientate us as toward a transcendent really beyond us. That is, if philosophy is true and faithful to concrete being.[118]

We have seen that Marcel is skeptical of rational approaches to deep human concerns. As we might expect, he holds no fondness for the traditional proofs for the existence of God, through arguments of causality, contingency, design, etc. Not only do such rational approaches to divinity tend to cut the inquirer off from his own relational existence to a transcendence, but they also fail to recognize the diverse attitudes which persons will have towards a potentially existent infinite and, as well, the diverse meanings attached to words used in the 'demonstration'. Marcel feels that such heterogeneity points to the need for compassion on the part of the philosopher. If transcendence in any sense means anything significant it means the capacity to somehow be and feel with others. If a transcendent being exists it cannot, in Marcel's view, be but absolutely immanent too. And insofar as the philosopher enjoys a favored vision in depth of life he is brought closer to, not taken farther from, individual persons.

> Transcendence ... lifts man's thought... to reach a superior serenity. But let us be careful that this superior serenity not be cold and far away, as could be termed that of the ancient sage, for this serenity retains within

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[118] Gilson, op. cit., "A Unique Philosopher", p. 281.

> itself something of the fevers or the sufferings over which it has triumphed, and this is the same as saying that it is, in the strongest sense of the word, compassion.[119]

Subjective Universality

As a dramatist, Marcel has attempted to seek a resolution to the fact and tragedy of human disagreement.[120] He believes that his plays and his musical interests have had a healing as well as illuminating effect, showing the final harmony, mysterious but certain, that may operate in existence. Secondary reflection, which is 'embracive' or 'global' in character, places the self in a context. By it I can not only recognize the interconnectedness of my life with being beyond, but may also be enabled to sympathetically relate to the convictions of others, and thereby affirm the reality of complementation as well as contradiction in belief, desire, goal, etc. Through his personalist philosophy Marcel has sought the truest dwelling-place of universality. And he feels that he has found it in profound subjectivity. Marcel contends that the assurance that the poet, the musician, the ordinary man in his poetic and profound moments has, the assurance that in the depths of his being he is somehow joined in experience with all men, is precisely the realm of universality which must be explored by a personalist metaphysics.

> Through the way of friendly persuasion and concrete evocation, the way of call and response, he points to the common universal ground of integral personal experience, the matrix from which all else that is human is derived, the constant point of origin and return.[121]

Marcel affirms that the philosopher not only seeks, but may find, a universality in his experience, but not in the objective manner of conceptual thought.

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[119] Marcel, op. cit., "The Finality of the Drama", p. 336.

[120] Cf. PE, p. 106.

[121] Cain, op. cit., p. 120.

> To be a philosopher is after all to think sub specie aeterni. But we must here point out a possible source of grave misunderstanding. That phrase is, in truth, ambiguous: it may mean that we intend to abstract from the experience which is necessarily peculiar to ourselves, to transport ourselves into a sort of mental stratosphere; or it can have an entirely different meaning.... To philosophize sub specie aeterni may mean something very different from just wiping the slate clean. It may mean devoting myself to understanding my own life as fully as possible; and where I use the word 'life' in that connection, I could equally well use the word 'experience'. If I try to do so, I shall most likely be led to a strange and wonderful discovery — that the more I raise myself to a really concrete perception of my own experience, the more, by that very act, shall I be attuned to an effective understanding of others, of the experience of others.[122]

A philosophy of participation points to the world met through subjectivity, just as science and rational philosophy sheds light on the world through objectivity. Surely neither approach can be neglected, but Marcel believes that we in the west have in fact largely ignored pursuit of wisdom through a subjective mode. We have improperly felt that subjectivity means fiction or at least isolation. We have failed too often to realize that subjectivity is the scene of the indubitable too, and that "the deeper you go into yourself the further along you are toward the meeting of someone else."[123] Each man is a world, a small world called to union with a vaster one. We have had the seed of such a vision in an idea "present to a long philosophic tradition, which is today too often abandoned, of man as microcosm; therefore one would be led to ask if it is not that microcosmic quality which would be able alone to found ontologically the transcendance of man."[124]

One other point of some interest may be made concerning Marcel's intersubjective philosophy which shows the linking of immanence and transcendence. This refers to his para-psychical interests. Early experiments about the time

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[122] MB, Vol. II, p. 6.

[123] Gilson, op. cit., "A Unique Philosopher", p. 280.

[124] Marcel, op. cit., "L'Aspect Existentiel...", p. 13.

of the first World War gave him assurance of the validity of telepathy and of some kind of experienced relationship with the dead. And, he holds, the subsequent years of philosophical reflection, and a conversion to Catholicism, has not dimmed his conviction of the reality of metapsychical phenomena. The result of experiments in early life

> made it impossible for me to doubt the reality of metapsychical phenomena.... I am as persuaded as ever [writing in 1947] that the philosopher must take metapsychical facts into consideration, and that he cannot assimilate these facts unless he discards certain speculative prejudices.[125]

Philosophy, Marcel says, cannot abstract itself from the subjective. Man cannot get outside of the being which he seeks to know, simply because he is part of that being. To abstract himself from it means precisely to destroy any possibility of an authentic grasp of being; for abstracting means destroying being. But if philosophy is so tied to the concrete and subjective, how does it escape the criticism of being meaningless to more than the individual? Marcel replies that it is in deep personal experience and concrete awareness of being that one enters the realm of universality. It is in the depths of spiritual life (understood not as a specifically religious form of awareness and bearing, but as that area of man's being which surpasses material and manipulative concerns) that one dwells with the meaning of human existence, of that which is somehow present to every mind and heart.

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[125] PE, p. 122. Cf, also EB, p. 42.

CHAPTER VI

MYSTERY AND AUTHENTICITY

Problem and Mystery

Marcel terms his philosophy an explicitation of experience,[126] but a particularly rich experience. He does not identify it with the refinements of the objectivized laboratory and controlled exterior technique, as in empiricism. Nor with the brutally isolated and 'purified' ideational data of phenomenology. Nor with the abstractive power and logical 'categories' of the intellect associated with idealism. Nor yet with the critical heightening of the common man's experience of meanings in nature and life as found in realism. Rather, he sees philosophic activity as a minute, sensitive, truthful awakening to consciousness of the ontological life of the human personality in its depths. It is, as it were, a dipping into the subconscious life of the personality (not in a psychoanalytic sense, but in a meditative and philosophic sense) to see the rapprochement that inward being bears toward outward being and life. It is as though our conscious reasons, or our reasons to the extent that they are ordinarily conscious, has been stained by categorizing, by the formalistic and frozen dicta of society, and that we must seek a new dimension of the personality for a more authentic and un-perverted, 'un-grooved' approach to life. Adherence to such a dimension may serve toward healing the stylized world of 'normal consciousness'.

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[126] PE, p. 128.

Marcel admits that his philosophy employs an unusual approach, tied up with the experiences and methods of music and art. But he disagrees with the allegation of objective philosophers that his thought, for all its richness, is not really philosophy. He believes that traditionally philosophers have held too limited a notion of philosophy. Philosophy does not, as Maritain insists, restrict itself to merely conceptual knowledge. The 'intuition' of the unique, concrete philosophy, philosophy in a situation, is possible if we accept the distinction, which Marcel makes, between 'problem' and 'mystery'.

> A problem is something met with which bars my passage. It is before me in its entirety. A mystery, on the other hand, is something in which I find myself caught up, and whose essence is therefore not to be before me in its entirety. It is as though in this province the distinction between in me and before me loses its meaning.[127]

A problem is that which may be handled universally, indiscriminately, because it is separate from any form of subjectivity. This is what is done in technics and to a large extent in the natural sciences. But philosophy is different; philosophy is also appropriate to mystery, that is to an awareness of inexhaustible and not fully conceptualizable depths. To ask the ultimate philosophical question "What is being?", is to place the questioner in a realm of reality and experience so rich, so immediate, so personal, that the elements cannot be grasped by the abstractive intellect. It is a mystery which must be dwelt with.

Marcel's notion of philosophy as a quest not for the conceptually intelligible character of being but for being as profoundly and authentically relatable, finds its keenest expression in his notions of 'mystery'. By mystery here, Marcel says that he does not mean those religious doctrines which the Christian churches often designate as mysteries. His philosophy deals with philosophical mysteries rather than, as Christianity, with revealed mysteries.

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[127] BH, p. 100.

> There is no question of confusing those mysteries which are enveloped in human experience as such with those mysteries which are revealed, such as the Incarnation or Redemption, and to which no effort of thought bearing on experience can enable us to attain.[128]

Nor does mystery signify unresolved problems, difficulties in the objective order which further experience may serve to unfold.

