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Participatory Metaphysics: A Study of the Thought of Gabriel Marcel

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PARTICIPATORY METAPHYSICS:
A STUDY OF THE THOUGHT OF GABRIEL MARCEL

BY

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel. Specifically, the emphasis will be on what Marcel takes to be the unique epistemological demands of metaphysical subject matters.

Metaphysics, once considered the "Queen of the Sciences" has for some time been challenged in its position as a legitimate and/or viable philosophical discipline. This attitude toward metaphysics has been expressed in the philosophical community as either active, direct attack; or, more recently, passive neglect--'ignore-ance'--which perhaps suggests that the dominant feeling among members of the philosophical community may be that metaphysics simply no longer warrants any attention at all. Although the current position of disrepute into which metaphysics has fallen may be explained in many and various ways, two major contributing factors may be noted here: (1) the stubborn resistance of traditional metaphysical questions to any complete and final answers; and (2) the impressive success in recent history of the scientific method in the improvement of the human condition.

It is certainly the case that metaphysics is a particularly puzzling and frustrating discipline. However, the rejection of metaphysics is not a thing to be taken lightly or without careful consideration of the repercus-

sions and significance of the demise of that discipline which deals with the most fundamental, most significant, and most important questions human beings can ever pose: the very intelligibility of the universe; the nature of man, his ultimate origin and destiny; good and evil; God. It will not do to cut off access to such realms because of impatience or frustration with their magnitude and difficulty. Due to the importance of the subject matters of metaphysics, conscientious consideration of any and all alternatives to its demise must be undertaken. It is to this end that this thesis is presented.

Gabriel Marcel is vehemently opposed to the dominant attitude within the philosophical community of disdain for and/or neglect of metaphysical subject matters and metaphysics as a whole. He deplores the repercussions of this attitude not only as it affects philosophy in its formal sense, but also as it affects human beings, concretely, in their everyday lives. Marcel has important things to say concerning this situation and the purpose of this thesis is to give due consideration to his position.

A study of the work of Gabriel Marcel necessitates embarking upon a twisted and tangled path. Marcel employs various forms in his approach to philosophy: journal method; recounting of personal experiences; academic prose; drama, music and poetry; metaphoric "story-telling." No one particular work of Marcel reveals the entirety of his

thought in any one particular area. Notions mentioned briefly in one work may be taken up at length in another. Subject matters presented as being of little importance may, at another point, be presented as significant and far-reaching. It is for this reason that all of Marcel's published works have been consulted in the preparation of this paper. No one work could be considered as a fair representation of Marcel's view since it is the whole which is of significance and not any one of the parts in isolation. Piecemeal criticism is not appropriate to the work of Marcel and will not be attempted here. Rather, the purpose is to determine the value and significance of the whole of Marcel's thought to the realm of metaphysics.

Embarking now upon consideration of Marcel's work, it must always be borne in mind that the task of critical appraisal must and will be secondary to a more immediate and demanding one, that of resisting the temptation to quarrel with this philosophical style of Marcel's which is now somewhat out of fashion; and rather attempting comprehension in a sincere manner, of the intention of his thought.

CHAPTER ONE: MARCEL'S VIEW OF THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

The Human Condition

According to Marcel, modern man finds himself in what is termed "a state of metaphysical dis-ease." This dis-ease is not with nature as was the case in past history when the very survival of man as a species was, to varying degrees, in jeopardy. Rather, for Marcel, this dis-ease of mankind is a dis-ease with himself--a metaphysical illness--the symptom of which is a sense of strangeness with his own self, his own being.

Marcel places responsibility for this sense of dis-ease on the tendency of modern man to view himself and others exclusively in terms of function. It is certainly the case in American society that the first question asked of any individual in a social situation is, "What do you do?". It may be argued (as Marcel does) that such an emphasis on functionality belies an overriding need of modern man to categorize both himself and others. It seems that in order to feel comfortable with another, one must firmly identify what he is and what he is has come to be synonymous with what he does.

Consider the following situation. A young man, recently graduated from college, neither having nor looking for a job, finds himself at a party one evening. A stranger approaches him and after exchanging names, the stranger asks the inevit-

able question: "What do you do?". The question makes the young man extremely uncomfortable and, for lack of a better response (excluding a deceitful response as an alternative) he says in rather a too casual way, "I don't do anything." The stranger looks perplexed and as soon as is socially acceptable, he moves off to another group of people. The young man is left alone feeling worthless, valueless. This little scenario exposes a situation such that a man who performs no function (or a "low-status" function) is considered as having no worth. Marcel expresses the situation as follows: "it is increasingly the case that our sense of dignity and worth rests upon the functions we perform in society and not upon the awareness that there is an intrinsic sacredness involved in merely being human."¹

It is this loss of an awareness of ontological value that Marcel notes and deplores in the contemporary human situation. There are many societal facts which can be mentioned in support of Marcel's thesis that there has occurred in modern times, a loss of an awareness of ontological value: the deplorable status of the elderly; disdain for the unemployed; depreciation of the traditional roles of women; the near-worship of computers as the epitomy of functional efficiency.

¹Gabriel Marcel. Homo Viator, trans. Emma Crauford (Chicago: Regnery, 1952).

Marcel uses the illustration of a ticket-collector in the Underground. Everything in his world conspires to identify his self only with the work he performs, the function he fulfills. He is a ticket-collector. When the judgement is made that a person is what he does, recognition of the true value of human being is impossible.

Another aspect of the loss of an awareness of ontological value through the functionalized view of man is the loss of a sense of the importance of individuality. One becomes simply that--'one'--in the full meaning of the term which is a neutrality. A man whose value lies in his function is no more or less valuable than any other man who performs that function. The black humor of the often-heard quip, "You too can be replaced" is revealed within the context of a manner of thought which replaces the particular individual with the general "any one at all." That is, the functional way of viewing man is an abstraction from the individual, from the concrete.

It is interesting to speculate upon the similar positions held by men who are valued only for their functionality and our amazing computers--recent developments of our technological age. Computers are, indeed, the epitomy of functional efficiency. They will efficiently process without purpose; they will perform without goals. The question must be posed, however, as to what the repercussions might be of human beings cast in the role of computers. Can

human beings function without purpose? Can human beings find dignity in mere productivity? One thing is certain-- a computer cannot despair, while a human being most assuredly can, and to an alarming degree in our modern world, does. In a functionalized world where a sense of human ontological value is lost, any awareness of human dignity and purposefulness is lost. In such a world, the astounding popularity of philosophies of despair (such as that of Jean-Paul Sartre) is easily understood when it is recognized that functionalized thought makes generalized human despair a reality.

Marcel's view of the human condition is, then, not a happy one. The contemporary need to categorize human beings by function, to abstract from individuals to "any one at all," results in despair--a world where nothing ultimately matters.

It is as an alternative to this despair that Marcel presents his thoughts on the matter. His work is, indeed, a direct challenge to the adequacy of functional thought since in Marcel's view, despair is the inevitable conclusion of limiting reality to that which allows of measurement, categorization and control by functional, i.e., scientific thought.

The Marcelian View of Contemporary Thought

Marcel traces the despair of modern man to the singular nature of contemporary thought. Due, Marcel suggests, to the great enthusiasm for the scientific method motivated by its amazing success in recent history, modern man has uncritically accepted scientific thought as the exclusive means of acquiring knowledge of reality.

Marcel maintains that this intellectual singularity exists in the philosophical community as well, resulting in the contemporary dominance of, particularly, the logical positivist school and, in general, the decidedly empirical nature or thrust of modern philosophical thought. This may be due, Marcel suggests, to a certain embarrassment felt within the philosophical community when comparisons are made between the progress of science in solving its problems and the progress of philosophy in answering its questions and the conclusion drawn that while science has achieved remarkable success, philosophy has not. The philosophical discipline of metaphysics is, of course, especially prone to the criticism of lack of progress since it is the case that questions considered by metaphysicians in antiquity are still being considered by metaphysicians today and have yet to be answered in any complete and final way. Due to the "poor showing" of metaphysics, compared with science, it finds itself in a position of disrepute within the philosophical community and is ignored in favour

of the technical philosophical activities of the logical positivist school or empiriological philosophic systems.

Marcel, then, sees the situation of modern thought as characterized by intellectual singularity; i.e., acceptance of scientific thought to the exclusion of any other sort. This assumption that technical, scientific, empiriological thought yields the only valid knowledge about reality, held not only by mankind at large, but by the philosophical community as well, is viewed by Marcel as being a real danger to the human spirit and directly responsible for the ontological dis-ease, the despair, of modern man.

Marcel emphasizes three general characteristics of scientific thought which reveal the danger of the acceptance of this kind of thought as the only valid access to reality. These three characteristics are: (1) predetermination of subject matter, and (2) the spirit of abstraction, and (3) objective validation.

Predetermination of Subject Matter

Just as the particular disciplines of science delimit their subject matters (zoology is concerned with animal life and limits its subject matter to animal life; astronomy limits its subject matter to the heavens, etc.), so too the scientific method itself predetermines those subject matters which qualify as acceptable for scientific investigation. This, of course, would constitute no danger if scientific

thought were treated as only one of a number of kinds of thought available to man in his search for the nature of reality. However, when it is the case that one, single kind of thought is accepted as the only valid kind of thought, Marcel maintains a very real danger is present, and this is so whether the one accepted kind of thought is scientific, ontological, theological or whatever. It is the exclusive acceptance of one kind of thought to the exclusion of all others which constitutes the danger and not the nature of the accepted kind of thought itself.

It is important to recognize that methodological criteria for "valid thought" are nothing but concealed ways of stipulating and defining subject matters and when one methodology (in this case, the scientific method) is accepted to the exclusion of all others, what is effected is a single set of methodological criteria which determines what man can see and be aware of, what man can mean, and, ultimately, what can be. Such an intellectual situation is dangerous and, indeed, self-defeating to the human goal of knowledge of the nature of reality since the nature of what shall be considered as real is predetermined by the methodology employed.

It may be illuminating at this point to consider another period in our history when a situation of intellectual singularity existed and to note the repercussions which followed from such an intellectual situation.

The center of attraction for St. Thomas and his contemporaries was not empiriological or mathematical science, but rather ontological or philosophical knowledge, which attains the very being and intelligible structure of things. Indeed so great was the attraction towards this type of knowledge in the Middle Ages that the other sciences suffered from it. Not only did they fail to flourish and to achieve their independence as distinct kinds of knowledge, but all too frequently, problems that can be solved only by their methods were approached with the methods of ontology or philosophy. In general there was too great an optimism for the mind's ability to understand the ontological structure of things or their intelligible natures. The consequence of this optimism was the extension of philosophy to areas where it fails to achieve results. We know all too well the consequences of this; the corpse of medieval physics is there to warn us against the error.²

A lesson to be learned from the Middle Ages may be that a singular intellectual climate yields serious, perhaps disastrous consequences. Ontological thought, achieving such a singular position in the Middle Ages, resulted in a very serious retardation of man's scientific knowledge and progress.

