

INTRODUCTION: GABRIEL MARCEL AND THE POSTMODERN WORLD

During the heyday of existentialism, an oft issued disclaimer was that existentialism was not a doctrine whose traits could be enumerated to define a specific set of thinkers and writings.¹ There were too many different and sometimes contrary “existentialist” approaches, theistic and atheistic, phenomenological and metaphysical, personalist and individualist, philosophical and literary, to enable well-delineated categorization.²

¹Three of the very many instances of this disclaimer appear in: Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1956) p. 11; John Macquarrie, *Existentialism* (New York: Penguin Bks., 1973) p. 14; Robert Solomon, *From Rationalism to Existentialism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970) p.1.

²Marcel apparently wavered in regard to accepting the name “existentialist.” He rejected the label “Christian existentialist,” first applied to him by Sartre, because Marcel refused to subordinate “essence to existence”. [See, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, tr. Stephen Jolin and Peter McCormick, intro. Stephen Jolin (Evanston: Northwestern U. Pr., 1973) p. xxxii. Hereafter TWB.] With his “concrete” approach the question of essence was not framed as an epistemological debate between realism, conceptualism, and nominalism, but as an axiological issue. Marcel believed essences were the universal meanings encountered in concrete experience. Meditation on an essence's universality is an “enlightening modality” (TWB xxxii), a way of searching for “unalterable values” (TWB 31) and possibly glimpsing an “exalting truth” (TWB 87). In other contexts, Marcel favors an existentialist orientation. In TWB (40) he describes his “existentialist thinking” as going beyond the opposition between subjectivism and objective universalism. Also, in a conversation with Paul Ricoeur, Marcel says his philosophy is “existential to the degree that it is simultaneously drama, that is dramatic creation.” (TWB 230) Marcel may have rejected the “Christian existentialist” epithet, but his emphasis on the existentially concrete, his deep Christian faith, and his refusal to prioritize existence over essence might be exactly what define a “Christian existentialist,” but with Marcel, one who looks hopefully toward a postmodern world.

Postmodern thought, as expressed by Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty, Stanley Fish and various others, also seems to refuse any generic classification. Foucault, for instance, aimed to eliminate the subject, while Derrida apparently accepts a situated subject, one without fixed "sameness" whose protean character is a play of identity and difference.³ Fish's anti-foundationalism rejects universally normative value-prescriptions, while Rorty appears to privilege such values as tolerance and solidarity as desirable bases for establishing a sort of social ethic.⁴ Still, underlying this apparent diversity is a unity, a philosophical objective correlative which collectively thematizes postmoderns' efforts. The shared theme is their rebellion against modern rationalism, a common purpose which, however, actually belies their *postmodern* epithet.

Modern thought has always had a Janus-like physiognomy. On one side, with Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and the positivists, rationality was proclaimed as the self-sufficient means for solving any and all philosophical, scientific, and even social/ethical problems. Indubitable, apodictic epistemological foundations supported rationality and made possible its veritable omnipotence at problem-solving and system-building.⁵

Nevertheless on the other side, looking away from, and perhaps askance at, such zealous rationalism, post-Enlightenment moderns of a Humean or Nietzschean countenance proclaimed a

³Thomas Busch made this point in his excellent discussion of Derrida's, Foucault's and Marcel's different views on the subject. Thomas Busch, "Marcel and the Death of Man (A Response to the Dissolution of the Self in Recent Thought)" in *Contributions of Gabriel Marcel to Philosophy*, ed. William Cooney, pp. 125-135. See especially note #2, p. 134.

⁴For an example of Fish's anti-foundationalism see Stanley Fish, *There Is No Such Thing As Free Speech* (NY: Oxford U. Pr., 1994). Rorty's valuing of tolerance and solidarity is most clear in Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (NY: Cambridge U. Pr., 1989).

⁵I would like to acknowledge Michael Novak's brief but richly insightful essay "Belief and Unbelief" for inspiring some of the key concepts in this critique of postmodernism and Rorty's views. See *Crisis*, (12:6, June 1994) pp. 4-8.

wholesale antinomianism which rejected all types of laws, norms, and philosophical principles. Their reactionary ardor insisted that because the quest for absolute foundations is doomed to failure, all rational knowledge is perforce impossible. Accordingly, they elevated feeling above rationality so that it became a mere epiphenomenon of feelings. Rationality was considered as an unreal faculty, and was thusly ineffective at articulating any objective truth since it was determined by the entirely subjective caprice of feelings.

It is this antinomian face of modernity that postmoderns radicalized and then donned. They are not, therefore, truly *postmodern* but merely more philosophically extreme descendants of their post-Enlightenment ancestors. They have absolutized their skeptical heritage to ensure that no vestige of modern rationalism will survive their deconstruction. They have expanded the Baconian dictum, "Knowledge is power..." with the conjunct "... and power is truth," so that any values, scientific laws and philosophical principles have "truth" only insofar as they are fabricated and enforced by the most willful. An anarchic voluntarism appears as the only outcome of their rebellion. They offer no positive alternative to modern rationalism except to champion their favored political ideologies. But, since "power is truth," and power is the achievement of a personal will exerting itself over others in society, the "personal is political." Consequently, their ideologies devolve into demagogery where personal political partisanship becomes the origin and end of all philosophical and scientific inquiry.⁶

Without aiming to stamp his work with an indelible label, Gabriel

⁶It is always risky to generalize about philosophical movements when the generalizations are negative criticisms, and especially when the "movement" is as diverse as postmodernism. However, these generalizations are well-founded if one accepts Michel Foucault's thought as typifying postmoderns' views on power, truth and politics. In particular, the final section of an edited Foucault essay "The Political Function of the Intellectual" offers a list of five propositions which clearly and succinctly articulate the postmodern epistemological and political agenda. See Michel Foucault, "The Political Function of the Intellectual," trans. Colin Gordon, in *Philosophy: Contemporary Perspectives on Perennial Issues*, ed. E.D. Klemke, et al. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 4 ed., 1994) pp. 601-606.