> Mystery is not, as it is for the agnostic, construed as a lacuna in our knowledge, as a void to be filled, but rather as a certain plenitude, and what is more, as the expression of a will, of an exigence that is so profound that it is not aware of itself and constantly betrays itself in forging false certainties.[129]

'At Home' to Being

By mystery, then, is signified those un-conceptualizable but really experienced factors of our lives and of existence which form the basis from which conceptualizable experience may proceed. Whereas the problematic is something wholly detached from me, wholly 'over there', the mysterious is an enveloping reality in which I too am present. It is inclusive, not exclusive. Mystery involves union and communion at each point, not separation. When I seek and experience the source of unity in my life, when I advert to the bonds which profoundly exist between myself and others, I am entering into the area of mystery. But it must be noted that this search and recognition does not involve the tension and thrust frequently associated with handling an objective problem. It is more a case of relaxation and a shedding of tensions, though of course not a slackness or slothfulness that tends to dissolution. "The easing of tension of which we are speaking here has its basis in consent or assent."[130]

We must, then, be willing to 'undergo' existence to touch the mysterious. In achieving this mysterious dimension, one discovers that the active thrust of

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[128] PE, p. 45. Cf. also CF, p. 80.

[129] CF, p. 152.

[130] MAMS, p. 69.

intelligence and will, though it remains of necessity, has not, perhaps, as much significance as a condition of 'actively undergoing' life. One doesn't seek truth as much as admit it; one doesn't seek to make a life and a philosophy as much as allow it to emerge.

> The truth is that, if I examine myself honestly and without reference to any preconceived body of ideas, I find that I do not 'choose' my values at all, but that I recognize them and then posit my actions in accordance or in contradiction with these values.[131]

The disposition, then, of a person toward the mysterious is one of 'spiritual availability', shown by an active readiness to be present to life and the living, to be open to others, to say 'Amen' to existence.

> Availability (disponibilité)... does not mean emptiness, as in the case of an available dwelling (local disponible), but it means much rather an aptitude to give oneself to anything which offers, and to bind oneself by the gift.[132]

This openness indicates the fundamental nature of participation, which is not just active or passive, but both. It is an attitude which is expressed in the French word chez. To be 'at home' to life is the basic attitude in relating to the mysterious.[133] It involves a positive receptiveness, a willingness to accept experience. Participation involves a welcoming of existence,[134] an interior sharing. This attitude of participating in the meta-problematic contains neither the pure passivity of inert matter nor the separatistic, dominating character of objective technology. The technician as such lives in the realm of having and the problematic; whereas the artist, for example, lives primarily in the realm of being and mystery. "The artist's ambition is

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[131] PE, p. 87.

[132] HV, p. 23.

[133] CF, p. 89.

[134] MB, Vol. I, p. 146.

possible only at the level of participation, while the technician's, on the other hand, in some sense implies a refusal to participate, a blank negation."[135]

Faith and Hope

Marcel's notion of mystery may be seen more fully if we examine two profound realities, faith and hope, which transcend the level of objective comprehension. Again it should be noted that the philosopher will not approach these topics in the specifically religious or supernatural way. That is the task of the theologian. But Marcel believes that the work of the philosopher is to profoundly consider those simple, basic attitudes of spirit which may be designated on the natural level as a kind of fidelity and hope and which prepare for a lived cooperation in grace with the divine theological virtues.

Faith, he says, is neither opinion nor conviction, both of which are relegated to the closed or exclusively finite level. Opinion is a claim or assertion about, and is uncertain. Conviction is presumably an unshakable and closed assertion, but it is still conviction _about_. Both may be said to illustrate broadly some faith _that_, whereas genuine faith is faith _in_...[136] Faith thus refers to a someone, to the realm of personality not fact or thing. This person is the one whom religions call God.

God is not an objective datum and, to Marcel, the fact that men cannot agree from objective analysis that there is a God illustrates this. God, if He exists, cannot be treated as an object. If He is, He is supremely Subject, and our relationship to Him can only be in the subjective mode, not in a detached, conceptual, objective way. God cannot be known through concepts _to be_. His existence cannot be demonstrated, for demonstration bears only upon

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[135] _Ibid._, p. 148

[136] MB, Vol. II, p. 86.

secondary realities. It cannot be brought to bear upon the substratum so to speak, of experience, for this would require in turn a return to an even more fundamental principle. In other words, demonstration requires that something be initially recognized, not assumed, but admitted and recognized. "That of which the existence was capable of demonstration would not be, and could not be, God."[137] The existence of God has a priority which cannot be submitted to rational analysis. His existence as my own is not as such matter for conceptual examination. And His being as my own being is indubitable if I have not deliberately rejected the possibility of admitting such, or God has not, for reasons truly mysterious, made His sacred Presence almost totally obscure. In any event, that Presence, which is never really gone, is present or not present <u>to me</u> before any process of rational inquiry.

> If God is treated as a metaphysical <u>that</u> on which we make judgments that we expect to be in harmony with one another, the result is chaos. But is there any need for God to be either <u>that</u> or to be nothing?... If God is essentially a <u>thou</u>, for whom I exist, for whom I matter and who perhaps is only for me inasmuch as he wills to be, it is easy to understand that he is capable of not being for my neighbor. (The ideal substitutions of subject for subject which makes objective knowledge possible are strictly impossible here.) Hence we see why no demonstration of the existence of God is possible. There is no logical transition by which we can mount up to God from a starting point which is not God.[138]

Faith is at home only in the realm of mystery. God is not discovered through rational inference but is recognized and affirmed to exist from the deep call in the ground of one's immanence and in the exigence or 'surge' of one's being toward a transcendent Other. As God's existence cannot be treated as a datum for science, neither can strictly empirical or rational techniques determine the validity of prayer, the ordinary form of human communication with the divine. In Marcel's view, prayer, true, humble prayer, is in a real sense

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[137] MJ, p. 228.

[138] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 262. CF. also Marcel, <u>op. cit.</u>, "Philosophical Atheism", p. 503.

infallible.[139] It is impossible to imagine genuine, other-centered prayer not being answered, for prayer extends the person beyond the dimension of self to the One whose essence is gift and creativity. It is unthinkable that the person who is not self-enclosed, who has generously opened to transcendence, will not in turn be impregnated, in some way, by the Source of life. Of course the value or reality of the prayerful act cannot be known in an empirical manner. Genuine prayer, like all the great values which find their well-spring in the depths of the person (such as being, freedom, humility) comes from a source which is beyond the communicable, determinable, and problematic. These values are meta-problematic realities and tend to a fruition which transcends the observable level.

Hope, too, is something which can have meaning only if we admit a meta-problematic area in human experience. Like faith, naturally understood, hope is a proper concern for the philosopher. Many a philosopher would be inclined to shift this topic to a psychological or religious area for examination and analysis. But for Marcel hope is one of the significant experiences establishing for the philosopher the actual lines of being which he is called to investigate; in this case we may say a line of interconnected being by which I seem called to an attachment beyond myself. It of course involves the recognition of transcendence. "Hope seems to me, as it were, the prolongation into the unknown of an activity which is central — that is to say, rooted in being."[140] The activity of hope, as that of faith, somehow hangs upon, is related to, a certainty of being beyond me, but not separate from me. It is not adhesion to a pattern, a mold, a human ideal, a principle in abstraction, a

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[139] MB, Vol. II, p. 114.

[140] PE, p. 33.

dream, or a wish. It is related to an intangible but real presence. In other words, hope consists more in 'hoping in' than in 'hoping for',[141] as belief implies 'believing in' rather than 'believing that'. Hope cannot be called a mere emotion, useful for pushing or pulling us beyond ourselves. It is a creative attitude found in communion with another. "Hope is always associated with a communion, no matter how interior it may be. This is actually so true that one wonders if despair and solitude are not at bottom necessarily identical."[142]

As with other characteristics of authentic personality, Marcel sees the need for an ontological humility, a lack of tautness about our fundamental being, in order that hope may flourish. There is a "secret affinity between hope and relaxation."[143] Thus hope is not a struggling but a resting, a resting in the deep condition of personal being, and a resting which tends to acknowledge the transcendent Other.

> It is as if hope were situated in another dimension of which it could be said that it is that of humility and patience, a patience which is perhaps a profound and secret characteristic of life. If then we say, as we must, that hope is the act by which the temptation to despair is actively overcome, we must add that this victory is not necessarily accompanied by a feeling of effort; it is even linked to relaxation rather than to tension. But it should be stressed that this relaxation is not, and must not be, a slackening.[144]

Mysterious Knowing

Mystery is fundamental to life. A world from which mystery has vanished, is a world in which life is not worth living. It is a world without charm and surprise and gift, without wonder or adoration. As one of the characters in Marcel's play L'Iconoclaste puts it, "You wouldn't be content in the long run

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[141] HV, p. 45.

