

CONDITIONS CONDUCTIVE

TO PEACE

IN GABRIEL MARCEL

INTRODUCTION

Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), having lived through the experience of two World Wars with their devastating and dehumanizing results,¹ steadfastly and uncompromisedly stressed, in his many writings on the subject, that "war is something fundamentally evil" which led him to say upon reflecting on his task during the 1914-1918 war of giving information to families about their dead and wounded loved ones that "the war revealed itself under such desolate aspects that it became an object of indignation, a horror without equal" which made him feel "an anguish that never ceased tearing at me."² In reaction, he emphasized that "peace is a good" which must be recognized as "the basic condition for everything truly good," and that "peace appears to be the essential element in any existence worthy of the name."³ The rethinking of philosophical categories in personalist and existentialist terms furnished Gabriel Marcel with the ideas needed to work out the contemporary problematic of peace and war.⁴ As a result of his phenomenological reflection on the experiences

¹ Gabriel Marcel, "An Autobiographical Essay," (Spring 1969) in *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel* (Library of Living Philosophers Vol. XVII), ed. Paul A. Schilpp and Lewis E. Hahn (Law Salle, IL: Open Court, 1984), 19-21 and 41-48.

² Gabriel Marcel, "The Philosopher and Peace," in *Philosophical Fragments* (1904-1914), ed. Lionel A. Blain (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), 7-8; Idem, "An Autobiographical Essay," 20-21.

³ Ibid.

⁴ It should be noted that Gabriel Marcel rejected the use of the labels used here as useful and suggestive to identify his philosophical approach. He had misgivings about being identified with the personalist philosophical approaches of Emmanuel Mounier and Charles Renouvier. Gabriel Marcel, *En Chemin, Vers Quel Eveil?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 198. He feared misunderstandings if he were identified with the existentialist philosophical approach.

of persons facing up to difficulties encountered in actual human situations involving conflict, Gabriel Marcel was able to develop a meaningful and convincing explanation for the basic conditions which are conducive to peace and for those which lead to war and give solid arguments in favor of promoting peace. It should be kept in mind that underlying and confirming his philosophical arguments is the "unconquerable conviction that, so long as Christianity remained true to itself, Christianity could be the only authentic peacemaker."⁵

Gabriel Marcel's writings bring out how truth and authenticity bring about a society in which communication and invocation lead to peace while opinion and self-deception create an atmosphere leading to war, how fraternity and communion promote a community of persons seeking peace while equality and competition encourage war, and how a concrete and existential approach produces a respect for person contributing to peace while the spirit of abstraction and generalization is a factor in causing war. Gabriel Marcel, throughout his life stood firm in his conviction of the need to reflect on the horrifying human predicament in the face of war and violence. He often wrote about the role of the philosopher as a "veilleur" or watchman concerned with the well being of other persons subject to dire tragedies in human society.⁶ From his earliest intellectual efforts, Gabriel Marcel, the philosopher, the dramatist, and the musician, dedicated his main effort to the promotion of peace and to the fight against war.⁷

A. PERSONALIST PHILOSOPHY OF PARTICIPATION AND PEACE

Gabriel Marcel shows how Personalism as a philosophy of participation brings out the fact that truth creates an attitude of

sations between Paul Ricoeur and Gabriel Marcel," in Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, trans. Stephen Jolin and Peter McCormick (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 237-238.

⁵ Gabriel Marcel, *Man against Mass Society*, trans. G. S. Fraser (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985), 2.

⁶ Marcel, "An Autobiographical Essay," 54.

⁷ Katherine Rose Hanley, "Part One: Gabriel Marcel: Philosopher-Dramatist-Musician," in *Dramatic Approaches to Creative Fidelity: A Study in the Theatre and Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973)* (Lanham: university Press of America, 1988), 1-49.

authenticity and of respect for the person which promotes peace while opinion provides the occasion for propaganda and the incentive for prejudice which lead to war. Gabriel Marcel analyzes this condition for peace and war in *Les Menaces de Guerre* (1937-38)⁸ as well as in *Situations Périlleuses des Valeurs Ethiques* (1944).⁹

Gabriel Marcel considers that the basic condition for peace has to be an interior commitment of the whole person for a lived experience of a "tranquility of order."¹⁰ This definition of peace which comes from Saint Augustine of Hippo and which he takes from Saint Thomas Aquinas,¹¹ is interpreted by Gabriel Marcel to be more than a desired good which would be given and conceded from outside the self by others and as a result of a victory at war or an agreement by treaty, to be other than a peaceful state of mind resulting from indifference or aloofness in the face of human tragedy, and especially to be different from a pacifism which implies passivity when dealing with possible conflicts and war.¹² The Spirit of Peace requires a firm allegiance to truth and the will to pursue peace in a sustained and courageous way. Pacifism is to be rejected as a sign of weakness when the need arises to defend values fundamental to the self and to require respect for the self living within the community at risk.¹³ Abstaining from solid preparedness to face a potential invader can amount to treason.