We return now to Mr. Mauer for his comments on the contemporary situation.

With positivism, the modern world had its revenge on the Middle Ages but not without itself suffering a loss. For if the method of empiriological science is successful in dealing with many problems about the physical universe, they are equally unsuccessful in handling many others and these indeed the most important of all--those traditional questions of philosophy. In fact, the methods of the sciences do not even enable us to investigate the meaning and value of science itself and to evaluate the various

²Armand Maurer, Introduction to The Division and Methods of the Sciences, by St. Thomas Aquinas (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963), p. xi.

types of knowledge and science.³

The question to be raised by this consideration of the situation which existed in the Middle Ages is whether it is possible to approach the whole of reality with a single methodology. As will become clear in what follows, it is Marcel's intention to show that it is not.

The point must be made here, that while Marcel is opposed to singular thought whichever kind of thought happens to hold that position; it is clear that he considers the repercussions of the dominance of scientific, empiriological thought to be much more dangerous to the human condition than the case of the dominance of ontological thought which existed in the Middle Ages. Marcel takes this position (which is worthy of reflection) since he considers the corpse of ontological value which he views as the inevitable consequence of the exclusivity of scientific thought much more disastrous to the human spirit than the corpse of mediaeval physics.

To return now, to consideration of the predetermination of subject matter characteristic of the scientific method (indeed, of any method), it is necessary to bring to light the specifics of this predetermination. Marcel emphasizes two criteria which the scientific method demands that its subject matters fulfill: (1) materiality, and (2) staticity.

³Ibid., p. xiii.

Materiality

Scientific thought is directed toward physical things; i.e., substances and therefore reality, for science, is limited to physical, material reality. Such a delimitation of reality is, of course, proper and appropriate to the goal of empirical knowledge but it is important to make explicit that an implicit assumption--that empirical knowledge is the only valid knowledge--is made when empiriological, scientific thought is accepted to the exclusion of any other kind. Mr. Earle has a very strong statement to make concerning this subject: "A method in itself is nothing but a procedure for verifying or grounding the truth of assertions. An empiriological method is a method which guarantees truth by sense perception. To maintain, however, that all truths must be guaranteed by sense perception is to maintain that all cognitive awareness is the awareness of sense data. And this is not even a possible theory but a patent falsehood."⁴

Although perhaps obvious, it is helpful to make explicit the fact that sense perception is perception of physical, material objects and just as the former is a valid method of verifying the truth of certain assertions, so too the latter are perfectly valid objects of investigation, and Marcel would certainly not dispute this validity. However, the

⁴William Earle, Objectivity: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology (Chicago: Quadrangle Press, 1955), p. 91.

ordination of this methodology and corresponding subject matter as the only legitimate types, excluding any other sort of knowledge from the official canon of "scientifically warranted knowledge" (and, therefore, in view of the singular position held by scientific thought, excludes any other sort of knowledge from the realm of valid knowledge) is vehemently objected to by Marcel, and he would agree wholeheartedly with the statement of Mr. Earle that "We simply cannot tolerate rule a priori upon what can and what cannot be nor upon what is impossible short of sheer contradiction."⁵

It is interesting to speculate upon the possibility that a contributing factor in the exclusive acceptance of scientific, empiriological thought may be the apparent need of human beings to embody their ideas.⁶ Certainly it is the case that something within us is always happy when we can point to an object that is localized in space and say, "There it is!". Perhaps due to this tendency (or, it may be argued, necessity), to think in material, physical terms--a tendency which has been noted and struggled with ever since Heraclitus' attempt to express in material terms that which was immaterial--we are disposed to accord more credence to that which can be localized, pointed to and held than to that which eludes such determination.

⁵Ibid., p. 154.

⁶This is not to minimize the strong possibility that the very nature and structure of language is responsible for this tendency toward embodiment of ideas.

However, even granting the possibility of such a human predisposition, this, in itself, would certainly seem not to justify the elimination of such uncooperative entities from the realm of reality. Certainly Marcel would adamantly insist that it must be acknowledged (or, at the very least, the possibility must be acknowledged) that particular physical substances with which we are acquainted through sense perception form only a portion of reality, not its entirety and that sense perception in no sense represents the only or the typical or standard approach to reality.

Our attention is directed now to the question of how philosophy is affected by the criterion of materiality demanded of its subject matters by the scientific method. The most important effect for Marcel, is, of course, the apparent rejection of metaphysics as a viable discipline which is accepted or at least tolerated by the majority of members in the philosophical community. Acceptance of the criterion of materiality for valid subject matters immediately banishes metaphysics from the realm of valid disciplines since its subject matter is, of course, not material--being, whatever it may be, is certainly not a physical thing.

The philosophical acceptance of a methodology which delimits its subject matters to that which is material suggests, according to Quentin Lauer, "an impatience with that which is absolute and although such methodologies may have their utility, they can have no bearing in the realm of

ontology. Certainly we would all like to decide once and for all what reality is for then we should have something firm and solid; something settled."⁷ Whether this desire for final decision concerning the nature of reality is present or not, however, the philosopher must consider the possibility that surrender to impatience or anxiety in the face of that which is inexhaustible sentences him by self-conviction to an intellectual prison which is in effect a self-positioning in but a single aspect of the real, of one particular method of investigation which can never reveal the plenum of the phenomenal realm. Quentin Lauer states succinctly, "A philosopher, above anyone else, simply cannot afford to operate within a framework which he takes for granted."⁸ Such a luxury is, purely and simply, antithetical to philosophical enterprise which is the commitment to truth, to reality, however and wherever it may be revealed and whatever it may be.

As specifically regards the logical positivist school and its habit of relegating traditional metaphysical questions to a sort of philosophical limbo by dubbing them "pseudo-problems," Mr. Earle takes issue:

⁷Quentin Lauer, Phenomenology: Its Genesis and Prospect (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. vii.

⁸Ibid., p. viii.

Nothing is accomplished philosophically by relegating all inconvenient terms, meanings, intuitions and appearances to some limbo of 'linguistic convenience,' 'methodological devices,' 'syncategorematic expressions,' 'intellectual constructions,' 'mere ideas,' etc. Nothing which can genuinely be meant or can genuinely be apprehended by anyone can be 'thrown out,' or 'disposed with,' or declared out of hand to be meaningless. Everything can and needs to be clarified, but that clarification which decides on theoretical grounds what can be meant is not clarification at all but elimination by fiat."⁹

The results of scientific thought having achieved its present singular position in human thought in terms of philosophy, in Marcel's view, are then, to sum up, (1) the dominance of logical positivism, and (2) the corresponding denigration of metaphysics. However, Marcel must not be misunderstood as objecting to logical positivism itself (although it is clear that he does consider it to be merely a sort of technique rather than a truly philosophical activity) but rather he is objecting to the popularity which it enjoys, in his view, at the direct expense of metaphysics.

Staticity

Although Marcel treats this criterion of the scientific method for its subject matters less fully than that of materiality considered above, it is nonetheless important to consider this criterion, albeit briefly, here.

Regarding the activity of scientific investigation, it is noted that it must operate on that which is immobile. This is satisfactory when what is under investigation is a

⁹Earle, Objectivity, p. 93.

concept but, Marcel maintains, completely inappropriate when that which is under investigation is, e.g., a human life or being, which are certainly not static, immobile things but are nonetheless treated as such when approached by scientific thought. Moreover, Marcel takes every opportunity to point out that we do not generally experience the immobile; i.e., the real, the concrete, is recognized as being variable, if not, indeed, variability itself. The scientific method of investigation yields elements and elements are by definition invariable, being diagrams, simplified reconstructions, often mere symbols, and in any case, a motionless translation of a reality which is moving. The error, however, lies not in this freezing of movement itself, but rather in the mistaken belief that within these static frames reality can be adequately represented. These brief statements concerning staticity is adequate here as further consideration and elaboration of staticity will be undertaken in a different context--that of the spirit of abstraction--which follows.

The Spirit of Abstraction

The second major characteristic of the scientific method according to Marcel is what he calls "the spirit of abstraction." He employs the phrase 'spirit of abstraction' rather than the word 'abstraction' in order to make clear that his intent is not to attack abstraction itself. This

should be obvious since abstraction is essential to any kind of thought or action. Without abstraction it would be impossible, for example, to distinguish, as is done, between green and red or between Communists and Socialists, neurotics and psychotics, etc. Apart from the fact that abstraction is necessary for isolating parts from wholes, elements and dimensions from their totalities, there could be no clarity of thought and thus no basis for consistent action without abstraction. Abstraction is the foundation of reason and just as Marcel objects to what he calls technolatry (the uncritical worship of technology) but not to technology itself, so too he wishes to make clear that he has no objection to abstraction but wishes only to bring to light the adverse effects of the spirit of abstraction.

The spirit of abstraction refers to the ignore-ance of the concrete realities from which the abstraction is taken. It is not the fact that such abstraction takes place that Marcel is objecting to, it is the tendency to forget that it is an abstraction that is the objectionable thing for Marcel. In his own words, "the spirit of abstraction substitutes, e.g., for a human being, a certain idea, a certain abstract designation."¹⁰ Elaborating further, he says, "I try hard to show that it would not be legitimate for thought operating in the name of univer-

¹⁰Gabriel Marcel, The Existential Background of Human Dignity, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 123.

sal principles, to consign the concrete and individual actually sustaining it to a merely contingent status, that our thinking, on the contrary, must acknowledge the noncontingency of this experience if it is not to become inconsequential."¹¹

What Marcel is saying is that the universal concepts arrived at through abstraction by scientific thought are not recognized as abstractions but rather are taken to be realities while that which is truly real--the particulars, the individuals from which the abstractions are taken--are forgotten, treated as irrelevant. Particulars are variable, changeable, diverse; the concepts of science are not. Science requires, as noted previously, staticity of its objects and thus cannot deal with the realities of concrete human experience. Bergson puts the situation very well with the statement, "The demonstrations which have been given of the relativity of our (metaphysical) knowledge are tainted with an original vice; they imply that all knowledge must necessarily start from concepts with fixed outlines in order to clasp with them the reality which flows."¹² But what are we speaking of when we talk of concepts? We are speaking of abstraction. Concepts are abstractions from a unified object which has been analyzed

¹¹Ibid., p. 30.