[142] Ibid., p. 58.

[143] Ibid., p. 39.

[144] EB, p. 142.

with a world from which mystery has been swept away. Man is like that."[145] Marcel has devoted his philosophic work to accentuating this truth. And truth it is, he contends. Mystery is not an excuse for neglecting painstaking research or a blanket for one whose faith has been disproven or a sedative in the face of the horrors of life. It is, precisely, the condition of deep personal being at the vestibule of the transcendent source of life. And it is a condition which philosophy cannot afford to ignore. Philosophers must struggle against their perennial tendency to rationally and fully comprehend life:

> Whatever its ultimate meaning, the universe into which we have been thrown cannot satisfy our reason, let us have the courage to admit it once and for all. To deny it is not only scandalous, but in some ways truly sinful; and indeed I am convinced that this is precisely the besetting sin of the philosopher.[146]

In relating philosophically to the realm of mystery it is necessary, as we have seen, to transcend conceptual categories. Being which is mysterious is not, at least for humankind, intelligible. If then we cannot depend upon the intelligibility of being as the realist is determined to, nor on the empirically verifiable as the more positivistic philosopher would insist, what is our criterion for judgment — or recognition — or appreciation — or whatever word the Marcellian kind of thinker would prefer to use to indicate real contact with being? In place of the 'verifiability' or 'intelligibility' of being, I suggest that we work with the term 'authenticity' of being. Unlike Heidegger, and even Sartre, Marcel has not generally employed the term, but it seems to me to be as effective as any other in coming a little more to grips with the nature of genuine philosophical experience, as Marcel understands it.

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[145] Reproduced in EB, p. 52.

[146] PE, p. 124.

The meaning of the term in this context will, I trust, come to light in the following pages.

Marcel says that "provided it is taken in its metaphysical and not its physical sense, the distinction between the full and the empty seems to me more fundamental than that between the one and the many."[147] Such a statement may on the one hand indicate his preference for unicity (since 'full' may refer to a single being in its perfection) and manifest a distrust for plurality. On the other hand, a predilection for 'fullness' may not indicate a rejection of plurality or an identifying of it with emptiness, but merely — and this is most characteristic of Marcel — that fullness may globally and holistically incorporate the distinctions, rather frozen and impenetrable distinctions, sometimes existing in the frame of the one and the many.

Obviously, fullness cannot be reached even with respect to a single intellectual apperception unless the totality of the knowing subject is involved in the act of knowing. This means of course that the ratiocinative intellect is insufficient to achieve globalness, precisely because, like the bulk of the iceberg which remains hidden beneath the surface, the greater 'part' of the reality of thought is under the surface of the ratiocinative dimension. Also, the fullness of philosophical nourishment can only come when in addition to the intellectual and specifically cognitive regions of personality, the volitional and specifically affective areas are also engaged. Marcel thus seeks a totality of philosophical apperception which would have the whole man in act. In a philosophy of the concrete, in which there is an intimate connection among thought, affection, and action, the appropriateness of the common existential terminology becomes evident. 'Engagement',

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[147] Ibid., p. 12.

'involvement', 'commitment' — these are words suggesting a person who has proceeded from intellectual conviction to heartfelt, personal action.

This is not to say, as Marcel constantly remarks, that he would have philosophy turned into poetry or psychology or religion. Philosophy remains a quest for wisdom, a search for knowing in its deepest significance, and it proceeds only through the keenest reflection. Of course, the mysterious area of the center of the self and its found relationships with the other beings of life does not seem to admit of direct conceptual handling. So, Marcel says, we have to 'attack' the basic elements of being by following the sometimes circuitous wanderings of impression, feeling, emotions, and thoughts in a concrete, topographical way, and attempt to elucidate the experience by carefully chosen and constantly corrected metaphor. Through a phenomenological awareness of the interior sources of life, Marcel attempts to re-tell the whole of the life impulses in their tending to love, freedom, and God. He attempts a quiet vision of the acts of consciousness and the 'calling' from the unconscious life of the spirit. In capturing the echos of the spirit, it might be said that the method and presentation of Marcel is 'musical', involving a coming-to-grips, without distorting or breaking the realities which he is holding to, with the great tendencies of the meta-sensory in man, a meeting and wandering with the 'music' of mind following heart in its own activities. Thus, he is bound to escape the more schematic formulas and presentations of idealistic, realistic, and positivistic philosophers, since his greatest effort is to explicate the meandering path of intuition.

Intuition

Marcel is generally wary of using the term 'intuition'. In ordinary

understanding it seems to somehow supplant intellect, and he is far from wanting to do this, particularly if intuition has anything of the brutish or wishful about it. For him, the global sense which he describes as secondary reflection constitutes generally what is genuine in intuition.

> I shall always view with a certain distrust philosophical teachings that purport to rest upon intuition. I have tried to show that reflection can present itself under two different and complementary forms: the one being purely analytic and 'reducing' (this is primary reflection) and the other, on the contrary 'recuperative' or, if you will, synthetic. It is precisely the latter that rests upon being — not upon an intuition but upon a certitude which blends with what we call our soul.[148]

Marcel is not for replacing the concept with intuition. The concept is a necessary element of heuristic philosophy,[149] so long as it is not hypostatized and made the sole means by which wisdom can be approached. The other, and deeper, means may be called intuition if we choose, but we must realize that it cannot be thought to have the usual sense of means or instrument, that is, something that we can work with to deliver results. "Intuition in an existential philosophy such as this is not something that lies at our disposal, something we have, but rather it is a source, in itself inaccessible, from which we set out to think."[150] If we can keep the word intuition free from the esoteric or privileged associations it has sometimes had and use it to refer to the global sense of being which every man has (though admittedly in some it is almost undeveloped), Marcel would be willing to use the term. In one of Marcel's plays, Ariadne, the principal character says: "I don't much like the word 'intuition'. It's been too cheapened. But it's the only word for a kind of certainty which sometimes comes upon me, suddenly. It's more than an idea.

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[148] Marcel, op. cit., "What Can One Expect of Philosophy", p. 261.

[149] Marcel, op. cit., Introduction to De L'Existence á L'Etre, p. 282.

[150] MJ, p. x.

I feel possessed."[151] It is the nature of this possession, we may even say this sacred possession, which it has been Marcel's concern to evoke.

Authenticity — Criterion of Mysterious Truth

Marcel holds that because a philosopher's reflection necessarily begins in a situation, he cannot depend alone on the conceptual mode of thought, tending as it does to artificially categorize. Concepts bestow logical clarity, but this sort of clarity is exactly what we cannot have when we reach a certain level of interior or intersubjective experience, a level which we may call intuitive, a level which is profounder and less-clear but not less certain than the experiences expressible in the daylight of conscious reason. Reflection occurs in a situation, in which the subject immediately and obviously finds himself somehow related to the other. Philosophy consists in this, in following with critical accuracy the lines of being and relationship from the depths of the I to the other, in such a way that I clearly and authentically analyze and express my situation in being. Clearly, for analysis must be astute, words must, in so far as they can, really express or evoke the perceived or recognized subjective reality. Authentic, for a phenomenology of this sort involves, let us admit, a kind of purity of heart as well as mind. If I find in myself a need, for example, for transcendence to a mysterious Absolute Other, how do I determine whether this need has a real point, whether there is in fact a Divine Other? Only by determining if the 'surge' or impulse or exigence of my whole being towards another is authentic. Marcel's handling of the desire <u>that there be a God</u> is different from a traditional line (associated with Augustinism) which would take the impulse for the Infinite as a noble point of departure to analyze

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[151]Gabriel Marcel, <u>Ariadne</u>, in <u>Three Plays of Gabriel Marcel</u> (London: Secker and Warburg, 1952), p. 144.

whether in fact the objective world can tell us anything of the actual existence of such a Being. Marcel believes, rather, that in examining the desire, the hope, the thought, the whole collectivity of the personal tendency to assert that 'Thou Art' one can achieve greater certitude than any objective 'proof' could ever bestow. If this personal tendency runs deep, if it is a healing tendency, if it is most essentially and genuinely connected with the I that I am, Marcel holds that to deny the authenticity of such a tendency is as absurd as denying the very bases of my life. Experience, authentic experience, rather than intelligibility, is the fundamental concern of the philosopher.[152] By "an authentic philosophy ... I mean a philosophy which is experience transmuted into thought."[153] But this experience, this certitude, is at base "not rational or logical but existential."[154]

This deeper area, the domain of the real philosopher as well as the poet and the mystic, cannot be reduced to empirical or logical-intelligible terms. To try to do so is a perversion. The tendency of idealism and realism to conceptually define the ground or basis of faith, the so-called natural dispositions, defeats its apologetic since it is an effort to conceptualize the unconceptualizable depths.[155] If the philosopher wants to relate to this realm of mystery, and to relate he should, he must realize that his experience, which he will want to "transmute into thought", cannot be transmuted into the thought of conceptual language. "Concerning the source of illumination, I would add that it consists in somehow immersing one's self again in the original source beyond all utterance, and hence all conceptualization."[156] Marcel wishes "to assert the

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[152] CF, p. 14.