Marcel's thought can be characterized as postmodern for two main reasons. First of all, Marcel is postmodern because he is thoroughly anti-modern in that he opposed *both* the rationalistic and antinomian sides of modernism. However, and this is the second reason, Marcel's thought is not just anti-modern, not merely an extended polemic against modern views, but seeks to go beyond modern perspectives offering positive and hopeful alternatives. For Marcel, the modern era has seriously deformed human self-definition, human relationships and foundational values leaving a "broken world"⁷ which is in need of philosophical and existential healing. Marcel's treatment is to expose concretely the detrimental effects of modernity and then propose, albeit only in seminal form, ways in which the broken world can be mended.

This introductory article will elaborate Marcel's postmodern orientation through four topics. First of all, Marcel's conception of the philosopher will be discussed in the effort to explain how it differs from the predominate modern conceptions. Then, following the organizational structure of this volume's essays, a synoptic account of Marcel's views "On Human Being," "On Interhuman Being" and "On Human Knowing" will be offered. Finally, the concluding section of this article will present a thematic overview of all of the essays in this volume, beginning with the previously unpublished version of Marcel's "Science and Wisdom."

The Marcelian Philosopher

For Marcel, the modern philosopher has generally sided with one of the poles of a vocational opposition. Modern philosophers tend to define themselves as disinterested spectators or engaged

⁷The term "broken world" is from a title of one of Marcel's best plays which dramatically expresses and capsulizes his diagnosis of the debilitated modern condition. A translation of the play by Sr. Colla is in *The Existentialist Drama of Gabriel Marcel*, ed. Francis Lescoe (West Hartford, CT: McAuley Pr., 1974). K.R. Hanley's article in this volume, "Gabriel Marcel and Postmodernism: Perspectives on a Broken World," offers a detailed analysis of the play, especially as it represents Marcel's assessment of the "tragic" situation of modernity and his hopeful prospectus for the future.

advocates. Marcel, however, conceives the philosopher as one who transcends this opposition, identifying his own philosophical project as “a metaphysic whose axis is gratitude and the consciousness of the sacred.”⁸

The disinterested spectator is the Cartesian thinker whose uninhibited rationalism makes a mere abstraction of human existence.⁹ His “bloodless rationalism”¹⁰ dissociates life from spirit so that any aspect of human existence can be objectified as a fully analyzable datum or a problem to be completely resolved. Within the technics¹¹ of the rationalist, “Life is no longer, as it were, conceived except in bio-sociological terms, that is to say, as a process whose physico-chemical conditions are claimed to be strictly and objectively definable...”¹² Such technicism not only dehumanizes the world since it ignores the concrete, value-laden life experiences of individual human beings, but also de-sanctifies the world since it excludes the spiritual as a vital aspect of existence. Modern rationalism lacks humility; it admits no limitations, no mystery. What is by definition beyond its purview, namely the spiritual, is dismissed as irrational, or at least arational, and therefore not of any

⁸Gabriel Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom* (NY: Philosophical Library, 1955) p. 33. Hereafter cited as DW.

⁹TWB 39.

¹⁰DW 19.

¹¹Since “technology is the embodiment of rationality” (TWB 202), Marcel defines technics “as all the systematized methods which enable man to subordinate nature, considered as blind or even rebellious, to his own ends.” Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator*, trans. Emma Craufurd (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1978) p. 114. Hereafter cited as HV.

¹²DW 17.

consequence.¹³ As Marcel observes, the rationalist philosopher is lost within the "infinitely tragic spiritual situation of the modern world."¹⁴

The philosophers of *pensée engagée* are also in a tragic situation because their thought cannot rise above partisanship and aspire to "universal" significance. By universal, Marcel means "that spirit which tends to promote among men mutual comprehension and respect for each other, without of course involving the sort of egalitarianism which cultural thought, since Nietzsche and Scheler, has shown to be the foundation of confusion and resentment."¹⁵ The philosopher partisan is "doomed to a certain solitude"¹⁶ because his thought becomes propaganda and then ultimately demagogery.¹⁷ For the demagogue, the philosophical becomes personal so that there are as many valid philosophies as there are individual personalities, which precludes any real philosophical commonality or universality. Thus the demagogue is left alone with his philosophy. And though as a way to ameliorate the atomization of philosophy, the demagogue may espouse an egalitarian tolerance which proclaims all philosophical views should be equally tolerated, he still remains alone because his egalitarianism will not accept any philosophical universality. Any special universal significance is resented by such egalitarians as being intolerant of their individual philosophies, their very personalities.