¹²Henri Bergson, Introduction to Metaphysics (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1949), p. 27.

into so many symbolical expressions.¹³

Within the exclusive use of scientific method, the risk is always there of falling into the spirit of abstraction, i.e., "forgetting" that its resultant concepts only allude to and do not represent reality.

Intrinsic to the spirit of abstraction, according to Marcel, is a need for possession. "Whatever resists our mental and physical attempts at possession stands as judgment and a threat to the one whose life-orientation is toward having rather than being."¹⁴ This aspect of possession intrinsic to the spirit of abstraction appeals to an apparent need of human beings (alluded to previously) to have a thing or an object in one's control; possession is the power to retain, conserve, protect and dispose of.

With the dominance of scientific thought, Marcel insists on pointing out that the phenomenon of having now applies as much to the world of philosophy and persons as to the physical world. The spirit of abstraction implicitly contains the effort to characterize and categorize a concrete reality in such a way that it can become a mental possession which can be manipulated and controlled at will.

¹³And not incidentally, they tend to divide philosophy into "distinct schools, each of which takes its seat, chooses its counters and carries on with the others a game that will never end." Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁴Gabriel Marcel, Being and Having, trans. Katherine Farrer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1951), p. 214.

Characterization is a certain kind of possession or a claim to possession of that which cannot be possessed. It is the construction of little abstract effigies, models, as English physicists call them, of a reality which will not lend itself to these tricks, these deceptions, these pretences, except in the most superficial way.¹⁵

As with abstraction, man cannot live without a certain amount of mental possession, but, in agreement with Hegel, Marcel hastens to point out the phenomenon of what he calls the 'boomerang action,' i.e., the stronger the possessive instinct, the more the possessed object gains control over the possessor. The fanatical positivist, for example, according to Marcel, comes to be captive to ideas which he began by having, when he surrenders to the temptation to limit reality to what can be possessed, controlled and categorized. "The mysterious fullness of concrete reality is sacrificed to a system of ideas which limits the real to what can be possessed with certainty through scientific modes of thought."¹⁶

A society which reserves its highest prestige for science and technology will be in constant danger of sacrificing being to having, of denying the mysterious fullness of concrete reality for the clear knowledge which makes technology possible. This, according to Marcel, is what has happened in contemporary society and is, again, a

¹⁵Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁶Gabriel Marcel, A Metaphysical Journal, trans. by B. Wall (Chicago: Henry Regnery Press, 1952), p. 257.

contributing factor to the dis-ease and despair in which modern man finds himself.

Objective Validation

This brings us now to the third and (for our purposes) final characteristic of scientific thought emphasized by Marcel--objective validation.

Intrinsic to scientific thought is the demand that the investigator maintain a completely objective attitude throughout his investigation. Marcel maintains that the exclusive use of a method which demands such objectivity for validation of its knowledge has serious implications, since it, in effect, cuts off access to reality. This demand for objectivity implicitly denies the legitimacy of experience as a valid means of attaining knowledge since experience is always particular, always individual. Objectivity, however, maintains that knowledge be neutral, i.e., be of the sort which can be attained by anyone at all. Marcel maintains that the demand for such an objective, purely neutral observer or investigator can be of no help in resolving the many difficulties of the human situation and all attempts to do so are doomed necessarily since it removes from these concrete human situations, the very concreteness which makes them the realities that they are. It is important to note an implicit duality which is accepted when the objective stance is accepted; i.e., the artificial duality of individual thought and 'thought in

general'. It is necessary to note, however, that 'thought in general' can be nothing other than thought without a thinker.

Certainly such a demand for objectivity immediately makes impossible the attainment of the ontological goal since it regards as true only that which can be objectively, scientifically verified. In Marcel's words, "It defines truth as an accord of minds reached by the submission of individual thought to thought in general."¹⁷

The point which seems to be missed in such an approach is that the world as constituted for a self-in-general is a formally valid and universally verifiable system of propositions, but it does not exist. What exists is what is present for an incarnate consciousness. As a traditional epistemological subject, I am perfectly interchangeable with anyone else and the Marcelian objection is that there are phenomenal realms which are of the sort that such interchangeability makes no sense.

The demand for objectivity closes the door to the metaphysical realm out of hand and the attempt to deal scientifically with that which properly belongs to the metaphysical realm makes no sense since scientific thought demands the separation of the investigator from that which is investigated, and, as Marcel points out, "We are

¹⁷Ibid., p. 184.

involved in being and it is not in our power to leave it: more simply, we are and the whole metaphysical inquiry is just how to place ourselves in relation to plenary reality."¹⁸

Another aspect of the demand for objective validation which Marcel points out is that it amounts to "the abandonment of concrete and creative activities in favour of abstract, depersonalized, uncreative tasks and even an active opposition to all kinds of creativity."¹⁹ This is so, since, of course, the creative act, is the personal act, the act of a concrete individual and such an individual act is dismissed out of hand as invalid in the scientific realm.

It is interesting to take note of the fact that even some scientists recognize that the objectivity demanded and claimed by science itself is artificial. Consider the following:

Naturalists may attempt to achieve a scientific objectivity toward the creatures they study, but fortunately for editors they invariably fail. Some, such as observant J. Frank Dobie, make no attempt to hide their feelings toward an animal; Alan M. Beck, gathering data for his doctorate at John Hopkins University, carefully recorded for days the feeding times and places of a stray dog but admits he selected the dog and named him 'Shag' because "I had become fond of him." Affection and compassion pervade most of these articles--even the annoying mosquito wins Marston Bate's admiration for its ingenuity in finding breeding sites.²⁰

¹⁸Marcel, Being and Having, p. 35.

¹⁹Gabriel Marcel, The Mystery of Being, 2 vols. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1960), 1:38.

²⁰Alan Ternes, ed., Ants, Indians and Little Dinosaurs, p. 7.

Although it is possible that pure objectivity is impossible in any human activity (including science) Marcel makes every effort to point out that such a demand is absurd within the philosophical realm.

Implicit in scientific thought is the assumption of a kind of transcendent nature of man, exemplified in the philosophical community by "the illusion of the philosopher as taking his stand on some height where he has abstracted from his own experience, where he has put aside such things as unworthy of consideration...for the richness of experience he is substituting mere abstract schemas and far from transcending experience, he has not yet reached the stage of grappling with it."²¹ If a philosopher is sincerely concerned with reality and with attending to that which is real, it would, Marcel suggests, at the very least seem worthy of consideration that the one who is concerned with such things ought to take into account that reality with which he is in closest contact--his own. Marcel further suggests that this surprising ignore-ance of the fundamental reality permeating any possible reality has to do with the tendency to transfer the definitions and the categories that are valid to the purely objective, scientific world, into a realm of discourse where they do not properly apply.

Marcel views the characteristic of objective validation

²¹Marcel, Mystery of Being, 1:116.

then, as having the implicit effect of rejection of reality. He says, "in a world like our own which is becoming more and more completely subjected to the domain of objective knowledge and scientific technique, everything, by an almost fatal necessity, tends to fall out as if this observation of our situation from the outside were a real possibility."²²

A consideration of Marcel's view of the contemporary situation has revealed the situation of the presence of a singular intellectual climate and his objections to this situation. The general objection is that such an intellectual singularity is not capable of dealing with the plenum of reality. More specifically, the objection is that scientific thought cuts off access to immediate reality, rejects metaphysics out of hand, and results in a human situation of despair. Marcel comments on this situation, "Fundamentally, we are in the situation of a man who has just perceived that the key with which he hoped to open a certain door will not, after all, fit into the lock."²³

In the following chapter we will present Marcel's alternative to singularity in thought and its repercussions. What will be the nature of this alternative? In

²²Ibid., p. 250.

²³Ibid., p. 136.

his own words, "the key for which I shall be looking to open my door will be, in the widest sense, the idea of participation--sharing, taking part in, partaking of."²⁴

²⁴Ibid., p. 137.

CHAPTER TWO: THE MARCELIAN POSITION

Marcel's work, as a body of philosophical thought is not, to anyone even superficially acquainted with recent phenomenological/existential philosophy,¹ particularly unique. What is unique is not so much what he says but where one is led through his work. Marcel often metaphorically refers to man as "an itinerant wayfarer,"² and it is perhaps not merely coincidental that an understanding of his work seems to involve one less in a study and more in a journey. This sense of sharing, of accompanying Marcel on a journey is heavy with significance and bears witness to the important role which participation plays in his thought.

It is this central idea of participation which colors and motivates Marcel's peculiar method of presentation. More important than the obvious fact that the major portion of Marcel's work is in journal form is that Marcel prefers to "show" a point or a notion rather than to merely talk about it abstractly. This is due, according to Marcel, both to the peculiar approach appropriate to metaphysical subject matters

¹Although acknowledging the phenomenological aspects of his work, Marcel prefers his thought be labeled 'neo-socratic' if it must be labeled at all. He is very unhappy with the term existentialism, since he prefers that his work not be mistaken as being of the sort of the popular existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre. However, a label of this sort is popularly applied to philosophers such as Heidegger, Jaspers, Merleau-Ponty, etc., with whose philosophies Marcel's is broadly in accord.

²This is the central idea behind Marcel's Homo Viator.

and to the peculiar orientation required of the subject approaching it.

This "showing" is accomplished to varying degrees of effectiveness through metaphor, the recounting of personal experiences, story-telling, etc. It is this rather disconcerting method of presentation which seems to engender suspicion and/or confusion in many who habitually equate non-objective with irrational without considering the possibility of any number of entities whose characters are not of the sort which permit of objective exposition. As Mr. Earle says, "It is a mistake to suppose that since we cannot describe objectively the characteristic or experience we have in mind that, therefore, we can have nothing in mind."³

Certainly, it is the case that with the contemporary dominance of linguistic analysis and the logical positivist school of philosophic thought that a philosophy such as Marcel's seems out of date, even primitive. However, to consider this contemporary philosophic preference as anything other than a prejudice would be, for anyone sincerely engaged in the philosophic endeavor, a clear case of apostasy.