[153] Ibid., p. 26.

[154] Ibid., p. 15.

[155] Ibid., p. 9.

[156] EB, p. 86.

rights of a phenomenology in the light of which the primacy of experience over what could be called pure thought must be rigorously preserved."[157] There is an underland of being which conceptual thought cannot touch. Every man can recognize this mysterious depth, and in fact constantly pre-supposes it.

> Doesn't the very fact of living, in the full sense we give the word when we refer to our life, human life, imply for anyone who considers the matter carefully, the existence of a kind of metaphysical Atlantis, incapable by nature of being explored but whose presence actually confers on our experience its body, meaning and mysterious density?[158]

This realm of mystery, this realm of personal being that is preconceptual, can only be touched by authenticity, by a kind of holistic relating of the entire person. The only guarantee that one is 'right' and 'true' in this region is whether the assertion of truth can, one would be inclined to say, 'find a home' in the depths of my being. Such expressions as 'ringing true', a 'fitting truth', 'sounds right', indicate on a plebian level the sort of ring and fittingness in authenticity which Marcel attributes to real relationship with being as it is. But how do we move in such a dark land? Where are the comparative and sharable yardsticks for genuine experience? In our quest for authenticity we seem lost in a realm so tenuous that we wonder if there can be any solid guide to test authenticity, to rout rationalizing and honest error. This, perhaps, is the task of the philosopher like Marcel who is exploring the intellectual land between the daylight of reason and the depths of the unconscious: to push back into the personal dimension of mystery the power of thought and critical reflection, as far as it can go, and to express and evoke in hard-won and communicable terms the reality experienced. Wisdom then becomes, in more ways than one, the heuristic enterprise Marcel claims for

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[157] Ibid., p. 96.

[158] CF, p. 92.

it. Not only is the search of the man of wisdom, when he views the world outside himself, like that of the traveler on a road which reaches he knows not where, but in his interior evocations he is engaged on an unplotted land of psychic experience. It is a land where image and symbol normally find a home and which the Marcellian kind of thinker is called to elucidate through secondary reflection. It is a region where the concept as such is homeless, not only because the concept deals with the general and we are here in a world of radical singularity and uniqueness but because the concept depends on a material referent through abstraction and in this region we touch the simplicity of absolute spirituality.

In this 'lower' level of psychic experience, our norm is authenticity. The basic assertion of scientific knowledge is that real facts can be known; of philosophical knowledge ordinarily understood, that being is intelligible. With both assertions Marcel would agree, although he seems to equate the intelligibility of essential knowing with the knowing and evidences of empirical science. But, he holds, beyond such certain knowledge, which is expressible, discussional, manipulable, there lies a deeper area of personal knowing and authentic contact with reality. Perhaps Marcel has succeeded in showing us that there is an authentic pre-conscious ordering to life as well as an authentic conscious one. If we identify accurate science and philosophy as being an adequation of reason with its intelligible object and insist that there is authenticity in this area — as well as error or inauthenticity — is it not appropriate to hold that there is a true, authentic ordering of the pre-conscious depths of man with life and being? Marcel, we may say, is the philosopher of such authenticity, rather than a philosopher of intelligibility; he is concerned with relating the totality of man's life — not merely his intellect — to being.

Philosophy thus seen is for Marcel a global wisdom. Technology, science,

and a certain rationalized and logicized kind of philosophy deals with the partial, the amputated, the problematic. But genuine philosophy, like art and religion, deals with the totality of being, with the wholeness of being. In fact, Marcel would say, this is the only way to which being can be related, in the way of wholeness. Being, whether my being, or the being of the other, human or sub-human, finite or Infinite, simply cannot be apprehended by reason or any form of analysis that would restrict, confine, dis-engage some aspect of the being.[159] In truth, such terms as 'apprehension' are indicative of a partial, non-mysterious, and non-philosophical approach to being. Strictly speaking, being cannot be apprehended or 'grasped'; it can only be 'dwelt with.'[160] It is known by being participated in, not by being apprehended. It is achieved in communion, not in objective vision.

The Transcendental in the Concrete

Marcel's fundamental point, then, involves situating man again in his totality, open to all of the depths of the self and to the vast and mysterious realm of being outside or beyond him. His philosophy is eminently concrete and yet transcendental. But not transcendental in a medieval and Thomist sense of relating to the transcendental analogicity of being and such 'divine names' referent to all reality as being, the true, the good, etc. Nor transcendental in the Kantian sense of the noumenal order which practical reason but not pure reason can achieve. He is unlike the Thomist in that he does not seek a science of being-as-such, and unlike the Kantian in that he does not employ an 'as if' categorical maxim. It is true that he sounds Kantian in certain expressions, as when he says, for example, about hope, that it

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[159] PE, p. 14.

[160] Ibid., p. 18.

> consists in asserting that there is at the heart of being, beyond all data, beyond all inventories and all calculations, a mysterious principle which is in connivance with me, which cannot but will that which I will, if what I will deserves to be willed and is, in fact, willed by the whole of my being.[161]

But it is clear from Marcel's position that what hope infallibly hangs upon is not a maxim or a 'principle', but a being too, a presence.

It is true that Marcel is like the Thomist in that he sees transcendence eventually bringing us to persons, and like the Kantian in that concrete moral tendencies, as well as cognitive ones, are of significance for philosophy. But Marcel's philosophy never dwells for a moment with a transcendental — 'as such' or 'as if'. He is supremely concerned with persons, and his metaphysical efforts as well as his ethics is directed toward a greater realization of one's personal meaning and depth and with one's being with other persons in the community of being.

Drama and Music: Other Paths to the Experience of Being

It is here, with this presentation of Marcel's notion that universality is achieved through concrete authentic depth, that we may look, in brief, at the bearing that drama has had upon his philosophy.

> My dramatic work, far from constituting an entirely separate compartment of my life, completes indissolubly my philosophical or, I might say, technical writings, whether in diary or lecture form.... My plays might be compared to an underground stream whose overflow, often scarcely perceptible, irrigates, as it were, my speculative thought.[162]

Marcel's activity as a dramatist contains the most powerful affirmation of his contention that the modes of artistic and philosophical knowing are not as dissimilar as traditionally believed. His dramas contain the seed of all

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[161] Ibid., p. 28.

[162] EB, p. 5.

his later major philosophical notions; these notions first emerged in this inchoate form, where they live in the context of human situations and struggles.

> The dramatic mode of thought, dealing as it does with subjects as such — that is to say, with their reality as subjects — illustrated and confirmed in advance all that I was later to write on the purely philosophical plane concerning knowledge in its capacity to transcend objectivity.[163]

Marcel's dramatic work feeds his philosophy. 'Feeds' is a better term than 'gives expression to', for the plays of Marcel are not didactic works which have been directed in creation by a philosophical position. They are, rather, expressions of the interior dialog which engages Marcel in his consideration of the very persons who make up the plays. They are harbingers rather than echoes of his thought. Many themes which have appeared in his later essays and lectures found their first issue in earlier plays, where the ideas virginally appeared.

Marcel's chief notions of participation, communion, fidelity, and transcendence constitute the themes of the dramas. It is of course eminently fitting that one of the leading personalist philosophers of the century should also be a dramatist, since this form of literary expression is at heart a presentation in small of the total human drama of people in search for each other and ultimate meanings. The dramatic form, dealing with particular human lives, is the antithesis of the spirit of abstraction. Marcel admits that it was an early love of the drama which countered his idealist tendings in philosophy.[164] But far from curtailing his philosophical interests, the drama has offered his philosophy its surest footing. "I am convinced that it is in drama and through drama that metaphysical thought grasps and defines itself <u>in concreto</u>."[165] Drama, if it is true to the persons who constitute it, can serve

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[163] PE, p. 107

[164] EB, p. 20.

[165] PE, p. 26.

to put us in touch with the universality and infinite that dwells within each of us.