¹³Marcel believes that in the modern world rationalism has become technicism, and its main problem is that it is "enclosed in a dimension of technological thought to the point of denying that there could be any other dimension." This denial "amounts to the claim that everything that does not lend itself to understanding in terms of technological thought, and this is in terms of observable changes in the material world, must be regarded as illusory." (TWB 195).

¹⁴DW 55.

¹⁵TWB 30.

¹⁶TWB 26.

¹⁷TWB 24.

Marcel indicates that there is a sharp opposition between “the partisan and the human” in that if the “human” is understood as “the attachment to properly human values,” then the partisan is without grounding in what is universally and truly human.¹⁸ The philosopher partisan is alienated from others; his demagogery undermines genuine community because “intersubjectivity is openness to the other.”¹⁹ Such openness is not a matter of considering the other only in relation to oneself, as the demagogue aims to do when he persuades the other to accept his ideology, his personality. The other in such a circumstance is used only for the demagogue’s self-confirmation. For Marcel the possibility for opening to the other is established by the human value of charity, *agápe*. With the humility and availability (*disponibilité*) of this value, others are respected as “fraternal”²⁰ seekers of universal truth.

As cited earlier (note #8), Marcel describes his philosophical project as a metaphysic based on gratitude and the consciousness of the sacred. Unlike the detached spectator, the pure knower, or the committed partisan, the self-serving demagogue, a Marcelian postmodern philosopher is characterized by gratitude, which is intrinsic to a charitable disposition. The philosopher is humbly grateful²¹ for the possibility of encountering universal meaning within the context of his personal concrete experience. As Marcel recommends, the philosopher must “preserve 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 experience, which he neither can nor should ignore, for it will be the source of whatever

¹⁸TWB 248.

¹⁹TWB 253.

²⁰TWB 32.

²¹Marcel states in TWB xxxiv, “...humility is a primordial metaphysical virtue.”

individual contribution he might make."²²

The Marcelian philosopher is an awakener whose responsibility is "much less to prove than to *show*." Such showing does not pertain to the "order of things", what is empirically factual, but to the metaphysics of the spiritual domain where "to show is to make ripen and thus to promote and transform." The philosopher seeks for himself, and endeavors to show others the general conditions of an "existential maturity."²³ This maturity is awake to the sacred, the unalterable values with their universal meaning and their transcendent source. And, with such maturity the philosopher hopes to awaken in others a consciousness of the sacred.

On Human Being

Within his philosophical project, Marcel's understanding of human being occupies a central position. And, at the core of his philosophy of human being is his notion of axiology. This emphasis on axiology bespeaks a postmodern orientation because it is directly related to Marcel's perception of the tragedy of modernism. The *hamartia* of modernism is that it has abandoned a traditional form of wisdom which "provided a sort of meeting ground for the sacred and the profane. What is new is that this very meeting ground has collapsed, leaving the world more broken than it has ever been, perhaps, in any known epoch."²⁴

Traditional wisdom acknowledged and respected foundational human values as universal and unalterable. Traditional wisdom prized the affirmation of such values as formative in part of a spiritual awareness of the sacred. Modernism, however, rejected this axiology substituting voluntarism and value-relativism. In voluntarism "human freedom gives birth to its own values"²⁵ so that values are located in

²²TWB 31.

²³All of the quoted material in this paragraph is from TWB 31-2.

²⁴DW 50.

²⁵DW 48.

the domain of pure subjectivity.²⁶ Any hope for recognizing the universality and unalterability of values is suppressed by the idolatry of individualized freedom. This is the modern “cult of the individual” whose “egolatry” involves a “moral egocentricity” which avers that if the individual is not the progenitor of his own values, then the individual is not truly free.²⁷ It is a moral anarchy that has resulted from the modern decline of wisdom, a disordering of human being’s essential interrelatedness with others and with being itself.

Marcel’s efforts to reconstruct a sense of wisdom begin with an axiology of human being as revealed in concrete human experience, and what is fundamental to this axiology is human being as incarnate being. In a conversation with Marcel, Paul Ricoeur observed that “You (Marcel) have taken the body, rather than language, as the primary focus of your reflection on existence.”²⁸ There are at least three main reasons why Marcel primarily focuses on the body, and together they establish the bases for his hopeful postmodernism.

First of all, the body is the visible expression of the mystery of human incarnation. Modern strategies for dealing with human being as a profound unity of body and spirit (soul)²⁹ have either simply rejected the soul, as with materialism, or proposed some type of dualistic causal interactionism. The explanations of human behavior proffered by both strategies ultimately denigrate human being as a type of organic machine.³⁰ Materialism entails a physicalistic determinism which disvalues the free will and denies cognitive

²⁶TWB 91.

²⁷HV 18. Marcel defines “egolatry” as the “idolatry of the self.”

²⁸TWB 222.

²⁹TWB 256.

³⁰Though Marcel never used the exact phrase “organic machine,” in TWB 182 he explicitly rejects the notion that man is an “electronic machine.” Human behavior and human being cannot be reduced to an amalgam of biochemical processes which produce electronic impulses that determine all that humans think and do.

intentionality. Dualism actually converts the spiritual soul, which is said to control the bodily instrument, into a type of body - a sort of "physical soul" or "immaterial matter"³¹ which through efficient causality can produce bodily actions. Consequently, the dualist does in fact lose the spirituality of the soul which he originally aimed to maintain.