This discussion of methodology is important as an introduction to a philosophy such as Marcel's since it must be made clear that his method is not of the sort that is arbitrarily chosen and employed but is rather developed in accord-

³Earle, Objectivity, p. 37.

ance with the demands of metaphysical subject matter. As Marcel puts it, "...we must exclude the idea that the mind can, as it were, objectively define the structure of reality and then regard itself as qualified to legislate for it. My own idea was, on the contrary, that the undertaking had to be pursued within reality itself, to which the philosopher can never stand in the relationship of an onlooker to a picture."⁴

Marcel puts forth his approach, then, as one which is proper to its subject matter (not, incidentally, proper to all subject matters as the scientific method seems to claim for itself). His approach is not indifferent to the subject matter but rather takes into account its nature since it is the assumption or submission to a position within concrete reality since, of course, in the case of metaphysics, such a position is logically and existentially presupposed and only through a blatant disregard for human reality may any other position be assumed. This, of course, means that Marcel will be concerned with concrete, individual experience, in direct contradiction to the banishment of such experiences from the realm of scientific validity. Marcel says, "The philosopher's vocation consists in his personal response to a 'call' which demands of him that, in paradoxical cooperation with the spirit of universality, he have and pay attention to concrete

⁴Gabriel Marcel, The Philosophy of Existence, trans. Manya Harari (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), pp. 27-28.

experience."⁵

It would be a misunderstanding to construe from this statement that Marcel wishes to dictate the 'proper' subject matters of philosophy. On the contrary, Marcel would agree that the vocation of philosophy commits one "to open the sphere of reality to whatever we know and not to restrict it to physical objects, nature, particular temporal events, etc. There can be no a priori ruling upon which types of objects are real and which are not."⁶ This constitutes the spirit of universality which is the appropriate attitude for a philosopher.

Certainly one of the major thrusts of the quoted statements of Marcel noted here is toward the goal of pointing out the inadequacies of various methodologies for dealing with metaphysical subject matters, and a definite suggestion that it is at the level of existence where clues may be found. He says, "The more we lay stress on the object as such, on the characteristics which, in as much as it is an object, make it up; on the intelligibility with which it must be charged if it is to give a line of approach to the subject which faces it, the more we shall be obliged to leave the existential aspect in darkness."⁷ It is through bringing

⁵Gabriel Marcel, Tragic Wisdom and Beyond, trans. S. Jolin and P. McCormick (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. xxi.

⁶Earle, Objectivity, p. 154.

⁷Marcel, The Mystery of Being, 1:26.

to light these existential aspects that Marcel hopes to shed light on traditional metaphysical concerns.

Having made these general introductory comments to a presentation of Marcel's position, the presentation itself can now be embarked upon. It will consist of two general parts: (1) Marcel's distinction between mystery and problem, and (2) Marcel's distinction between primary and secondary reflection.

Mystery and Problem

Having dealt with Marcel's criticisms of various characteristics of scientific thought (Chapter One) which he considers inappropriate to or dangerous to the human situation, we must now concern ourselves with those particular areas of life and those particular subject matters to which he is alluding.

Despite the modern tendency to ignore or degrade as pseudo, traditional metaphysical questions remain central to Marcel's work. The meaning of life, the phenomenon of love and fidelity, the terrors of death, anxiety, despair and suicide--these and many other very real human concerns are of primary interest to Marcel as are the traditional metaphysical concerns--the mind/body question, freedom, etc., and one and all are, for him, considered in terms of mystery.⁸

⁸This term, perhaps more than any other, is responsible for a general misunderstanding of the thrust of Marcel's philosophy and too often results in it being categorized as mysticism.

The word 'mystery' is not in favour with most modern philosophers. It is important to clarify, therefore, that the term is not used in the sense of referring to dogmas of faith or revelations of God. Such an understanding of the term might lead some readers to suppose that Marcelian mysteries are not subject to the canons of logic or rationality, and any such understanding of the term must be put aside if one is to achieve any notion of what Marcel is trying to reveal in using this term.⁹

When one experiences a mystery, it, at first, appears to be merely a problem which is difficult to solve. Consider the following situation: I am involved in an intimate relationship with another person but despite all my effort and the many and various tactics I employ, the relationship simply does not "come together"; something is wrong and I struggle to analyze the situation, lay out the pieces and put them together again in a harmonious configuration. Countless hours are spent turning the situation over and over in my mind--nothing works. This is, indeed, a difficult problem. More than this, the more I grapple with the problem, the less sense it seems to make, until the entire situation seems to take on a sense of incredible absurdity. When reason has done its utmost and the relationship remains as much of a

⁹Marcel is often referred to as 'the Christian existentialist' which is misleading since it is often interpreted as meaning that his philosophical work presupposes religious belief and this is definitely not the case.

puzzle as ever, one possible next step is to acknowledge that it makes no sense--it is absurd--and throw it away as useless. This, in fact, would be the approach which would be taken according to Marcel, by those who have fallen into the spirit of abstraction and have resigned themselves to the dominance of scientific thought (see Chapter One).

Marcel would have us note in this situation, however, a further phenomenon. Having performed the technocratic, scientific analysis of the situation and having been confronted with the "revealed absurdity" of the situation and being prompted by the scientific attitude to reject the relationship; I find within myself a most disconcerting uneasiness with this conclusion; a feeling that something somewhere has gone very wrong. It is this feeling of uneasiness that Marcel would have us pay attention to¹⁰ and he maintains "this uneasiness is enough to show that there is in all this some appalling mistake, some ghastly misinterpretation."¹¹

Assuming, for the moment, that Marcel is correct and that something has, indeed, gone wrong; we shall now go back and try to ascertain where exactly things have gone amiss. In so doing, Marcel would agree with Bergson that we are philosophizing and that "to philosophize is to invert the

¹⁰This 'paying attention' is very important in Marcel's thought as we will see later.

¹¹Marcel, The Philosophy of Existence, p. 12.

habitual direction of the work of thought."¹²

Perhaps the most obvious thing to note is that a human relationship is not an object.¹³ This recognition of our example as a non-object is amazingly pregnant with possibility, with meaning. As soon as a "thing" is recognized as lying outside of or unable to be contained within the habitual objective approach to knowing, we are struck by the uniqueness and exciting potentiality of the "thing". As Jaspers puts it, "What is logically impossible to accomplish in the usual sense of knowledge is nonetheless philosophically possible as increasing lucidity of a sense of being totally different from all determinate knowledge. We enter the widest realm of possibility."¹⁴

Considering our human relationship further, we find that the distinction between what is in me and what is before me breaks down. It is this peculiar characteristic which should give me my first clue that this is not merely a difficult problem, it is not a problem at all--it is a mystery. A mystery is that from which I cannot extricate myself, that of which I am a part and this is why traditional epistemo-

¹²Bergson, Introduction to Metaphysics, p. 28.

¹³By 'object' Marcel always intends the literal meaning: something thrown or put in the way, so as to interrupt or obstruct the course of a person or thing; an obstacle, a hindrance.

¹⁴Karl Jaspers, Philosophy of Existence (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971). Trans. Richard F. Grabau. p. 19.

logical approaches (rationalism, analysis, scientific method, etc.) do not work and why I must acknowledge this fact and work from within the mystery, in accordance with my peculiar situation as inextricably bound up with it. As Mr. Gallagher maintains, "to philosophize is not to flee from the situation into the arid certainties of pure thought."¹⁵

Perhaps answering more to our example, but yet applicable to mystery itself is the following comment, "knowledge bears on universals; love reveals the singular; loving knowledge is the definition of philosophy."¹⁶

Our example of a human relationship has perhaps given us a clear enough idea of Marcel's notion of mystery so that we can now move away from the specific example to a more general treatment of the notion. Our goal in this section is ultimately to explain Marcel's statement that "the important point of this distinction (between mystery and problem) is not to denigrate objective knowledge, but to reveal metaphysical knowledge as that which must be treated as mystery."¹⁷

To center our discussion on the topic once again, let us restate our notion of mystery: a mystery is something in which I myself am involved, and it can therefore only be

¹⁵Kenneth T. Gallagher, The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel (New York: Fordham University Press, 1962), p. 14.

¹⁶T.M. Tonon, "Gabriel Marcel and The Spirit of Abstraction," Senior Honors Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, unpublished.

¹⁷Marcel, A Metaphysical Journal, p. 91.

thought of as a sphere where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and its initial validity. Certainly we may say that such traditional metaphysical questions as those concerned with freedom, commitment, the meaning of life, the existence of God; are of the sort that there is no objective standpoint which I can adopt to answer such questions. I am involved in and inseparable from that about which I am asking. Whether I am free or whether I am to believe in God, can never be decided on the basis of verifiable evidence which I can get apart from my willing, feeling and deciding self. Thus, a mystery is "a problem which encroaches upon its own data, invading them, as it were, and thereby transcending itself as a simple problem."¹⁸

The contemporary distaste for metaphysics may be explained by the historical fact that philosophers have not been able to answer its questions or solve its problems. Is it not possible that a key to this frustrating situation is that metaphysics does not deal with problems at all, but with mysteries? As Gallagher points out, "metaphysical questions ceaselessly renew themselves. They are not susceptible of a solution in any proper sense. On the contrary, there is a prevailing impression of an inexhaustible profundity, of depths which no amount of thought can fathom. The best that we can do is to

¹⁸Marcel, The Philosophy of Existence, p. 8.

locate ourselves within the mystery, but this can hardly be said to be a solution."¹⁹

We are anticipating the subsequent portion of this chapter when we quote Marcel, "Perhaps I can best explain my continual and central metaphysical preoccupation by saying that my aim is to discover how a subject, in his actual capacity as subject, is related to a reality which cannot in this context be regarded as objective yet which is persistently required and recognized as real."²⁰

We have now arrived at the central Marcelian issue: How is knowledge in the sphere of mystery possible? How are we to think participation?

¹⁹Gallagher, The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel, pp. 37-8.

²⁰Marcel, The Philosophy of Existence, p. 127.

Primary Reflection and Secondary Reflection

Our consideration in the previous section of Marcel's distinction between mystery and problem was primarily expressed in negative terms. However, knowing what a mystery is not is insufficient. Toward the end, then of clarifying what a mystery is for Marcel, the example introduced in the first section of this chapter will be used again.

As alluded to previously, a mystery appears initially to be a particularly difficult problem. However, upon reflection²¹ it is seen that the distinguishing characteristic of a mystery is that I am unable to extricate myself from it--I, that is, my concrete being, is bound up with a mystery. It is possible, of course, for me to approach a mystery as if it were merely a problem. This constitutes an implicit denial of the presence of a mystery. What does this lead to?

When one²² treats a human relationship, for example, as a problem, one is unconsciously applying the method and presuppositions of problem-solving. This means that the relationship is viewed as a thing, more or less similar to any other thing, i.e., objectifiable (it is over against me); analyzable (may be broken down into simple component parts);

²¹The term 'reflection' is used in the Marcelian sense as will be specifically shown subsequently.

²²It is interesting to note that the very language used in explicating a problem-solving approach is different from that used when dealing with mystery: the former encourages use of the neutrals: 'one,' 'the,' etc.; the latter the personal: 'I,' 'me,' etc.

conceptualizable (a universal).