> Here lies what I consider to be the chief function of the theater: not to relate the particular to the general or to a law or to an idea, but to awaken or re-awaken in us the consciousness of the infinite which is concealed in the particular. To my mind, in this way alone can the dramatist penetrate to our center and arrive at that zone of concrete universality which music and metaphysics reach by other convergent ways.[166]

Like his dramatic works, Marcel's musical interests — composition, improvization, and musical criticism — complements and supports his philosophical reflections. To him, music and philosophy both stem from the same metaphysical source. He feels that true philosophical work is an expression in language of the same visions and experiences which music transmutes into sound; and he likens his philosophical activity to music more than to mathematics or logic.[167] Conversely, music is philosophy in a wordless language. For Marcel, music has been the 'ground soil' of his philosophical reflection, which took the place of the intimate contact with nature which he as a city-dweller has not had. Like drama and philosophy, music is an expression of the bond in personal existence, of the experience of intersubjectivity. "Music appears as the sensuous, and at the same time supra-sensuous, expression of that intersubjectivity which opens philosophic reflection to the discovery of the concrete thou and us."[168] And like philosophy, music has pointed to the curative need of global recognitions. More, music has offered the basic assurance to Marcel of the ultimate unity and harmony of being, which his notion of secondary reflection has served to elucidate on the philosophical level.

> I think I can say without hesitation that it is music, and music almost exclusively, which has been for me an unshakable testimony of a deeper

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[166] "The Drama of the Soul in Exile", preface to op. cit., Three Plays by Gabriel Marcel, p. 27.

[167] HV, p. 7.

[168] EB, p. 50.

> reality in which it seemed to me that everything fragmentary and unfulfilled on the sensory level would find fulfillment.[169]

It is worth noting in this connection, that perhaps Marcel's evocative philosophy, which seems so poetic at times, even 'musical', has served to make us aware of the possibility of the philosopher approaching being in modes other than through 'insight' and 'intellectual vision'. Marcel has tried to point out the possible tyranny that the 'intellectually visible' has had in western philosophy. He says, for example:

> When people talk of drawing back from life to see it in perspective they are letting themselves be deceived by metaphors from optics which, in this realm of discourse, have no valid application. I am not sure that a serious writer ought still to speak at all of 'existentialism'; for, day by day, in a certain kind of newspaper in France, this word is put to quite thoughtless uses. But we ought perhaps to say that the merit of existentialist philosophy, in so far as we can properly speak of such a thing at all, consists more than anything else in transcending and rejecting the mode of thought which has become incarnate in optical metaphors.[170]

Thus, we in the west are inclined to admit into philosophical language cognitive equivalents of only the sense of sight. We speak of 'insight' and 'vision', and, most frequently perhaps, of 'seeing' (a truth, the answer to a problem, etc.). And even when we use such terms as 'comprehend' and 'grasp' it seems there is an implicit relevance to somehow being illuminated or seeing. But where in the mainstream of our western philosophy do we find cognitive equivalents not merely of the sense of sight but also of, say, the audial or tactual senses? Is it possible that any philosophy of authenticity will have to be one which, like Marcel's, uses meta-sensory equivalents of more than the power of sight? One commentator has said of Marcel that his "philosophical stance is essentially auditory, rather than optical."[171] Perhaps we require far more of an auditory or acoustic philosophy, not to say of a somesthetic or olfactory one.

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[169] Ibid., p. 21.

[170] MAMS, p. 29.

[171] Cain, op. cit., p. 14.

CHAPTER VII

RELEVANT THEMES IN INDIAN THOUGHT

In the following pages it is my intent to explore briefly several themes in Indian philosophy that have a peculiar relevance to the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel. A number of the major notions of Indian thought are deeply similar to the main points in Marcel's thought. This is not to say that there are not some considerable differences too. For example, there is not a trace of pantheism or monism in Marcel's writings, and the monistic tendency of a good deal of Indian speculation is well known. Even so, we realize that there is a strong and permanent minor current in Indian philosophy which definitely disavows pantheism or monism in any form and asserts the eternal duality of the human and the divine. However, my concern will not be with this issue either. I am intent merely upon identifying, through the writings of a number of modern representatives or scholars of Indian thought, several themes evidently common both to this branch of Oriental speculation and to the great French personalist philosopher. It seems that the thought of Gabriel Marcel may offer us considerable possibilities for further rapprochement with the metaphysics of India. I am restricting myself to a brief examination of three characteristics of Indian philosophy which are also found centrally in Marcel's philosophy: participation, or man's relationship with the universe of being; presence, or participation with the divine; and the pre-conceptual, intuitive, or 'authentic' dimension of man's experience.

Indian thought has centered around the development of the notions of Atman and Brahman, "which have been described as the 'two pillars on which rests

nearly the whole edifice of Indian philosophy.'"[172] Atman is absolute consciousness, the inner self of man; Brahman is absolute existence, the final source of the world beyond the self.[173] Each expresses an ultimate tendency in early Indian speculation. One current of speculation concentrated on the psychic realm, the deepest meaning of man's inner life, on immanence. Another current concentrated on the physical world, the ultimate meaning and source of the cosmos, on transcendence. The great insight in Indian philosophy occurred when somehow these two supreme notions coalesced.

> What is remarkable about these terms [Atman and Brahman] is that, though entirely different in their original connotation and though occasionally bearing it still in Upaniṣadic passages, they come to be prevailingly used as synonymous — each signifying alike the eternal source of the universe including nature as well as man. The development of the same significance by these two distinct terms means that the Indian, in the course of his speculation, identified the outer reality with the inner; and by such a happy identification at last reached the goal of his long quest after unity.[174]

Being thus was unified, or seen as unified, and this experience of unity is one which any man may achieve since it does not require an abstruse, objective theorizing, but only a recognition, through meditation and concentration, of the bases of the self. Thus one can be led to a "realization within oneself of the unity underlying the multiplicity of the universe."[175] Plurality is not disconnected; there is a bond among beings, and the self is the center of the bond. "The self is the core of being, the inner thread by being strung on which the world with all its variety exists. It is the real of the real,

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[172] M. Hiriyanna, Outlines of Indian Philosophy (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1932), p. 54.

[173] Ibid., p. 55.

[174] Ibid.

[175] Ibid., p. 77.

satyasya satyam."[176] Each man is a world, but a world related, to the center of other persons, and to the infinite source of all existence. The subjective universality of the self participates in the unlimited.

> There is a real ground in man's deepest being for the experience of reality. Man as a microcosm has relations with every form of existence.... In the spiritual experience itself, the barriers between the self and the ultimate reality drop away. In the moment of highest insight, the self becomes aware not only of its own existence but of the existence of an omnipresent spirit of which it is, as it were, a focusing.[177]

This unified experience breaks down the abnormal divisions which we make between subject and object.[178] Such a full state of consciousness places us in a timeless realm, not the lifeless one of abstract concepts, but the living one of creative union with the depth of the soul and God. In the depths of the self one comes upon the other, and thus true subjectivity leads us necessarily to intersubjectivity. "Spirits in unity with themselves must in the end be in unity with one another."[179] The person who denies the interconnectedness of reality only tends to annihilate himself. Man cannot achieve life and beatitude unless he recognizes the communitarian character of being. "A single impulsion runs beneath all the adventures and aspirations of man. It is the soul's experience of the essential unity with the whole of being that is brought out in the words 'Thou in me and I in Thee'. Fellowship is life, lack of fellowship death."[180] This interdependence of human beings is so essential, that divinity cannot be experienced without it. So deep is the participative nature of being, that only if men will love one another can they experience divine love and life.

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[176] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Eastern Religions and Western Thought (New York: Oxford University Press, Galaxy Book edition, 1959), p. 30.

[177] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, "Religious Experience and Its Affirmations", A Source Book in Indian Philosophy, edited by S. Radhakrishnan and C. A. Moore (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 626.

[178] Ibid., p. 617.

[179] Radhakrishnan, op. cit., Eastern Religions and Western Thought, p. 46.

[180] Ibid., p. 32.

> The spiritual individual acts out of that sense of oneness which gives him immediate and direct perception of the demand of self on other self, the need of life, the good, the work of love and sympathy that can truly be done. A realization of spiritual unity, a dynamization of the intimate consciousness of one-being, of one self in all beings, can alone found and govern by its truth the action of the divine life.[181]

The supremest point of man's experience of the fellowship of being is in union with the divine. Like every true union this one is interior. God is not a thing to be grasped, he is a reality which can only be experienced and admitted. He is Presence, not thing, the absolutely within (immanence) and the absolutely without (transcendence). Union with the infinite is so interior that it can be said that our ordinary language distinguishing object and subject no longer has meaning in this experience. In the third stage of mystical ascent, the

> stage of samadhi or identification, the conscious division and separation of the self from the divine being, the object from the subject, which is the normal condition of unregenerate humanity, is broken down. The individual surrenders to the object and is absorbed by it. He becomes what he beholds. The distinction between subject and object disappears.[182]

This experience is in the highest sense one of spirit and life, not thing and object. It is an experience of the real source of being, not merely a psychic phenomenon. It is an experience of that which in some way is really other than the self, but not other in the objective mode of separation. The divine is present, but its presence cannot be demonstrated, only realized. "God is not an object like other objects in nature. God is spirit which is distinct from the knowing subject or the known object. All proofs for the existence of God fail because they conceive of God as an objective reality."[183]

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[181] Sri Aurobindo, from a selection from The Life Divine, reproduced in op. cit., A Source Book in Indian Philosophy, p. 608.