The mechanistic anthropologies of materialism and dualism both prove inadequate for understanding the very real and concrete human experiences of freedom, of willed intentional thought and behavior, and of spirituality. Recognizing the mystery of human incarnation precisely requires the humble admission that our sense of ourselves as soul/body unities, a sense which is developed through such concrete experiences as willing, intending and spiritual faith, defies the solution-strategies of modern mechanisms.³²

The second reason why Marcel focuses on the body is that human incarnation expresses the fundamental relatedness of being itself. As incarnate beings we are inextricably bound to concrete situations in the world. Our ontological condition is that of incarnate beings-in-a-world-with-others. Marcel indicates that sensation and cognition testify to our ineluctable participation in the world of existing things and others.³³ Human being is then essentially relational just as being itself. For Marcel, being is not some disconnected, completely self-standing substance but involves all existents, and thus its

³¹Marcel uses these phrases in his *Metaphysical Journal*, trans. Bernard Wall (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1952) pp. 90-91, 246.

³²For a detailed discussion of Marcel's notion of the mystery of human incarnation and the deficiencies in modern materialism and dualism see my article "Secondary Reflection and Marcelian Anthropology," *Philosophy Today*, vol. 34:3, Fall 1990, pp. 222-228.

³³See TWB 222 where Ricoeur remarks on Marcel's concept of the testimony of sensation.

relatedness is intrinsic to its nature.³⁴ Being cannot be duly appreciated without including its relations, and similarly, human being cannot be properly appreciated without including its relatedness, especially to others.

The final reason why Marcel focuses on the body is that since our incarnate being is essentially related to others, our being is value-laden. Ricoeur's observation that Marcel does not primarily focus on language is particularly relevant here. The philosophical occupation with language is part of the modern obsession with epistemology. Language is considered to be constitutive of human knowing, and modern thought has been consumed with the questions of how through language we can know and define being, or whether we can know and define being at all. Marcel, however, expresses a postmodern view by asserting that our original access to being is not epistemological but axiological. Indeed, for Marcel axiology and ontology are fundamentally interconnected.³⁵ Through the presence of the other we can, if we make ourselves available, experience the meaning of the values which are characteristic of the relatedness of being. Unalterable values such as fidelity, hope and charity are the features of the face of being, of human being and being itself. Such values are not at first known through some rationally reflective, linguistically conceptual cognitive process, but are originally encountered and experienced in a pre-conceptual, pre-reflective manner. The presence of the other can gift us with an experience of being through the values of its relations, if we are

³⁴Marcel's notion of the intrinsic relatedness of being is more fully elaborated in Joseph Godfrey's, S.J., article in this volume, "The Phenomena of Trusting and Relational Ontologies." See also my review article "Contributions of Gabriel Marcel to Philosophy," *Bulletin de la Société Américaine de Philosophie de Langue Française*, vol. V: 1, Spring 1993, pp. 103-107.

³⁵In reference to the issue of the connection between life and the sacred, between human being, unalterable values and being itself, Marcel states, "I insist on this to emphasize that the question raised here refers not only to an axiology but also, and more essentially, to an ontology. Axiology and ontology here are probably inseparable." (TWB 117.)

disposed to accept those values and be so illumined.³⁶

On Interhuman Being

Anyone with even a passing familiarity with Marcel's thought is aware that his metaphysics of being is "essentially anti-cartesian" in that it "is a metaphysic of *we are* as opposed to a metaphysic of *I think*."³⁷ The hermetically self-sealed cartesian ego is a philosophical illusion, for the relatedness of human being and being itself entails that being-with is the nature of all being. Human beings are together in being through an intersubjective nexus, "a world in which everything is bound together" in relations of "living communication."³⁸ Even one's self-knowledge and self-communication involve others because "...I communicate effectively with myself only insofar as I communicate with the other person."³⁹ In fact, in generalizing from his own experience, Marcel adds that because of his interhuman bonds, "the best part of my personality does not belong to me. I am in no sense the owner, only the trustee."⁴⁰ The human being is birthed by others, physically and psychologically. What we are as distinct subjects is an outgrowth of our interhuman being, and the ultimate

³⁶Marcel frequently uses the metaphors of "illumination," "light" "enlightening," "flashes of lightning," to describe the encounter with the truth of the values of being. See, for instance, TWB xxxii, xxxiii, 142.

³⁷Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, Vol. II: Faith and Reality*, trans. G.S. Fraser (Chicago: Gateway Edition, 1960) 10. Hereafter cited as MBII.

³⁸Thomas Anderson uses the phrase "intersubjective nexus" to describe Marcellian interhuman being in his article "Gabriel Marcel's Notions of Being" in the Cooney volume (see above, note #3), pp. 47-78. In that article, Anderson cites this reference from MBII 11-17, 191.

³⁹Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, trans. R. Rosthal (NY: Noonday Press, 1964) 34. Albert (NY: Noonday Press, 1964) 34. Albert Randall clearly makes this point in his essay in this volume, "Personhood and the Mystery of Being: Marcel's Ontology of Communion, Presence and Availability."

⁴⁰HV 19.

realization of our humanity is within universal community which is on the way to realizing the fullness of being itself.