Uncritical acceptance of these presuppositions determines not only one's approach to (in this case) a human relationship but more significantly (for Marcel), one's attitude toward it. Given these presuppositions, the person is truly a 'one'. That is, the approach is employable by any one at all. The result of this attitude parallels the approach in that my relationship, the relationship in which I am supposed to live, is transformed into "something of the kind 'relationship'." All "components" of the "problem" have been effectively neutralized--there is no concrete individual, no concrete relationship--in fact, nothing real is left at all.²³

Perhaps the most important aspect of this situation for Marcel, is the fact that the 'one', in extricating himself from the mystery-treated-as-problem; in neutralizing himself to the point where he is effectively any one at all, has transformed the relationship into a spectacle of sorts and an absurd spectacle at that. As Marcel puts it: "It may happen that I disregard my involvement (or, indeed, never recognize it) and turn myself into a neutral spectator. But this change of front carries with it the risk that the whole may also tend to appear to me as a pure spectacle, and especially in the case of a love relationship (as is the example employed here)

²³See Marcel's Homo Viator, pp. 68-79.

a spectacle lacking in sense."²⁴

At this point, one may either reject the relationship, i.e., dissolve it, due to its appearance as absurd, or reflect upon the situation further.²⁵ Marcel has an explicit explanation for the one choice or the other. He maintains that feeling (or lack of it) is that which is responsible for either abandoning the relationship (lack of feeling) or the decision to move beyond the problematic stance through reflection (presence of feeling).

Feeling is, for Marcel, that which is left over, the residue, so to speak, which is found when reason has gone as far as it can. It is that which belies the presence of mystery, that which points toward the presence of a value which cannot be revealed by the problem-solving approach.

To return to our example, the decision²⁶ to reflect upon the relationship is motivated by a feeling which results in a recognition that there is something more than that revealed by the problem-solving approach. It is the feeling that there is a valuable reality beyond what appeared through the problem-solving method as a mere absurdity.

Bound up with the presence of feeling and the reflection

²⁴Marcel, Being and Having, p. 17.

²⁵A third alternative, of course, is to retain the relationship with its absurdity, but this seems to be an obviously "dead-end" alternative.

²⁶This may or may not be entirely conscious.

it demands is the acknowledgement of a value which is worthy of a moving beyond the initial attempt (the problem-solving procedure) to "come to grips" with the relationship.

Marcel puts it this way, "I make my mental effort because something real, something valuable, is at stake. Reflection is never exercised on things that are not worth the trouble of reflecting about."²⁷

As soon as the avenue of reflection is embarked upon, this change of attitude changes the approach. The initial dissolution effected by the problem-solving attitude is over-come, i.e., the artificial separation of my self from my relationship with another is abandoned and my involvement is recognized and embraced. This is necessarily so due to the very nature of this second reflection since it is "a personal act; an act which nobody else is able to undertake in my place or on my behalf. The act of reflection is linked, as bone is linked with bone in the human body, to living experience; and it is important to understand the nature of that link."²⁸ To put it succinctly, the very act of reflection situates me back where I began (in immediacy) before the problem-solving attitude was assumed--in a concrete individual experience. That is, I acknowledge my involvement, which was, of course, present throughout the

²⁷Marcel, The Mystery of Being, 1:97.

²⁸Ibid., p. 98.

problem-solving activity, but not acknowledged.

This fact of not having acknowledged the mystery does not, of course, alter its being a mystery, but it does alter the manner in which it appears to me.

Reflection is nothing other than a kind of attention--an attention directed toward that which resists problem-solving methodology and this attention (as opposed to the non-acknowledgement of mystery intrinsic in problem-solving) reveals (or admits revelation of) something valuable, something concrete, something almost overwhelmingly real.

It must be clarified at this point, that the Marcelian use of the term 'reflection' is unique. Marcel distinguishes two kinds of reflection which he calls primary reflection and secondary reflection. Both types of reflection are epistemological in character, i.e., both are ways of becoming aware of something. The discussion of reflection carried on in this section up to this point has been a discussion of what Marcel terms secondary reflection. It is absolutely necessary, if we are to understand the epistemological significance of Marcel's philosophical work, to now embark upon a fairly detailed elucidation of the most important Marcelian distinction between primary reflection and secondary reflection.²⁹

²⁹I should like to make note that in a single place, in a single work, Marcel distinguishes between knowledge and knowing--equating the former with secondary reflection; the latter with primary reflection: "We must say then that thought is inside existence, that it is a mode of existence which is privileged in being able to make abstraction from

In beginning our discussion of primary and secondary reflection, we can now attempt an answer to the questions posed at the end of the first section of this chapter, i.e., "How is knowledge in the sphere of mystery possible?" How are we to think participation?" We are thinking participation when we are engaged in secondary reflection and knowledge in the sphere of mystery is possible in secondary reflection through primary reflection. This is the Marcellian answer to these questions, the full meaning of which will be clarified in the discussion which follows.

What is meant by the statement, "secondary reflection is thinking participation?" First, secondary reflection is that sort of thought which is appropriate to mystery and, as we have seen earlier, mystery is involvement. In acknowledging mystery then, i.e., embarking upon secondary reflection, one is, at the same time and of necessity, thinking participation, i.e., mystery. Mystery, participation and secondary reflection all are means of expressing various aspects of the same thing and any one presupposes the other.

Perhaps a few words more ought to be said concerning involvement (my factual, concrete state within a mystery)

itself qua existence, and this for strictly limited purposes. It would not be untrue to say that thought involves in this sense (primary reflection) a sort of lie, or rather a sort of fundamental blindness; but the blindness disappears in proportion as it is accompanied by knowledge, which I take to mean the return to being (secondary reflection). But such a return can only be made intelligible if the initial blindness has been explicitly recognized." Marcel, Being and Having, p. 28.

and participation (the activity of secondary reflection toward the goal of knowledge within a mystery). Our example of a human relationship is one which clearly exhibits the above characteristics. Relationship, of course, actually means involvement and lack of participation within a relationship effects loss of any meaningful use of the term.

Marcel presents many examples of mystery, some of which exhibit just as clearly the characteristics of involvement and participation as our example: fidelity, hope, despair, and faith. These examples (and our own as well) although, of course, genuine mysteries are yet for Marcel used more as stepping stones toward those mysteries with which his work is more primarily concerned. These are the traditional metaphysical mysteries, such as the existence of God, the nature of human freedom, the "mind/body problem", etc., and, ultimately, the nature of being itself. Through elucidation of the first group of mysteries, he hopes to move more easily and intelligibly to the second and then to the third, even though, as he is careful to often and emphatically point out, the third is presupposed for and is the foundation of all mysteries and, indeed, of all phenomena whatever.

The second group of mysteries--traditional metaphysical questions, given our extensive discussion of the first group of mysteries--clearly are mysteries in the Marcelian use of the term. The question of the scope and nature of human freedom, for example, clearly involves me as a human being. I am

a part of the question and my activities and experiences may properly be brought to bear on the question. Answers to this question have an enormous impact on my life; indeed, may determine its entire character. I cannot, therefore, meaningfully extricate the fact of my immediate, concrete being from the question. I, as this particular, embodied being³⁰ am involved in this question before I ever begin to recognize the need for or the possibility of a "philosophical investigation" of the question and Marcel wishes not only to draw our attention to the fact of our a priori involvement but to the necessity of our taking into account this involvement as a priori to any metaphysical undertaking.

The third type of mystery, being itself, is the ultimate mystery in the sense that it is the absolute foundation of all thought and although it precedes any thought, i.e., is necessarily a priori to any thought, Marcel seems to be saying that it is practically and factually acknowledged only after ascending certain levels of thought, i.e., immediate apprehension; primary knowing, secondary knowledge. We shall return to Marcel's notion of being itself after we have sufficiently clarified the Marcelian distinction between primary reflection and secondary reflection.

Marcel is a metaphysician at a time when metaphysics is out of style, some might even say, extinct. The whole of

³⁰Marcel prefers the phrase, "incarnate being."

Marcel's work is an attempt not merely to "save" metaphysics as a valid intellectual enterprise, but much more importantly (and ambitiously) to save mankind from the loss of those values which would result from its abandonment.³¹ Primary reflection (problem-solving, scientific method, etc.) can never reveal value and a world which embraces primary reflection exclusively will (according to Marcel) be effectively cut off from it. As Earle puts it: "there is no factual description of values which does not evacuate those values of their value. There can only be expressive and imperative statements which communicate how they feel, but do not state the content of the feeling as a descriptive proposition. Our conclusion then is that objective reality is valueless, and nothing but dead fact."³² This life of dead fact which is the result of blind faith in primary reflection to the exclusion of any other manner of knowing is nothing short of the ultimate tragedy for Marcel, and indeed one of his most powerful works is devoted exclusively to warning of such an imminent tragedy.³³

The entire thrust of Marcel's work is essentially a plea to mankind not to reject primary reflection and all its benefits, but to recognize that it is not the final answer and its ultimate repercussions will be a humanly meaningless

³²Earle, Objectivity, p. 61.

³³This work is Marcel's Tragic Wisdom and Beyond.

world of empty "knowing that." The plea is evident in the following statement, "Metaphysics is not a purely impersonal science, carried on in the snug security of objective categories. It is a means of exorcising despair."³⁴ A world without metaphysics (secondary reflection) is a world of dead facts (primary reflection), a world without values, given over to despair. This is what Marcel is determined to avoid.

Given Marcel's great concern with the necessity to re-establish secondary reflection to its proper place, he, however, makes every effort to avoid what he terms "an intrinsic artificial duality" in modes of knowing, and insists that there is no need to completely abandon either primary or secondary reflection. Each of the two is important in the proper place. In fact, they are not two different things--a 'this' and a 'that'--but rather (and here language makes difficult a clear explication), two different modes of the same thing. Marcel says: "we must make a distinction here (discussing primary and secondary reflection) between the notions of difference and duality and to protest against everyday language which, having to do above all with physical objects, inevitably contributes to the confusion of difference with duality."³⁵ Gallagher puts it this way: "Secondary reflection differs not in the instrument of

³⁴Marcel, Being and Having, p. 87. (My emphasis.)

³⁵Marcel, The Mystery of Being, 1:80.

thought which it uses but in the direction of the thought. Primary reflection tends to reify its concepts and in doing so, to abstract from existence; secondary reflection, in replunging into the oceanic immediacy from which its concepts are scooped up, at the same time re-establishes the primacy of the existential."³⁶ The following quotation from Bergson may also help to illustrate this point. "We distinguish two different ways of knowing a thing. The first implies we move around an object; the second that we enter into it. The first depends on the point of view at which we are placed and on the symbols by which we express ourselves. The second neither depends on a point of view nor relies on any symbol."³⁷

What is implicit in these statements must be made explicit. We are not to suppose we are on the horns of a dilemma in the distinction of primary and secondary reflection. Rather we must recognize their relationship, the applicability of one and the other and the need for them both--neither to the exclusion of the other. While it may seem that Marcel is attempting to rejuvenate secondary reflection at the expense of primary reflection, it only seems to be so since it is secondary reflection which is in desperate need of revival and, as Marcel says, "my work is concerned with knowledge in

³⁶Gallagher, The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel, p. 43.