[182] Radhakrishnan, op. cit., Eastern Religions and Western Thought, p. 50.

[183] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, "The Spirit in Man", Contemporary Indian Philosophy, edited by S. Radhakrishnan and J. H. Muirhead (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), p. 275.

The divine, which is eternal and without limitation, cannot be ascended to in the way of logical inference. He is prior to every postulate and his existence is not deducible from the material and limited world. Every demonstration of God's existence that has even the semblance of truth, is merely a disguised assertion of what was recognized prior to analysis. And every tendency toward the divine is itself divinely inspired. In a text reminiscent of Marcel's view that we can only come to the divine if we have begun from the divine, Radhakrishnan says

> Brahman, which is the Sanskrit word for the Absolute, is the principle of search as well as the object sought, the animating ideal and its fulfillment. The striving of the soul for the infinite is said to be Brahman. The impulse that compels us to raise the question of the true, the divine, is itself divine.[184]

This experience of the Absolute marks the apex of Indian metaphysical speculation and practice. It bears a strong resemblance to Marcel's notion that in sensing the depth of the self one also somehow encounters other human persons and the Divine Other. As seen from the usual standpoint of Christian theology it represents an authentic experience but one largely 'natural' and not specifically divine. However, Christian theologians in association with Indian thought are perhaps not so inclined to consign this spiritual experience to an experience of the soul alone. One recognized theologian now living in India has expressed his understanding of this experience in these terms:

> This Hindu experience, though it has various forms and may not be altogether adequate in many ways, is a very great thing. Jacques Maritain and other philosophers have explained it as ultimately an experience of the soul in its inmost depths; through it we get beyond the world of the senses, beyond our imaginations, beyond all the world of thought which always occupies us, until we reach the inner center where the soul is resting in itself. Maritain calls it an 'experience of the substantial being of the soul, the soul in its ground of reality.' That surely is something very real and I think many of us have an unconscious desire for it. But I

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[184] Radhakrishnan, op. cit., Eastern Religions and Western Thought, p. 22.

think this is important: the experience of the soul in its depths is not an experience of the soul alone; indirectly at least God is encountered, the source of life, the source of being.[185]

We have seen that Marcel's philosophy affirms the need for including all experience — not merely rational cognitive experience — but all experience, rational, sub-rational, and supra-rational, cognitive and affective, in the philosophic act. Similarly, the Indian thinker would want to include all experience, all manners of relating to being, within the philosopher's domain. Perhaps we can say that whereas the typical philosopher in the west has been anxious to be faithful to empirical or intelligible experience, the Indian philosopher attempts a fidelity to all experience. This brings us to the assertion of the Indian thinker that we need to allow the deliverances of intuition into philosophy. Here, we take intuition generally to mean that authentic pre-conceptual experience which Marcel says is available to us in such acts as secondary reflection.

In the depths of man's spirit lies a region which supports conscious reason. "Behind our conscious self is our secret being without which the superficial consciousness cannot exist or act."[186] This is the region of intuition, which power is itself capable of seeing, but not being seen. Objective reason and logical categories represent only a portion of the mind's total capacities. Indeed, the mind's non-rational powers are greater than reason. "Indian philosophy insists that the sphere of logical thought is far exceeded by that of the mind's possible experiences of reality."[187] Though non-rational, intuition is not contrary to reason. It is in fact the source of reason. Though it is less articulate than reason, it is more intimate and more total, reaching the central meaning of things more swiftly.

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[185] Dom Bede Griffiths, O.S.B., a specialist in Christian-Hindu relations, in a feature article in Jubilee (November, 1963).

[186] Radhakrishnan, op. cit., Eastern Religions and Western Thought, p. 37.

[187] Heinrich Zimmer, Philosophies of India (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1956), p. 25.

> Intuition is beyond reason though not against reason.... Intuition is not independent but emphatically dependent upon thought and is immanent in the very nature of our thinking. It is dynamically continuous with thought and pierces through the conceptual context of knowledge to the living reality under it.... It stands to intellect as a whole to a part, as the creative source of thought to the created categories which work more or less automatically.[188]

Reason is necessary for the philosopher, according to the Indian thinker. It is required at certain points in philosophical reflection and discussion to make objective presentations and logical demonstrations. But reason by itself is incapable of reaching the innermost reality of the self or the other. For this, intuition is needed. Logic and reason touch reality indirectly; intuition perceives the real directly.

> Indian philosophy makes unquestioned and extensive use of reason, but intuition is accepted as the only method through which the ultimate can be known. Reason, intellectual knowledge, is not enough. Reason is not useless or fallacious, but it is insufficient. To know reality one must have an actual experience of it. One does not merely <u>know</u> the truth in Indian philosophy; one <u>realizes</u> it. The word which most aptly describes philosophy in India is <u>darśana</u>, which comes from the verbal root <u>dṛś</u>, meaning 'to see.' 'To see' is to have a direct intuitive experience of the object, or, rather, to realize it in the sense of becoming one with it.[189]

Western philosophy has, according to Indian thinkers, allowed all too little position to the intuitive mode of knowing. Yet, certain Christian thinkers such as St. Augustine and Blaise Pascal have spoken in intuitive terms, and the contemporary existentialist has gathered some support for the intuitive faculty. One contemporary Indian scholar has pointed to the origins of western philosophy and asked us to recognize again the high position of intuition in Plato's thought:

> When Plato spoke of reason as the highest part of the soul and expounded the Socratic doctrine that virtue is knowledge, he was not thinking of reason as mere ratiocination, but as something ontological. Such a reason can be both intellect and intuition. It is the <u>logos</u> in man according to the Greeks, the <u>mahat</u>...according to the Sāṅkhya, and the <u>Mahān Ātma</u> according

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[188] Radhakrishnan, <u>op. cit.</u>, "The Spirit of Man", p. 269.

[189] Radhakrishnan and Moore, <u>op. cit.</u>, <u>A Source Book in Indian Philosophy</u>, p. xxv.

to the Upaniṣads when we treat it as the Cosmic Person.[190]

Not only does Platonism, historically and presently, offer opportunities for furthering an appreciation of the intuitive in man, but existentialism also focuses on the non-conceptual ways of human knowing. The existentialist, like the Indian thinker, is concerned to find a correction for the over-conceptualizing of western philosophy by reflection which bears upon the intuitive reaches of subjectivity.

> The existentialists, though differing among themselves, aim to ventilate one common major trend — the de-conceptualizing and de-objectification of traditional experiences, and in this they come close in spirit and temperament to the philosophic condition of the Buddhist schools.[191]

Such modern western philosophers are similar to leading contemporary Indian thinkers, such as Radhakrishnan, who holds "a view of Spirit, God, Universe and Absolute, not on logico-metaphysical-theological but on deep psychological grounds, separating himself from east-west conceptual-objectivist tendencies, finding answer for everything by a return to one's deep self."[192]

Within the psyche, in intuition, one attains, according to Indian philosophy, that which is most real. Philosophy, as religion, is "an effort to unveil the deepest layers of man's being and get into enduring contact with them."[193] In this area of authenticity, at the simple center of the self, the complex acts of mind and will, affections and volitions, are found to have the same source, and in this pre-conscious, intuitive area even the distinctions between thoughts and actions tend to fade away under the unifying force of the intuitive power.

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[190] Poola Raju, op. cit., "Life's Ideals, East and West", p. 220.

[191] A. K. Sarkar, "Existentialism: A Historical Assessment". Presidential address for the History of Philosophy Section of the Indian Philosophical Congress, 1958. Published in the proceedings of the Congress, p. 45.

[192] Ibid.

[193] Radhakrishnan, op. cit., Eastern Religions and Western Thought, p. 21.