Marcel's notion of community can be sharpened by contrasting it with what it is not. Community is not merely social co-existence, which is characteristic of the underdeveloped forms of collectivism and democratic individualism. These forms, according to Marcel, are at the crux of the modern social-political crisis of humankind, and in attempting to overcome this crisis, "The question is how to get people out of the false dilemma between an imaginary individualism and a collectivism that denies the human personality."⁴¹

Marcel's rejection of collectivism, which would include socialism and statism, is easy to understand as it is entirely consistent with his resistance to any form of totalizing depersonalization.⁴² Collectivism erases the individual human personality. The human subject is lost within a faceless mass, unable to establish his own freedom, his own participation in the values which bind him to others and to being itself.

Marcel's concerns about democracy are however more subtle than his criticisms of collectivism. In defending democracy he states that "democracy should doubtless be recognized as the only possible mode of existence for societies today."⁴³ Still, democratic individualism is highly problematic because it obstructs possibilities for community. Marcel warns that democracy, not in its principles but in its achievements, encourages "claiming in all its aspects, the demanding of rights— and indeed to bring a mercenary spirit into all human relationships."⁴⁴ The democratic spirit can occlude community because it "tends to exclude disinterested service born of fidelity and

⁴¹Gabriel Marcel, *Searchings* (NY: Newman Press, 1967) p.88.

⁴²Marcel maintained an unambiguous opposition to modern sociological moralists who proclaimed and heralded the establishment of a "socialism which was to subordinate personal initiative, in every field, to State control." HV 74.

⁴³TWB 25.

⁴⁴HV 56.

a belief in the intrinsic value of such service."⁴⁵ This abnegation of service to the communal good happens when egalitarianism dominates so that "each individual claims from the start to enjoy the same as his neighbor," and one's self-respect devolves into "the defensive attitude of ever claiming rights from others."⁴⁶

Democratic individualism and egalitarianism breed an atmosphere of mistrust in which the possession and exercise of individual rights is played as a zero-sum game. What is lost are authentic ideas of solidarity and justice because to attain justice one cannot allow oneself to be duped; one cannot allow another to take advantage of one's good nature.⁴⁷ Wherever "egalitarianism prevails, rooted as it is envy and resentment, the sense of quality tends to vanish."⁴⁸ The disappearance of quality is precisely the dissolution of community, the disvaluing of those relations which ground humanity in being.

Marcel develops his notion of community through his descriptions of presence and universality. He stresses that "*presence is intersubjective*. It cannot but be interpreted as the expression of a will which seeks to reveal itself to me; but this revelation supposes that I do not put an obstacle in its way."⁴⁹ Such obstacles could be the ideologies of collectivism or democratic individualism, or the attitudes of rationalism or partisan demagogery. Any of these obstacles would undermine a disposition of charitable openness through which universal meaning can be experienced. The universal is, then, primarily encountered in intersubjective presence. The universal is within a form of experience which has profound axiological meaning, and this meaning is the foundation for

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid. (Emphasis in original)

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸DW 44.

⁴⁹Gabriel Marcel, *Presence and Immortality*, trans. M. Machado (Pittsburgh: Duquesne U. Pr., 1967) p. 153.

achieving "objective" truth.

The postmodern view that axiology, not epistemology, opens the original access to being is evident in Marcel's notion of community. An objective, universal truth expresses a non-contingent reality which bears transcendent metaphysical significance. But achieving such truth is an ongoing task which is performed under the sign of fraternity, of community.⁵⁰ In other words, to participate in this task, it is necessary to recognize and assimilate such universal values as fidelity (loyalty), charity and especially hope since they enable a self-transcending availability to others and to being itself.

As Marcel renders his metaphysic of hope, "Hope is essentially...the availability of a soul which has entered intimately enough into the experience of communion to accomplish in the teeth of will and knowledge, the transcendent act..."⁵¹ To hope in this way is "being in truth" which is a "way of being or acting which is essentially loyal—loyal toward oneself and loyal toward the other—but which can legitimately remain marked by an uncertainty."⁵²

The uncertainty to which Marcel refers is due to the inexhaustible experience of presence, so "being in truth" is inevitably an unfinished and agonizingly insecure wisdom.⁵³ Universal community, the realization of human being and the full participation in being, cannot be finally won as a conquest;⁵⁴ but to continue to perform the transcendent act and to continue to speak the truth serves this supra-personal community by strengthening the bonds of hope which sustain the ongoing task.⁵⁵

⁵⁰Cf. TWB, "Translator's Introduction," p. xxvii.

⁵¹HV 10.

⁵²TWB 92.

⁵³Cf. TWB, "Translator's Introduction," p. xxix.

⁵⁴See HV 10.

⁵⁵See HV 156.

On Human Knowing

In *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, the term Marcel frequently uses to describe the kind of knowing which contacts universal meaning is "experiential thinking."⁵⁶ This is a sort of knowing which can not only be accomplished by any person with a concrete experience of intersubjective presence, but is also the knowing with which philosophical reflection on being should begin. By engaging in experiential thinking about an experience of presence, any person can come to appreciate and participate in the universal values which bind them to others and to being itself. However, the philosopher's vocation requires an additional responsibility, namely to communicate the meanings of those values in order to show others what they are, how they can be encountered in community, and how they express being itself.