³⁷Bergson, Introduction to Metaphysics, p. 1.

its capacity to transcend objectivity."³⁸ So, while Marcel's emphasis is necessarily on secondary reflection, it ought not be drawn from this that Marcel longs for the destruction of primary reflection. After all, Marcel does use the term "transcend" in his quoted statement above, not "destroy."

Marcel also wishes to make clear that in many cases, primary reflection is absolutely essential in order for secondary reflection to arise. Oftentimes it is primary reflection which points the way to a mystery, but its failure to "deal convincingly"³⁹ with the subject matter. In fact, Marcel often speaks of primary reflection as a "level of thought" which transcends itself in secondary reflection. "Certainly objective knowledge has its place but only as an initial phase in the 'ascending dialectic'! Objective knowledge is neither definitive nor total knowledge. In order to remain loyal to itself, it must transcend itself and give way to the ontological mystery. In fact, it points out its own incomplete and limited nature."⁴⁰

There is a certain ambiguity in Marcel's distinction between primary and secondary reflection in that at times the language he uses gives the impression that the one is totally divorced from the other. For example, "we can say

³⁹By this is meant that the subject feels the inadequacy of the problem-solving approach.

⁴⁰Marcel, Being and Having, p. 174.

that where 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."⁴¹ This apparent difficulty, however, is overcome when a grasp of the whole of Marcel's thought (as opposed to isolated quotes here and there) is achieved. It then becomes clear that Marcel does not intend to say that a radical division exists between the two, but rather that they are simply different--they involve a difference in attitude, but not a difference in nature--and oftentimes they are complementary. The difficulty arises from language since language is such that everything tends to be presented as either subject or predicate, and a thought which must be expressed in such a way cannot reveal the presence of being--or express its real meaning. The order of mystery is both transobjective and transsubjective and, as Marcel puts it, "Ontological reality cannot be designated, but only alluded to."⁴²

It is necessary for completion of this explication of Marcel's epistemological position regarding mystery, to turn our attention to the conscious subject. For simplicity's sake we will use the term 'person' throughout this discussion to avoid the subject/object dichotomy and will mean by this term, 'subject-conscious-of-object'.

⁴¹Marcel, The Mystery of Being, 1:102-3.

⁴²Marcel, A Metaphysical Journal, p. 128.

To avoid misunderstanding, it must be pointed out that primary or secondary reflection does not "come over" a person in the sense that the person is completely passive. This could not be farther from the truth. For Marcel, the person is always an active, free⁴³ subject and very much in control (whether consciously or not) of his cognitive activity.

Referring to the particular cognitive activity appropriate to mystery, Marcel says, "All reflection does not by any means come to a halt in mystery, but we do have to adapt our inquiry to the new conditions and employ the means of reflective inquiry suited to the mysterious order."⁴⁴ A person, therefore, must not only choose to move beyond or transcend primary reflection but also, in a very real sense, is in control of the direction and position of his cognitive activity even after the mysterious order is recognized as such and ipso facto he is in the realm of secondary reflection.

The person qua subject, is, for Marcel, always a responsible subject, responsible for the knowledge which he gleans from any experience, situation, object, etc.⁴⁵

I believe Mr. Earle puts it very well, "The subject must

⁴³Freedom is a very important notion in Marcel's thought but beyond describing Marcel's idea of free, cognitive activity in a person, the larger notion lies beyond the scope of this paper.

⁴⁴Marcel, Being and Having, p. x.

⁴⁵It must be borne in mind that the subject and the object are only discernable features of a concrete whole, the subject-conscious-of-an-object. They are not separable data. None of the members of the triad are separable. They are distinguishable but, in ordinary consciousness, not to be found in isolation.

be open to the reality it would know. Nothing is automatic in the life of subjectivity, everything is free act. Everything depends on choice...on the inner direction and movement of the self. It must choose to see and to know if it is to see or know at all."⁴⁶

And this is so whether one takes the avenue of primary reflection or secondary reflection--the person determines how a thing appears and indeed, what appears. If we must attribute activity or passivity to any component of the whole of 'subject-as-conscious-of-an-object,' it would have to be stated that passivity is on the "side" of the object. The world cannot by its pressure force a subject to recognize it. Recognition, i.e., cognition in its explicit mode, rests upon the free act of opening the self. However, we must hasten to make clear at this point, before any misunderstanding occurs, that once the self makes that choice and opens itself to what is there, what it sees is simply what is there and not what it might wish to see.

As Jeanne Delhomme puts the most complex situation of mystery: "There are a thousand different ways of exploring the ontological mystery; there are an infinite number of concrete approaches to it, none of which exhausts the inexhaustible concrete reality, but each of which testifies to the same presence."⁴⁷ Ms. Delhomme's statement implicitly

⁴⁶Earle, Objectivity, p. 54.

⁴⁷Jeanne Delhomme, Temoignage et Dialectique, in

alludes to the following statement of Marcel, "(mine) is a metaphysics of we are as opposed to a metaphysic of I think."⁴⁸ Philosophic universality is thus realized by the unanimity (yet certainly not the identity) of testimonials while the condition of the existing being is common to all, every existence is personal. Philosophy (for Marcel, the ascending dialectic of reflection) is the concrete unity of these two elements of the ontological mystery. This rooting of the ontological mystery in the concrete must of necessity change the character of the knowledge which is achieved in the sphere of being. In this case we have a "science" which cannot prescind from the singular; obviously it can only be analogically similar to those sciences which are constituted as sciences by prescinding from the singular.

Metaphysics, is, for Marcel, a discipline peculiar unto itself. It is, for one thing, the only discipline which is specifically concerned with that which is fundamental and foundational to, as well as presupposed, but not acknowledged by, all other disciplines--being. It is that discipline whose attention is specifically directed toward mystery, whether it be individual mysteries (particular instances of being) or the absolute mystery (being itself). As Jaspers puts it: "philosophizing is the expression of an encounter with being. This expression takes two directions: a

Existentialisme Chretien (Paris: Plon, 1947), p. 200.

⁴⁸Marcel, The Mystery of Being, 1:10.

reflection on the nature and limits of objective knowledge, which I call world orientation and a transcending thinking in which being itself comes to expression, which I call metaphysics."⁴⁹ It is the peculiar nature of metaphysics, i.e., the discipline whose subject matter is being, that is responsible for its having fallen into disrepute in the modern age. In an age where primary reflection (scientific method, problem-solving approach, etc.) has been embraced as the exclusive road to knowledge, there is no place for a discipline whose subject matters resist this approach and, indeed, are considered absurd or "unreal", i.e., pseudo-subject matters, when approached in this manner. The subject matter of metaphysics is such that it cannot be analyzed, i.e., broken down into manageable component parts; aspects cannot be separated off; experiences cannot be 'diagrammed into intelligibility. This does not pose any difficulty for Mr. Earle, who says, "if there are elements in experience which cannot be sorted out neatly according to categorical method, then so much the worse for the categorical method."⁵⁰

Consider the Marcelian statement:

To postulate the meta-problematical is to postulate the primacy of being over knowledge (not of being as asserted, but of being as asserting itself); it is to recognize that knowledge is environed by being; that it is interior to it in a certain sense.

⁴⁹Jaspers, The Philosophy of Existence, p. 33.

⁵⁰Earle, Objectivity, p. 52.

From this is the standpoint, contrary to what epistemology seeks vainly to establish, there exists well and truly a mystery of cognition; knowledge is contingent on a participation in being for which no epistemology can account because it continually presupposes it.⁵¹

Gallagher says much the same thing but perhaps a bit more clearly, "(Philosophical reflection) is constituted around a given which, upon reflection, not only does not become transparent to itself, but is converted into a distinct apprehension of, I do not say a contradiction, but a radical mystery which gives way to an antinomy as soon as discursive thought attempts to reduce it, or, if you wish, problematize it."⁵²

James Collins, in the introduction to Marcel's Being and Having tries to explicate Marcel's epistemological position by saying the following: "there must be a hold on the real at the root of intelligence. His (Marcel's) existentialism does not accept an irrationalist split between being and having, being and knowing, but requires that the latter act transpire at the heart of being. Marcel is disturbed by the inadequacy of the concept to express existential reality, but he also gropes toward some intellectual grasp upon the real which will respect the latter in its proper actuality."⁵³

Marcel himself in trying to "grobe toward some intellec-

⁵¹Marcel, The Philosophy of Existence, p. 18.

⁵²Gallagher, The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel, p. 43.

⁵³Marcel, Being and Having, p. xiii.

tual grasp upon the real which will respect (it) in its proper actuality,"⁵⁴ explains, "The difficulty with which I had to cope was that of conceiving an order which, while irreducible to any objective constituents, would in no way be tainted by an arbitrariness commonly believed to prevail on the level of subjectivity."⁵⁵

The above is, of course, not to be misunderstood as meaning that metaphysical knowledge is merely subjective knowledge as Marcel makes quite clear, "... (being) is a question of fundamental situation; this fundamental situation cannot be an object; and it might be said that it is not to be appraised in terms of a subject/object distinction. I think that there is no more serious error in this respect than the error of subjectifying."⁵⁶ And perhaps even more clearly, Marcel says in another work, "For, in fact, we are now at a stage where we have to transcend the primary and fundamentally spatial opposition between external and internal, between outside and inside. Insofar as I really contemplate a landscape a certain togetherness grows up between the landscape and me. But this is the point where we can begin to get a better grasp of that regathering, or regrouping process of which I spoke earlier; is the state of ingatheredness not, in fact, the very means by which I am able to

⁵⁴Ibid., p. xiii.

⁵⁵Marcel, The Existential Background of Human Dignity, p. 25.

⁵⁶Marcel, Tragic Wisdom and Beyond, p. 61.

transcend the opposition of my inner and outer worlds?"⁵⁷

In fact, Marcel is saying that metaphysical thought is that which does and in fact must, transcend the subject/object dichotomy of problematic thought. It is that sort of thought to which any such separation of parts becomes meaningless and, indeed, literally causes its "object" to disappear.

Some commentators on Marcel find all of this to be extremely odd and even an absurd epistemological position.⁵⁸ One can respond to such views no better than does Mr. Earle, "It is true that the idea of Being or reality is a very odd one. But it would be odd if it were not. After all, we are dealing with something which is essentially and necessarily unlike any other object in the world. Here, at best are some analogies and it is almost the case that anything in the world can serve as an analogy for Being. And while anything can serve, it is also true that none is anything but a point of suggestiveness, and is radically false if taken literally."⁵⁹

Granting the difficulties posed by language in the realm of being, just what is this knowledge which Marcel claims is gleaned from secondary reflection? It is, as we have seen, a knowledge gleaned through personal, individual, concrete persons. Isn't Marcel rather reminiscent of Prota-

⁵⁷Marcel, The Mystery of Being, 1:158.