> Indian thought requires us to abstract from sense life and discursive thinking in order to surrender to the deepest self where we get into immediate contact with reality. To know better, we must become different, our thoughts and feelings must be deeply harmonized. Intuition is not only perfect knowledge but also perfect living.[194]

According to the Indian tradition, reality in every experienceable dimension is the concern of the philosopher. When he is true to that aspect of his calling which requires the use of images and concepts, he flies from mere imaginative fancies or logical constructs that are not hinged to real being. And, the philosopher who employs intuition will be no less concerned to have it bear upon reality. Because it does not work with the demonstrable as such we ought not to feel that intuition does not have an obligation to be anchored in being. "There is the controlling power of reality in intuitive apprehension quite as much as in perpetual acts or reflective thought. The objects of intuition are recognized and not created by us."[195]

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[194] Radhakrishnan, op. cit., "The Spirit of Man", p. 270.

[195] Ibid., p. 267.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Marcel affirms that the business of the philosopher is not to be confused with that of the mystic or the prophet. The philosopher's field of activity is reflective thinking, but thinking which can never really be systematized. Philosophical reflection has to grow out of concrete circumstances, about specific beings and relationships in reality. Philosophy thus is not only always creative (akin in thought to the activities of music with sound and drama with emotion and word), but also pastoral; it has to be concerned with grass roots reality. "The philosopher, of necessity, has begun by asking himself the ordinary questions."[196] The philosopher's scope can never be universal in the sense in which conceptual theoreticians would use the term — as surveying all of reality in order to schematize intellectually one's findings — but must necessarily be localized, having to do with one's own experience, in all its concreteness. This of course does not mean that the philosopher's pronouncements will be isolated and sectarian, for true universality is achieved in depth. The closer that one gets to the heart of an experience or being, the closer does one reach the converging limits of love and truth; and in this area there is a universal language by which philosophers and thinkers of different settings and traditions may communicate. Profound subjectivity is needed in order to touch the center of universality in the self. Philosophy therefore needs a greater immanence than it usually has been

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[196] MB, Vol. I, p. 14.

interested in having. But, Marcel sees the activity of reflection as mutilated without the element of transcendence also, an openness beyond the self to the ground of being, which, or, rather, Who alone can give assurance of truth not only in realms of faith but also in the area of human and 'natural' experience.

Marcel's distrust of the objectivization emphasis of Western thought is shown in his criticism of mid-twentieth century culture. Our society is too manipulative; technocracy has been produced by the segmented mind which looks upon the universe of being as so many things to be handled, numbered, and categorized. This process of objectivization produces a sterile world, one in which life is no longer loved, but something 'to be gotten through.' Such criticisms of modern western technological culture has often occasioned critics of Marcel to accuse him of neglecting science, progress, and the material order generally. Marcel insists, however, that his criticism of the beaurocratic mentality is not intended to depreciate material values and physical life. He asserts, in fact, that we require a greater 'presence' to the material order, to be watered again with the impulses of nature, to have a spontaneous sympathy with the vitality and moods of nature.

Marcel's persistent distinction between mystery and problem shows his distrust of objectivizing man and his experience. The experience of being cannot be grasped or conceptually known, but somehow it must be explored, evoked, mysteriously related to. Concerning empiricism, Marcel says that one of its errors is to "take experience for granted and to ignore its mystery; whereas what is amazing and miraculous is that there should be experience at all."[197] The empiricist ignores the mystery of being and attempts to treat it objectively. But being is that which cannot be treated objectively. For we ourselves are

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[197] PE, p. 128.

immersed in being and can only through distortion rise above being. Being is fuller than mere factness or objectivity. On the plane of objectivity we speak of this here or that there; but being transcends the here-elsewhere. Being is fulness, and through the exigence of being in each of us we are urged to open to its fulness. Being offers the hope of eternity since the person in responding to the call or exigence of being is naturally disposed to an openness to spirit and unendingness. Being is the ambience of thought; thought emerges from being as the personal consciousness attempts to express the experience of being. But we have to insist that our personal experience of being is never perfectly translatable. "The fundamental datum of all metaphysical reflection is that I am a being who is not transparent to himself, that is to say, my being is to me a mystery."[198] Mystery is the basis for objectivity, as eternity is for time and the unlimited for the finite, but mystery cannot be objectively comprehended, anymore than the temporal or finite can as such understand the eternal and infinite. The philosophy of Marcel

> forbids him to support himself on a first principle or on a primitive fact; but, as well, the similar notion of a logically initial or empirically indubitable term seems suspect to him: there is no inquest possible on the nature of that which is metaphysically first.[199]

Every objective analysis is finally fictitious since it does not take being where being is found, in union with others. Marcel's metaphysic of hope, for example, is hope grounded no doubt in being, but in relational being; it is a tendency rooted in reality to find salvation only through others. This, for Marcel, is the necessary ingredient: that we realize that being, truth, creativity, and every other fundamental quality and yearning of life is present only when the 'I' is open to others, when the 'I' admits that it cannot treat

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[198] MJ, p. 290.

[199] Delhomme, op. cit., p. 122.

itself or others merely objectively, when the 'I' is aware of the basic unfinishedness of life and of the futility to encapsule in an objective manner the profound given elements of existence.

Marcel's philosophy seems to have no discreteness, no objectivity, in the sense of — like the drama — being a seeing, speaking and creating at once, in the philosophic act. But he sees this as proper, since for him philosophy deals with human life, and "all human life develops in the manner of a drama."[200] He identifies an objective statement of what being is with inauthenticity and with the false attempt to 'beingize' being which is becoming. It is the ancient question of whether philosophy can be concerned with the passing, with — in Aristotelian terms — that which is in becoming. Marcel distrusts conceptual philosophy, because such philosophy lays hold of, or claims that it does, certain permanent features of being, fundamentally along the line of essence. Marcel keenly recognizes, however, that in the realm of living and limited being the essence is never fully actualized, that it is in the process of becoming more itself, and it is precisely this becoming of self that his existential philosophy seeks to know.

It is difficult to understand Marcel's writings at first, and never can it be said that there is an obviously discernible thread of thought. But he sheds much light on numerous issues affecting modern life. His thought seems true, almost infallibly authentic, but perhaps narrowly so. There appears to be an emphatic use of the passive intellect, as he 'suffers' life and experience intellectually, but perhaps too little of the active intellect. Though he has influenced large numbers of contemporary philosophers and theologians of a liberal bent, there is a surprising conservatism in his thought, but perhaps this is because he is concrete; he wants genuine, human growth, not merely technical advancement and sophistication.

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[200] HV, p. 10.

Authenticity seems a good word to identify Marcel and his philosophy. His thought is honest, critical but not vain, concrete but not parochial. It is the expression of a man who pre-supposes nothing, who begins where he is, who proceeds through the chartless tracks of virginal intellectual experience. It is filled with illuminations of the concrete situation of man, seen and expressed in a way which Marcel insists is philosophical, which the realist would be inclined to call pre-philosophical, poetic, and mystic. Is his thought a beautiful narrative of life on the rim of consciousness, or is it philosophy? If we assert that his reflections are philosophy, are we willing to admit the birth or the growth in the West of poetic philosophy? mystical philosophy? Whether or not we construe Marcel's thought as genuine philosophy, it is certain that it explores an area of deep cognitive life which is neglected in our day, and which perhaps has been generally neglected in the Western intellectual tradition. It would seem to offer real possibilities of an exchange between the philosophical tradition of the West, and the personal mystical tendencies of the Indian systems.

Marcel believes that it is impossible to conceptualize the intuitive experiences of being which he evokes for us. Does any conceptualization really destroy, as he asserts, the whole grasp, the living truth? Such a view seems to diminish the credentials and achievements of the conceptual reason at the same time that it enobles not merely the heart but the fuller spirit. Certainly, Marcel's call for secondary reflection, to reclaim the whole man, to heal the wounded and fractioned being of man, is necessary and noble. But there is a real question whether his understanding of <u>essence</u> (in his terms, as that which is most important in man) does not really neglect the capacity of the mind to see something of the nature of things, to dwell in objective contemplation, and to have a healing process which proceeds from vision to

act, and not only from a holistic awareness of subjectivity.

Marcel's personalist metaphysics constitutes an attempt to express (but not in precise conceptual terms) the first 'givens' of experience. It is an attempt to phenomenologically analyze the first principles of thought, and the emotional and living ambience from which they emerge. In this sense, Marcel succeeds, at the very least, in achieving development in the line of thought which one Thomist philosopher has called the vocation of existentialism: "The proper task of existentialism is to work out a 'phenomenology of existence', a task which it does very well indeed when, leaving pseudometaphysics aside, it addresses itself to it."[201]

The realist philosopher, as the Thomist, insists that true philosophy recognizes and expresses the intelligibility of being — an intelligibility neither idealistically imposed nor known by the restrictive techniques of empiricism, but really present in being and grasped conceptually by the human mind. Marcel would insist that his mode of philosophizing expands the dimension of philosophy — so that philosophy can include not only what is empirically or conceptually verifiable, but also what can be invoked or evoked through subjectivity and intersubjectivity. If western philosophy is willing to accept such an expansion as authentic, philosophy in the west will be able to open up new and fruitful similarities with the speculations of India.