As with Marcel's notion of community, experiential thinking as the philosopher's task can be best explicated by initially proceeding *via negativa*. Marcel equates experiential thinking with second-level reflection⁵⁷ and distinguishes it from first-level reflection. First-level reflection is purely analytical and reductive, broaching every issue as a problem-to-be-solved.⁵⁸ It seeks objectively valid solutions pursuing only verifiable knowledge which is restricted to either the kind of empiriological verification prized by positivistic natural and social sciences or the totalizing claims of grand systematic rationalisms. Concrete experiences and phenomena are not considered

⁵⁶See, for example, TWB 252, 228-29.

⁵⁷William Cooney offers a convincing argument as to why the term should be "second-level reflection" instead of "second" or "secondary" reflection. See William Cooney, "Gabriel Marcel's Philosophy of Participation: Homo Spectans vs. Homo Particeps," in *Gabriel Marcel's Contribution to Philosophy*, ed. William Cooney (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989) p. xi and p. xviii (note #70).

⁵⁸TWB 15.

holistically, but are reduced to their component elements or aspects⁵⁹ in order to facilitate the verification of claims about their contents. And though Marcel does not flatly reject first-level reflection, since it does have its purpose and does at times achieve its goals, he does believe that exclusively employing it blinds one to the meanings of universal values and the mystery of being.

Second-level reflection is not first level reflection, and it is also not an intuition, some type of subjective feeling that post-Enlightenment moderns find so appealing. Marcel states bluntly that he “will always regard with suspicion any philosophical doctrine that claims to rest on intuition.”⁶⁰ Any “kind of appeal to purely subjective intuitions”⁶¹ would relativize and contradict second-level reflection’s efforts to articulate intelligently and intelligibly the universal meanings of values and their relationships with being.

Marcel does identify second-level reflection as the “high instrument of philosophy.”⁶² It is a thinking activity, a reconstructive, and not deconstructive, reflection on those “cardinal experiences” of universal values which retrieves the ontological aim of philosophy

⁵⁹For a full discussion of first-level and second-level reflection see Marcel’s “On the Ontological Mystery” in *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, trans. Many Harari (Seacacus, NJ: The Citadel Press, 1973) pp. 19ff.

⁶⁰TWB 15. It would be worthwhile here to cite the entire passage from which this quote is taken. “The instrument of philosophy, on the contrary, (to religion), is reflection, and I will always regard with suspicion any philosophical doctrine that claims to rest on intuition.”

⁶¹TWB 229.

⁶²Thomas Busch cites Marcel’s use of this phrase in Thomas Busch, *The Participant Perspective: A Gabriel Marcel Reader* (Lanham, MD: U. Press of America, 1987) p. 8.

from its concealment by singular emphasis on first-level reflection.⁶³ Second-level reflection “dwells on being,”⁶⁴ attempting to reconstruct, synthesize and intelligibly describe those pre-reflective experiences of intersubjective presence in which universal values are encountered and being is glimpsed.

Since second-level reflection is a way of philosophizing, a way of doing ontology and metaphysics, Marcel does deal with the issue of the truth of second-level reflection's descriptions. Contrary to modern skepticisms and subjectivisms, Marcel is fundamentally an epistemological realist. Truth is real and is, at least to a degree, discoverable by human knowing.⁶⁵ In regard to axiological and ontological truth, he speaks of truth as an illumination, a light⁶⁶ which can dawn on a knower engaged in experiential thinking. However, he cautions that “Truth, even when understood as a light, cannot be regarded as an agent operating on a relatively passive entity. Truth is truth only if it is *recognized*; and recognition involves a movement of

⁶³TWB 229. Again it would be worthwhile to cite the entire passage from which this quote and the quote above for note #61 are taken. The passage is a conversation with Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur: “In brief, we would have to say that these cardinal experiences bear in themselves the critical function. They are critical experiences to the extent that they are experiences which effect in the same movement the retrieval of the ontological aim and the criticism of the modalities which conceal it from us.” Marcel: “And these experiences in fact accomodate what I have called secondary reflection, as opposed to primary reflection, which is purely critical or analytic. Secondary reflection is a reconstructive reflection, and the practice of this reflection has been my concern from the moment when, toward the 1930's, I became full aware of what I wanted to do... It has been my aim to bring about this reconstruction, but to bring it about in an intelligent and intelligible way, and not by some kind of appeal to purely subjective intuitions.”

⁶⁴TWB 15.

⁶⁵Brendan Sweetman's article, “Gabriel Marcel and the Problem of Knowledge,” in this volume also makes this point about Marcel's epistemology.

⁶⁶See note #36 above.

attention in the direction of truth.”⁶⁷

Though this passage may appear to convey a subjectivism, Marcel is not saying that a subjective recognition of truth is *the* criterion of truth. What is true is not true simply because it is claimed as true. Recognition, the assertion of truth, is the fulfillment of truth, and such recognition depends on a certain movement of attention in the direction of truth. This movement is the disposition of availability characterized by the values of charitable openness and humility. In other words, to attend to truth is to humbly dispose oneself within community to the possibility of receiving a shared or sharable illumination. Moreover, this disposition is not passive because in order to make some intelligible and communicable sense of an illumining encounter with truth, one must be ready and willing to engage in second-level reflection. As has been indicated many times, Marcel espouses a postmodern perspective that axiology, and not epistemology, is primary in regard to possibly knowing and speaking universal truth, for knowing and speaking universal truth requires the value-laden disposition of being-in-truth.