⁵⁸See especially Marjorie Greene's, The Existential Philosophers.

⁵⁹Earle, Objectivity, p. 86.

goras? Despite the Marcelian claims to the contrary, hasn't he "placed" metaphysics in the realm of mere subjectivity?

At this point, an attempt will be made not so much to show in the face of these objections that Marcel is right, but rather how the criticisms are--not so much wrong--but rather meaningless in the sphere of mystery, i.e., being. As unsatisfactory as the response to these questions may be, the only possible response is, these questions make no sense; they are completely unrelated to the sphere to which they are directed. They are asking for categorization and such requests simply cannot be satisfied in the realm of metaphysics.

This request for categorization is an implicit request for possession⁶⁰, and it is necessary to point out that intellectually, the only reality I 'possess' is what I can characterize. But a thought which proceeds in this manner is a thought which never makes contact with being. For being is uncharacterizable. The point is that the questions are asking something of being which it cannot deliver. It is asking something akin to "What color is love?" Marcel makes this point by stating, "to be cannot be a property, since it is to be that makes possible the existence of any property at all; it is that without which no property whatsoever can be conceived; it is to be that makes possible the existence

⁶⁰An important aspect of Marcel's work is the distinction between being and having. However, the scope of this paper does not allow of an in-depth explication of this important Marcelian Distinction beyond reference to Marcel's epistemological approach.

of any property at all."⁶¹

The questions lie solidly within the realm of primary reflection and demand the clear objects which are the only sort which primary reflection allows. The posing of these questions (by empiricists, rationalists, or whomever) are grounded in the same fallacy. They mistake partial notations for real parts, confusing the point of view of analysis and (for want of a better term) of intuition, of science and metaphysics. An intuition is desired, yet by a strange inconsistency this intuition is sought in analysis, which is the very negation of it. In a deeper and certainly much more Marcelian sense, such questioners lack the necessary personal characteristic "of an ability to admire--their intellectual thrust is not really to know but rather to obtain, to possess, to 'cage'."⁶² Since for Marcel metaphysics is only possible through communion, it is easy to see why he will declare that the inability to admire is a metaphysical fault: it is the mark of the indisponible⁶³ man and the indisponible man cannot be a metaphysician.⁶⁴ It would, I believe be not inappropriate to comment that the indisponible man demands, attempts to grab being by the throat and

⁶¹Marcel, The Mystery of Being, 1:23.

⁶²Ibid., p. 91.

⁶³Marcel refers to that endowment of the person in virtue of which he is open to others and to reality by the untranslatable term, "disponibilite." (See Being and Having,

and shake the truth out of it, so to speak; while the true metaphysician, in one aspect of his stance⁶⁵ (and to borrow a phrase from Martin Heidegger), "Waits on being."⁶⁶

As stated earlier, the charges of "mere subjectivity" make no sense in the realm of metaphysics. Perhaps, however, critics may be able to relate more easily to the following statement of Gallagher, who is here responding to the charges of subjectivity, "But the entire fear is grounded on the misconception that as we descend into subjectivity we find a more and more isolated particularity. Whereas the truth appears to be just the opposite. The concrete universal is the pearl hidden in the heart of authentic subjectivity."⁶⁷ Or again, "...true subjectivity is not mere subjectivity. Since the conception of being includes both subject and object, then the philosophy of being can be neither a purely objective nor a purely subjective inquiry...since the matters of such an inquiry could not coincide with the true notion of being--since being transcends the division between subject and object."⁶⁸

p. 69; pp. 76-77.) The connotation of the French form (as well as it can be rendered in English), is: openness, release, abandonment, welcoming surrender, readiness to respond.

⁶⁴Marcel, Du refus a l'invocation, pp. 67-70.

⁶⁵One must not equate *disponible* with passivity--the French term does not carry this connotation as its English translations do.

⁶⁶See Martin Heidegger's Being and Time.

⁶⁷Gallagher, The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel, p. 141.

Regarding this subject, a few relevant statements may be helpful. For example, consider the following remarks of Mr. Earle: "It would be wonderful indeed if the character of the mystery, its inmost essence, were something simple to grasp and we needed only to hear the correct description to satisfy ourselves we had grasped it. Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the real situation. There is a mystery here at bottom and it would be foolish to pretend that there was not. But we can still do something--a mystery may be approached, and perhaps we can deepen our acquaintance with it."⁶⁸ And again, "we don't know what the entire character of reality is, and we should not attempt to close our ignorance through impatience with the infinity of the absolute itself."

Stephen Jolin in the introduction to Marcel's Tragic Wisdom and Beyond tries to clarify Marcel's view of the true situation as opposed to the objectivity/subjectivity controversy in the following way:

...his position is that we need not choose between the horns of the dilemma, as a logic rooted in the traditional opposition between individual experience and universal significance would seem to demand. Philosophy ought to be defined by reference to a 'third' which is properly speaking, a vocation and the philosophy true to his vocation is the one who succeeds in 'preserving in himself a paradoxical equilibrium between the spirit of universality on the one hand, inasmuch as this is embodied in values which must be recognized as unalterable, and on the

⁶⁸Earle, Objectivity, p. 48

other hand his personal experiences...for it will be the source of whatever contribution he might make.⁷¹

The literal meaning of the word 'vocation' is meaningful in our context. Universality, for Marcel, cannot be regarded as a possession, so much as an ongoing task. Even the unalterability and unconditionality encountered in the universal is to be taken as a direction for a journey, not as a resting place.

Marcel, in a characteristic way, says:

The philosopher's vocation is a call to 'fraternal comprehension', which means in practice the brotherly attempt to share with other persons the deepest insights that experience enhanced by reflection can provide. The fraternal spirit of universality means not only speaking with others but prophetically speaking for them, as I find Whitman speaking for innumerable beings incapable of expressing themselves.⁷²

We are all, for Marcel, witnesses. This is the essential fact of our lives--the fact that we are witnesses and that this is the expression of our mode of belonging to the world. When the philosophical enterprise is reduced to bickering between various schools we find ourselves in the position of communicating but hardly communing. It is unreal communication and hardly conducive to the philosophical enterprise. We may find ourselves in situations where another understands what I say to him, but he does not

⁷¹Marcel, Tragic Wisdom and Beyond, p. xxi.

⁷²Marcel, Homo Viator, p. 40. (The reference is to the poet, Walt Whitman.)

understand the meaning: I may even have the extremely disagreeable feeling that my own words, as he repeats them to me, have become unrecognizable. By a very singular phenomenon indeed, this person, interposes himself between me and my own reality; he makes me, in some sense, a stranger to my own meanings; my own reality. We do not mean to say that all philosophers must agree with one another--that would be absurd and in fact a real danger to true philosophical thought. However, the tendency of various schools to translate the meanings of others into their own to avoid dealing with the meanings themselves is certainly antithetical to the philosophic spirit.

This concludes the presentation of Marcel's thought. In the next chapter comments and inquiries will be made concerning it.

CHAPTER THREE: COMMENTS AND QUERIES

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, piecemeal criticisms are not appropriate given the nature of Marcel's thought. However, a few comments and inquiries are in order.

Introductory to these comments, I should like to mention a fact of Marcel's personal life. Due to certain physical difficulties, Marcel was not able to serve in a military capacity during the First World War. As an alternative, he performed voluntary services for the Red Cross. The nature of these services was to locate families of deceased servicemen and inform them of the death of their family member. It was this experience which motivated Marcel to take up the line of thought which has resulted in his "participatory metaphysics." Marcel had always been a delicate child, pampered and protected by a wealthy father and an attentive aunt (his mother died when he was very young) and the painful experience of having to deal in a professional capacity with grief-stricken people seems to have affected him very deeply and resulted in a life-long concern with the specifically human situation. Had his formal education been in psychology rather than philosophy, it is conceivable that he would have pursued a career in psychology similar to that of Rollo May.

These rather interesting speculations aside, however, I should like to suggest that Marcel's inordinate concern

with concrete, human situations has had the effect of making a determination of any real difference between philosophy and life within his work very difficult.

For example, when I recognize that my human relationship (to refer to the example of mystery used in this paper) is a mystery, i.e., that I am involved in this relationship and that I must live this relationship in order for it to be meaningful; would Marcel say, given this situation, that I am a philosopher? Does my recognition of mystery (whether I identify it in those terms or not) make me a metaphysician? Marcel never makes his position clear on this subject and it is therefore worthy of consideration.

Certainly it would seem very odd indeed if all those people who recognize the ontological value of their being and who recognize mystery in their lives and treat it accordingly turned out to be metaphysicians! What would be the repercussions of such a glut of metaphysicians?

The implicit assumption would seem to be that metaphysics and a truly human life are one and the same thing. Is this the case? Is there any difference between, e.g., Marcel in his activity as a metaphysician and his activity of living his own personal, individual life?

There is certainly a difference and it seems to amount to the fact that Marcel treats his personal experiences as indicative of or revelatory of certain universal human realities. In other words, he abstracts from a personal, concrete

experience to a universal reality. But isn't this abstraction one of those things to which Marcel vehemently objects? Have we discovered a serious contradiction between what Marcel says and what Marcel does?

Marcel has never (so far as I know) had anything specific to say concerning this, but a clue may be found if we consider the notions of direction or attitude of thought. That is, I suggest that the level of abstraction at which the Marcelian metaphysician carries on his work is different in attitude or direction from that at which, e.g., the physicist or the astronomer functions.

Marcel refers to secondary reflection as being, "recuperative," i.e., it returns to that essential unity of a person and his experience which is dissolved in primary reflection.¹ This suggests that the movement of secondary reflection is backward, i.e., toward immediacy as opposed to primary reflection whose movement is upward, i.e., away from immediacy. This being the case, perhaps Marcel would respond to a charge of contradiction within his thought by saying that abstractions gleaned through the activity of primary reflection (which he opposes in the realm of mystery) is quite different from that arrived at through the

¹"we can say that where 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." Marcel, The Mystery of Being, 1:102-3.

activity of secondary reflection--not a difference in nature, but rather a difference in attitude, in direction which when taken into account, may dispel any charge of contradiction. In other words, what Marcel may respond is that abstraction arrived at through primary reflection is, when applied to the metaphysical realm, a fall into the spirit of abstraction, i.e., the concrete, the immediate is abandoned; whereas abstraction arrived at through secondary reflection is proper within the metaphysical realm since it recognizes and, in some sense, retains the immediacy of experience.