We know that the great achievement of Greek philosophy was to give later thinkers a fine set of notions concerning essence, the essence of being. We may say that essence reigned supreme in the Greek philosophical mentality, whether seen in the more idealistic and Platonic tradition, or in the more realistic and Aristotelian tradition. The great Aristotelian of the middle ages, Thomas Aquinas, recognized the essential character of being, but nonethe-

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[201] Gilson, op. cit., Being and Some Philosophers, p. 152.

less asserted that existence, the act of existence, was the supreme reality in being. But, Aquinas felt, and subsequent Thomists have re-asserted, though philosophy must recognize that existence is ontologically prior to that which limits existence, namely, essence, philosophy and the concepts which philosophy employs cannot deal directly with the act of existence. Philosophy is obliged to give its direct consideration to essences, to which conceptual reason is adequate, all the while maintaining a dedication, indirectly, to see that existence underlies essence and to recognize that all essential considerations have value only as they bear upon things which really are.

Marcel's philosophy, in distinction, has been precisely to relate to the act of existence directly, and to experience all the singularity and ontological mystery of that act where it can best be felt: in the self. This, it seems to me, has also been the fundamental aim of traditional Indian metaphysics, to explicate the personal act of existence. But neither Indian speculation nor the thought of Gabriel Marcel has been selfish, merely egoistic. Both seek to explore and express not only the act of existence felt in the self, but that supreme and pervasive act of existence present throughout being — of which it can be said that there is no essence besides its existence, for it simply 'Is'.

In the foregoing pages I have been concerned primarily with presenting the philosophical positions of Gabriel Marcel. In addition, certain central assertions of Marcel have been related to a variance or complementation with the traditional Thomistic understanding of essence and existence and also to a number of deeply similar features of Indian speculation. It remains now to make a judgment upon the philosophical validity of Marcel's thought. In order to achieve this within brief limits, I shall narrow the discussion to the significant question of method, that is, to whether or not the personalist mode of philosophizing of Marcel constitutes a real expansion of the domain of philosophy

as ordinarily understood in the western realist and Thomistic tradition.

The answer to the question lies in an accurate appreciation of a crucial insight in philosophical history and of a recognition of the failure of subsequent philosophy to appreciate that insight. In the 13th century St. Thomas Aquinas asserted that "to be in act, is the divine essence itself."[202] God's essence is Is; there is no distinction in Him between His esse or be-ing and His essence. God is His existence, unlike all other beings, who have their existence, who are compositions of essence and existence. But, St. Thomas insisted, though we can know through reason that God is, even that He is existence itself, strictly speaking we cannot know what pure existence is like, since the human reason, in its present condition, cannot conceive existence as such. According to St. Thomas, "In its present condition the human mind is incapable of conceiving the is of anything apart from its concept of the thing that is."[203] Coupled with St. Thomas' assertion that God's essence is to be is his conviction that with regard to creatures, esse, the act of being in the creature, is "the actuality of all acts and consequently the perfection of all perfections."[204]

Here we have two significant points that bear upon the philosophy of Marcel. One is that the chiefest perfection of being, more, the basis of all perfections, is to be; the act of be-ing, esse, in creatures constitutes the fundamental act upon which all other acts hinge. Thus, in the authentic realistic position, esse, existence, is superior to essence. The second point is that the act of existence, though supreme, and perhaps because it is supreme, surpasses the present comprehension of human reason. We may in our judgments

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[202] Contra gentiles, I, 24, 5.

[203] Etienne Gilson, The Spirit of Thomism (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1964), p. 76.

[204] De Potentia, VII, 2, ad 9.

affirm or negate existence, but we are unable to say what existence is. We are held strictly in our human intellectual activity to a knowledge of essences, to knowing, in some real measure at least, what stones or horses or men are, not to knowing the act of existence in each.

It was precisely the failure of later medieval scholastic thought to understand St. Thomas' assertion of the real distinction between essence and existence in creatures and the supremacy but unknowability of the act of existence which paved the way to the demise of Scholaticism. When critics of Scholasticism like Rene Descartes and Francis Bacon condemned the Aristotelianism of the schools, their criticisms were trained on a Suarezian or other brand of Thomism which greatly misrepresented the master, which conceived, for example, of existence and essence as two things or of existence as an accidental feature of being.[205] In either case, the supremacy and unknowability of the act of existence was not recognized.

Two profoundly damaging conditions then followed. In the first place, the supremacy of the act of existence in creatures being missed, scholastic philosophers felt that the ground of perfection in creatures was essence, essence conceived in the static mode of abstract thought. If these scholastic thinkers had recognized the supremacy of the actus essendi, the act of being, which is also a virtus essendi, a power of being, how active and powerful their thought might have been! If they had seen the permanent but dynamic character of being at its root, how much more apt they would have been to expand their philosophic vision, to relate positively to the great developments in science and culture in the Renaissance and modern periods! In the second place, failing

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[205] Cf. Armand Maurer, Medieval Philosophy (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 356 ff.

to recognize the rationally unknowable character of existence as such (for this they did by turning existence into a separate thing or into an accidental feature of being, both of which possess an essence that can be conceived), later Scholastics closed off the source of ontological richness in being and in thought. Having essentialized being, they amputated mystery from reality.

Now to both of these failures of later Scholasticism — and to such similar failures in modern philosophy as well — Marcel has directed his philosophic energies. For Marcel, as we have seen, being is anything but static. It is in its source living and active, in a word, creative. He insists upon the dynamic and unfinished character of created being. Also, Marcel has attempted to direct the authentic philosophic act to the region of mystery in being, to that aspect of being which is not conceptually cognizable. Neo-Thomists like Maritain, Gilson, and Phelan, as well as St. Thomas himself, hold, on the one hand to the supremacy of the act of existence in all created being and, on the other hand, to the mysterious character of existence. Whereas the Greek philosophical mind did not penetrate to the superiority of existence over essence, the greatest of the Christian philosophers, aided by the light of Christian revelation regarding the creation of the world, was forced to the rational conclusion that existence is central in being. Contemporary philosophers in the spirit of St. Thomas re-affirm the supremacy of <u>esse</u> and the fact that <u>esse</u> as such transcends the capacity of the human mind to comprehend.

> <u>That</u> God is is not mysterious. It can be demonstrated. <u>What</u> God is is an impenetrable mystery. <u>What</u> a creature is is not mysterious. It is conceivable, if not by human intellect at least by the highest finite intelligence. And no mystery is conceivable to a finite mind. <u>That</u> creatures are is indeed a mystery. In problematizing that mystery in order to increase our insight, it would be disastrous to fall victim to

> the essentializing vocabulary of Greek philosophical literature and miss the dynamic actuality of that which renders the question mysterious, Esse.[206]

Man's essence, and that of other limited beings, is fundamentally knowable to the human intellect, whereas his existence is not. God's existence is known to be, but what that 'to be' is, is unknowable.

Thus both Marcel and the genuine Thomist are agreed that existence is supreme in reality and that existence as such, whether in man or in God, is mysterious to man's mind. Marcel and the Thomist are in disagreement, however, about the method which philosophy employs to relate to being. For the Thomist, philosophy, including the central philosophical discipline, metaphysics, is a science, employing universal concepts and dealing with categories of being about which rationally demonstrable statements can be made. For Marcel, philosophy is not a science but an exploration of personal experience, fundamentally related to the mysterious character of the self and of all beings. I prefer to take philosophy in the first sense — as a science of being, directed to the objective intelligibility of being. Therefore, I conclude, in the first place, that Gabriel Marcel has not produced a philosophy (or conceptual wisdom), partly because he has missed the objective intelligibility of being and partly because his vocation and concern has been with the mysterious dimension of being.

However, the Thomistic realist recognizes that though philosophy as such cannot directly handle the mysterious character of the act of existence in beings, that the act of existence is indeed, in Marcellian terms, able to be 'invoked' and 'evoked', particularly as the act of existence is experienced in the self. He recognizes that art and poetry as well as religion manifest this

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[206]Gerald B. Phelan, "The Being of Creatures", Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, 1957, p. 125.

mysterious seat of being. The major portion of Marcel's work has been precisely to evoke in essay form, in prose, the experience of mystery, which though it has not been, and cannot be, handled in conceptually verifiable terms, is authentically relatable in language which bears upon the felt depths of our being. Therefore, I conclude, in the second place, that Marcel has produced something greater than a philosophy, something which the Indian metaphysician would call the heart of philosophy, but which I would prefer to designate as a mysterious wisdom.

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