Still, even with this disposition, truth cannot be spoken in any absolute way. Experiential thinking is “essentially itinerant.”⁶⁸ To be-in-truth is an ongoing task, and therefore the communication of truth is possible only as an “itinerant narrative.”⁶⁹ Truth is revealed and shared as a type of story, or better, a drama, which however has no definite end. The dramatic scenes can individually and even collectively express truths but can never communicate the final, whole truth. What it means to be-in-truth is constantly evolving as one’s dispositional values of charity, fidelity and hope continue to mature.

Marcel amplifies his notion of the relationship between values and truth by affirming a solidarity between truth and justice. He states that “truth cannot be separated from a set of values” and “these

⁶⁷TWB xxxiii.

⁶⁸Cf. TWB 62.

⁶⁹Thomas Busch explores this notion of the “itinerant narrative” in his article, “Secondary Reflection as Interpretation,” in this volume.

values are grounded in a certain conjunction of order and freedom.”⁷⁰ This conjunction is justice, a feature of community and a necessary condition for the emergence of truth. So, unlike the antinomian moderns who denounce universally normative principles of moral order in favor of an anarchic, entirely voluntaristic freedom, Marcel explicitly ties freedom to a moral order, for only with a freedom which defers to an order of universal values can there be justice.⁷¹ And, only within such justice, whether it be the just disposition of a person seeking universal meaning, the just dispositions of persons engaged in an intersubjective encounter, or the justice valued within a society, can truth possibly emerge.

It is at this point that Marcel’s postmodern views on philosophical knowing can be appropriately concluded. The “existential maturity”⁷² which the philosopher seeks is an extremely rare faculty of appreciating experience through which the emergence of truth can be facilitated. The philosophical narrative is not an aimless wandering but a hopeful, though never finished, journey which patiently seeks the unalterable and unconditioned universal. The philosopher is not a sage, but is always becoming a sage,⁷³ and his narrative can never encapsulate but only point toward the infinite. Eschewing the dominant forms of modern thought, Marcel does not

⁷⁰TWB 101.

⁷¹Marcel was fully committed to a universal moral order, particularly regarding “life-issues” like abortion. He objected to the modern tendency to make an idol of freedom by which the right to choose takes moral precedence over the respect for life. Marcel would completely reject any sort of pro-choice position since “life-issues” are foundational to the social moral order. He expresses some of these views on the social moral order, moral judgments and abortion in HV 89: “We regain our right to judge, however, in matters concerned with realities of a social order, such as the increase of divorce, the spread in the use of contraceptives or the practice of abortion. We can above all exercise our judgment with full knowledge and complete justice against an abominable propaganda which aims at making such methods appear rationally justifiable.”

⁷²See note #23 above.

⁷³See TWB 211.

anathematize spiritual faith and revelation, but is “deeply convinced that there must be a hidden cooperation between philosophy and religion.”⁷⁴ The philosopher is not a theologian, not a religious apologist, but is aware that if his sage narrative is to be-in-truth, it must have an anagogic dimension of meaning. Similar to the Scholastic notion that metaphysics ultimately leads one to the threshold of faith, the Marcelian postmodern philosopher recognizes that the journey toward the ultimate mystery of being moves in the direction of faith.

Contents of this Volume

The inclusion of this previously unpublished version of “Science and Wisdom” in this volume is due to the fact that this essay conveys some of Marcel’s postmodern orientations. The essay broaches the theme of the loss of wisdom in the modern world, a theme explored at length in *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond* and *The Decline of Wisdom*, while focusing primarily on the devaluation of wisdom in science. And, true to his hopeful prospectus for a postmodern world, Marcel offers some positive recommendations for ways in which science and wisdom can converge, though without becoming identical.

Marcel begins the essay with an overview on the history of modern thought. He observes that beginning with Descartes, wisdom becomes co-extensive with knowledge. This view is radicalized with Spinoza so that progress in knowledge, or science, since Spinoza equates the two, necessarily entails progress in wisdom. The post-Enlightenment “romantics” reaction to such overweening rationalism was to divorce wisdom from knowledge, portraying wisdom as a special kind of intuition or affective moral sense. In the late nineteenth century with thinkers such as Nietzsche and Bergson, wisdom was conceived in ways that went far beyond traditional senses, but ways that apparently did not offer clear directions for development.

Without meaningful philosophical input, wisdom went “up for grabs”, so to speak, and was appropriated by Americanized psychology and logical positivism. Working from a combination of

⁷⁴TWB 14-15.

individualism and emotivism, they maintained that because all value judgments are no more than expressions of personal preferences, personal proclivities and feelings, wisdom is a personal rule of living that cannot be universalized. The wise person, then, is nothing more than one whose personal rule of living enables him to become well-adjusted to life within society. Given such a shallow, relativistic sense of wisdom, Marcel observes that it is no wonder that science, lacking sound philosophical guidance, has fallen into an instrumentalism which tends to subordinate values, truth and perhaps even human dignity to achieving practical ends.

As an example, Marcel cites the problem of overpopulation. He questions whether science has the competence to give wise advice on this issue. If science were to respect the dignity of persons and not venture into the sphere of private life wherein lies the right of a couple to decide their procreation, then science would be energetically working to increase possibilities for nourishing populations. However, to concentrate mainly on practically efficient techniques of population regulation, e.g. contraceptives, abortion and euthanasia, risks the debasement and depreciation of human existence.