This explanation is, of course, only a possible explanation since Marcel himself never deals with the question. However, such an explanation is consistent within Marcel's thought and satisfactorily resolves the apparent contradiction (and, incidentally, relieves the world of an enormous number of metaphysicians!). This explanation makes consistent the fact that as a metaphysician Marcel abstracts to the universal (which differentiates him from those many people who maintain ontological awareness within their own lives) with Marcel's objections against the spirit of abstraction.

Another possible way of dealing with this difficulty may be helpful. First, however, it must be repeated that Marcel is not opposed to abstraction. It is to the spirit of abstraction that he objects, i.e., mistaking the abstraction for reality; "forgetting" that it is the concrete from

which the abstraction was gathered that is real. Within the realm of metaphysics, of course, Marcel is most especially opposed to the presence of the spirit of abstraction since by its very nature it closes off any access to being.

However, abstraction is, as was pointed out previously, necessary for any thought at all. Certain kinds of thought, however, are appropriate to certain kinds of subject matters. For example, in Marcelian terms, primary reflection is appropriate to the subject matters of the natural sciences; while secondary reflection is appropriate to the subject matters of metaphysics. Proceeding one step further, it would not seem unreasonable to suggest that different kinds of thought yield different kinds of abstractions and these may be differentiated by saying that primary reflection yields abstractions of the kind that leave immediacy behind while secondary reflection yields abstractions which include the immediate.

A clear characterization of what is involved in secondary reflection, as exemplified by the two preceding attempts, is very difficult and may be taken as indicative of a mystery of cognition. As Marcel puts it, "...contrary to what epistemology seeks vainly to establish, there exists still and truly a mystery of cognition."²

It is interesting to note that St. Thomas Aquinas sug-

²Marcel, The Philosophy of Existence, p. 18.

gests that the human undertaking of metaphysics puts man in the closest possible contact with the angels, for metaphysics involves intellect as distinguished from reason. The former approaches the state of being able to grasp a multitude of truths in the unity of a single idea³ while the latter is the usual state of man, that of grasping a certain unity in multiplicity.⁴ There may be a certain similarity between St. Thomas' suggestion that metaphysics involves one in a realm similar to that of the angels and Marcel's statements that metaphysics involves one in the realm of mystery.

Whether we are making a "vain epistemological attempt," or are attempting access to the realm of the angels or are treating problematically that which is mysterious, it seems we have gone as far as is possible with this subject. No doubt a difficulty remains, but perhaps this discussion has shed some light upon it.

There is a second, in some sense, a related subject which would seem proper at this point. This subject concerns the manner in which universal statements may be made according to Marcel's position.

The notion of participation is important in Marcel's

³Indeed, the final goal of metaphysics would seem to be to grasp a multitude of truths in the single idea--being.

⁴See St. Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica, I, 58,3.

thought, not only as characteristic of mystery but also in terms of the metaphysical activity as a whole. A metaphysician, speculating in isolation, would not be a metaphysician at all in the Marcelian sense, not only in view of the fact that a person who would limit his life to study and books could in no sense be a philosopher since he would not be in contact with the fullness of experience which human life offers; but also in the sense that, for Marcel, the metaphysical activity must be carried on with others. As he says, "The philosopher's vocation is a call to 'fraternal comprehension', which means in practice the brotherly attempt to share with others the deepest insights that experience enhanced by reflection can provide."⁵

The question which must be asked is, what is the result of this sharing of ideas? How is a judgement to be reached concerning the universal validity of such insights?

Marcel seems to suggest that philosophic universality is realized by a certain unanimity of testimony to insight. Is he proposing that a tally of some sort must be taken to determine what the majority of metaphysicians would testify to concerning any particular insight? This would seem to be, at the very least, highly impractical; and, at the very most, a rather absurd manner of determining truth within the realm of metaphysics.

⁵Marcel, Homo Viator, p. 40.

Marcel has said that conclusions, as such, cannot be arrived at in the area of metaphysics. To what end, then, is the approach to the metaphysical realm made? What is to be our attitude toward this kind of "collection" of metaphysical insights? Is the goal of the metaphysician to be simply to testify to the fact that the presence of mystery is a reality? This clearly does not seem to be the case since Marcel himself makes many statements concerning the nature of specific metaphysical mysteries.

Still, the question remains, how are such statements of Marcel (and any other metaphysicians) to be validated? Marcel seems to be suggesting that the only possible validation can come from one's own experience of a similar insight.

This question of validation is a very puzzling one and I am unable to find any other possible answer to this question than the one given above within Marcel's works. It may be the case that this is the answer Marcel would give.

However, while this answer may not seem to some to be entirely satisfactory, it seems the question can be pursued no farther here.

A third area now seems worthy of comment. This is the "subjectivity as opposed to objectivity" controversy, or the "subject/object dichotomy" which has been referred to repeatedly by Marcel and his colleagues.

In view of the fact that the terms 'subject,' and 'object,' 'subjectivity,' and 'objectivity' are used so often through-

out Marcel's philosophical works and also in view of the fact that the most common criticism of Marcel's work is that it involves one in subjectivity, I believe a closer look at the way in which these terms are used may prove beneficial in our attempt at greater understanding of Marcel's position.

The four terms under consideration are not univocal but equivocal and for our purposes we note the following meanings:

"subject" - (1) that to which all mental representations are attributed; the thinking or cognizing agent, (2) the term of a proposition concerning which the predicate is affirmed or denied, (3) that which feels as contrasted with the object of feeling.

"object" - (1) anything that is visible or tangible and is stable in form, (2) anything which may be apprehended intellectually; that which is external to the mind, (3) something thrown or put in the way so as to obstruct or interrupt the course of a person; an obstacle; a hindrance.

"objective" - (1) being or belonging to the object of perception or thought (opposed to subjective), (2) not affected by personal feelings or situations, (3) intent upon or dealing with things external to the mind.

"subjective" - (1) existing in the mind; belonging to the thinking subject rather than to the object of

thought (opposed to objective), (2) pertaining to or on the part of an individual; personal, (3) placing emphasis or reliance on one's own attitudes, opinions, etc., (4) relating to properties or specific conditions of the mind as distinguished from general or universal experience.

It is immediately apparent from the meanings noted here that while 'subject' and 'object' are, in their most common meanings, correlative terms, i.e., they designate two aspects of a single relationship; 'subjective' and 'objective' are opposing terms.

Marcel insists on using the term 'object' in meaning (3) supposedly since he wishes to identify 'object' with that into which mystery is transformed when approached by problematic thought. This use of 'object' in sense(3), however, seems to "set him up" for charges of subjectivity since he introduces this dichotomous thought which seems to have had the result of putting his critics in the position of choosing between two mutually exclusive positions--objectivity or subjectivity--and since Marcel's opposition to objectivity is very clear, the charges of subjectivity "fall out."

There seems to have been no real need for Marcel to have introduced a subject/object dichotomy in his discussion of the inappropriateness of the problem-solving approach in the realm of mystery. The point would have been made had he simply shown that the problem solving approach treats of

objects in the sense of the first meaning of the term (as noted above) and is therefore inappropriate to mystery since a mystery is an object in the second sense of the term. This would have avoided the divisive atmosphere which results from the introduction of the term 'object' in the third sense.

This perhaps unfortunate use of the term 'object' in sense (3) results (or at least sets the stage for) in the charges of subjectivity. When these charges are made, however, the Marcellian response is that such charges are meaningless and seems to support this position by referring to the correlative nature of subject and object when their common meanings are intended. He says there exists no split or division between subject and object and rather suggests we use the phrase "subject-as-conscious-of-an-object." This does not really answer the charge, however, but rather avoids it.

It is worthwhile, therefore, to now turn our attention to the opposing notions of objectivity and subjectivity and to consider whether the charge of subjectivity is valid.

First, just what sense of objectivity does Marcel object to? It seems clear that it is the second meaning of objective which Marcel objects to as being inappropriate in the realm of mystery. Secondary reflection is, in fact, motivated by feeling and must be directly concerned with the individual, immediate experience. Does this mean, then, that

secondary reflection is subjective?

Certainly in sense (2) and (3) secondary reflection is subjective.

However, the charges of subjectivity would seem to be made in the first sense of subjective. That is, Marcel's critics are claiming that the objects (in the second sense) of secondary reflection exist only in the mind of the individual. Marcel's epistemological position is not subjective in this sense, however, since he makes clear that secondary reflection arises through a recognition of the presence of a reality--an objective reality in sense (1).

So, it seems that Marcel's response to charges of subjectivity is, in some respects, valid. The epistemological position of Marcel cannot be characterized as either subjective or objective--it is both and it is neither. That is, it is subjective in meanings (2), (3), and (to a certain degree), (4) of the term; yet it is not subjective in sense (1). On the other hand, it is objective in sense (1) and (3) of the term, yet it is not objective in sense (2). An appropriate characterization, then, is that it is both transsubjective and transobjective. Stephen Jolin's explanation seems, then, to be most indicative of its true character, "His (Marcel's) position is that we need not choose between the horns of the dilemma... Philosophy ought to be defined by reference to a 'third' which is properly speaking, a vocation and the philosopher true to his vocation is the one

who succeeds in 'preserving in himself a paradoxical equilibrium between the spirit of universality on the one hand, inasmuch as this is embodied in values which must be recognized as unalterable, and on the other hand, his personal experiences...for it will be the source of whatever contribution he might make."⁶

Despite the difficulties dealt with here (and certainly others, which lie beyond the scope of this paper), Marcel has made great contributions to philosophy. The light which his work has shed in the realm of metaphysics cannot be denied. The inadequacies of the scientific method which he points out are certainly important and worthy of attention in an age where the success of science tends to blind us to its failings. Certainly it is true that the exclusive use of scientific thought in a human world leads to emptiness and despair, for although science can and has cured many of our material ailments; our spiritual ailments lie outside its scope and certainly it may be argued that it will ultimately be our success or failure in the spiritual realm which will dictate our final glory or ruin.

We will conclude this paper with the following statement of Marcel: "Perhaps it will be objected that all I have said so far is really more posited than proved. I am perfectly ready to agree about this, as I consider that

⁶Marcel, Tragic Wisdom and Beyond, p. xxi.

the very idea of bringing a demonstration to bear on the primacy of existence seems to me radically contradictory. Our only possible procedure here consists in reflecting on affirmations whose titles of credit, so to speak, need to be examined."⁷

Philosophy can certainly be enriched by such an attitude and a deeper understanding and appreciation of the ultimately mysterious nature of human life be approached with more success.

⁷Marcel, Metaphysical Journal, p. 324.

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