Marcel does not believe that modern science's devaluation of wisdom is due to the practice of science itself. In fact, he expresses a great deal of respect for science. Consequently, he calls for the philosopher to awaken in the scientist a sense of authentic wisdom. Marcel's specific recommendations reflect his postmodern orientation of affirming the priority of axiology, with its ontological connection, over epistemology. He advises that science must cultivate a sense of humility through which it can recognize its limits and duly respect what is and should be beyond its mastery. Applying his notion that intersubjective community is a condition for the emergence of truth, he reminds scientists that "to conduct scientific research is undoubtedly and essentially to work in company *with others*, and this requires at least a minimum of good-will. Research thus implies a disposition that moves in the spirit of peace, and is on the threshold of love." Finally, Marcel suggests that science needs to be centered around a keynote, an order of justice. He states that this keynote "is an essence, though not an essence in the sense of an objectifiable content, but rather a crystalization of that Light...that is at the same

time Joy in being Light." In the light of wisdom, scientific research should be victorious over the fantasies of ignorance and fear, engaging in a joyous effort to clarify and appreciate life.

The articles contributed to this volume have been grouped according to the three themes in which Marcel's postmodern views are most evident. The first group "Marcel on Human Being," concentrates on showing how and why Marcel's views depart from modern anthropologies and challenge various social ideologies. Kenneth Gallagher's "Humanity and Creaturehood" discusses the philosophical and social implications of Marcel's interpretation of human incarnation and intersubjectivity. These implications entail a Marcelian opposition to a politicized consensus theory of truth, the desacralization of human life through such abominable practices as abortion, and the social power games played with the rights of the person. Thomas Anderson's article, "Technics and Atheism in Gabriel Marcel," articulates Marcel's concerns about an oppressive modern technicism which weakens those human relationships, especially the family, that are fundamental to human life and health. However, true to Marcel's hopeful philosophical disposition, Anderson also offers some sound Marcelian recommendations for preserving human dignity in the technological world. The final article in this group is Guillemine de Lacoste's "Gabriel Marcel's Body-as-a-Subject: A Prominently Postmodern Notion." De Lacoste details four ways in which Marcel's reflections on human incarnation qualify his thought as postmodern since he explicitly rejects modern theories of rationalism and idealism.

The second group, "Marcel on Interhuman Being," contains articles which from their different perspectives demonstrate the vitality of the notion of intersubjective presence within Marcel's thought. Clyde Pax's contribution, "Creative Fidelity in a Changing World," examines the ways in which the interhuman value and bond of fidelity can, if it is intellectually and socially respected, renew hope for responsible change in politics, the arts, and the sciences. Albert Randall's essay "Personhood and the Mystery of Being: Marcel's Ontology of Communion, Presence and Availability," raises similar points by considering how Marcelian intersubjective presence offers a hopeful vision for those who are speaking out against modern techniques of dehumanization and depersonalization. In his "The

Phenomena of Trusting and Relational Ontologies,” Joseph Godfrey, S.J., differentiates two kinds of trust (reliance trust and I-Thou trust), and explains why reflection on them can illumine the relational ontology Marcel developed. In doing so, Godfrey sheds much light on Marcel’s postmodern view that axiology, not epistemology, accesses ontology, and reflection on the experiences of trusting can fruitfully enter that access. K.R. Hanley’s “Gabriel Marcel and Postmodernism: Perspectives on a Broken World,” the final article in this group, focuses principally on Marcel’s dramatic representations in his play *The Broken World*. Hanley argues that the play portrays the modern decomposition of human relationships due to such confusions as value-relativism and epistemological skepticism. Hanley shows that Marcel opens a path which leads beyond where postmodernism is today by invoking a consciousness of universal values and an awareness of the spiritual.

The last group of articles, “Marcel on Human Knowing,” considers the differences between Marcelian epistemology and modern, including current “postmodern,” positions. Brendan Sweetman in “Gabriel Marcel and the Problem of Knowledge,” affirms that Marcel is a realist and his epistemology contests the relativisms of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes. However, Sweetman also explains that Marcel’s realism does not present “objective knowledge” as modern rationalisms do, but proffers a qualified, limited objectivity in order to preserve the encounter with mystery which can be made intelligible, though not exhaustively so, only through the narrative of second-level reflection. Patrick Bourgeois’s “Ricoeur and Marcel: An Alternative to Postmodern Deconstruction” discusses the philosophical convergence, and subtle differences, between Marcel and Ricoeur in order to point out how their “experiential thinking” goes beyond deconstruction’s limitations and its subversion of philosophy and language. Bourgeois believes that Marcel and Ricoeur reestablish some faith in philosophical analysis because for them philosophy culminates in its attempt to stay attuned to its limited access to being and to interpret, at this point, its ultimate significance. The final article in this group and in this volume is Thomas Busch’s “Secondary Reflection as Interpretation.” Busch also affirms Marcel’s epistemological realism, but distinguishes it from an Aristotelean type of direct or immediate realism. Busch indicates that as a realist, Marcel grounds knowledge in being, but the knowledge of being as

expressed through the narrative of second-level reflection is interpretive and finds its universality, its "objectivity," in dialogical intelligibility and verification. As is basic to Marcel's postmodernism, intersubjectivity is the condition for the emergence of truth, and philosophical knowledge can and should be accomplished only within the solidarity of fraternity.

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Wheeling Jesuit College

THOMAS A. MICHAUD