To be at peace requires authenticity within the self and the strength of character to fight for peace. In the possession of truth, a person can appeal to others to create a community dedicated to peace. The unifying quality of truth prevents conflicts and promotes the will to live together in peace. Our truth creates the bond for mutual respect and friendship. To the contrary, the emphasis on my opinion leads to a

⁸ Gabriel Marcel, "Les Menaces de Guerre," In *Presence de Gabriel Marcel*, cahier 4: *Gabriel Marcel et les Injustices de ce Temps La Responsabilité du Philosophe* (Paris: Aubier, 1 ss8) 49-57.

⁹ Gabriel Marcel, "Situation Périlleuses de Valeurs Ethiques," in *Homo Viator: Prolégomènes à une Métaphysique de L'Espérance* (Paris: Aubier, Montaigne, 1944), 205-217; Idem, "Dangerous situation of Ethical values," in *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Philosophy of Hope*, (New York: Harper and Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1962), 155-165.

¹⁰ Gabriel Marcel, "Les Menaces de Guerre," 49.

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologia* 2a-2ae, q.29, a.1, ad 1 (Rome: Marietti, 1948), II, 175: "Pax est tranquillitas ordinis." Augustine of Hippo *De Civitate Dei* XIX, 13, 1 (PL 41, 64): "Pax omnium rerum, tranquillitas ordinis."

¹² Gabriel Marcel. "Les Menaces de Guerre." 49.

¹³ Ibid, 49-51.

worthwhile object of desire given my opinions faces opposition from others making an equal claim. The opinion's claim to clout in competition and in controversy is questioned as being baseless and dubious.¹⁴ There is no reality or truth to bolster one's position. Nothing in the self justifies the claim since the reason for the opinion is outside the range of knowledge presenting truth of fact or certainty in conviction. This becomes the basis for dispute and disagreement. Opinion appears as an inevitable occasion for conflict and disorder. In extreme cases, the outcome could lead to war.

The difficulty remains in seeking to achieve peace on the basis of truth and authenticity, of love and respect of persons and of creative fidelity and mutual availability when we find ourselves in a regime of opinion where there is the absence of concern for the concrete existential and personalist being feature of individuals involved in the affairs of society.¹⁵ The emphasis on the function of opinion in society leads to a depersonalizing and dehumanizing world where the relationship between individuals and between countries remain on the abstract, anonymous, and general level of impersonal objects and things, numbers and statistics. As a consequence it becomes difficult when the issue of war and peace comes along, to change gears and to see that peace, in dealing with truth and love, is benefiting actually identifiable real persons by preserving the tranquility of order and that war, in dealing with opinion and hate, is devastating actually identifiable victims by inflicting violence and disorder.

A world where opinion is freely used as an agreed-upon right of each individual and each group in the society would seem to be a basic way to promote freedom for all citizens as equal, independent, autonomous, self-determining and self-sufficient. When thinking of order and disorder or peace and war, however, the situation turns out to be different. The illusion of openness and fairness soon disappears and the basis for a liberal democracy often proves to be a delusion.¹⁶ Gabriel Marcel is not so much intending to put down in a negative pessimistic pejorative way the right to expressing one's own opinion as to propose the need for reforms of these institutions in the hope of a turnaround towards a regime of truth which would promote peace. Often the opinion expressed in universal suffrage vote is the result of disoriented passions and uninformed attitudes so that the self is not really expressing himself.

¹⁴ Idem, "From Opinion to Faith," in *Creative Fidelity*, trans. Robert Rosthal (Dale: Farrar, Strauss and Company, 1964), 120-139.

¹⁵ Idem. "Les Menaces de Guerre," 52.

¹⁶ Ibid. 53.

Public political opinion often suffers from getting a pretension of knowing when, in fact, much ignorance and misunderstanding is at the bottom of the position taken. Party politics ends up having the self lose contact with himself as a result of the set programs promoted by the party and the information sent out as party policy. The Press intended as a medium of information or of opinion is also often misleading because of the bent it puts on news and of its partisanship in its editorials due to disguised agenda and concealed interest. Religions in their dogmatic teachings often offer an approach which suffers from the shortcomings of the regime of opinion which helps the maintaining of the established disorder in society which place peace at risk. It is clear that working for the reestablishment of a regime of truth and caring to overcome the pitfalls of a regime of opinion is essential in promoting peace.

B. PERSONALIST PHILOSOPHY OF CREATIVE FIDELITY AND PEACE

Gabriel Marcel also shows how Personalism as a philosophy of creative fidelity brings out the fact that fraternity creates a community with an emphasis on freedom and love which is conducive to peace while equality creates a society where discord and competition lead to war. Gabriel Marcel analyzes this condition for peace and war in *Paix sur la Terre*(1965)¹⁷.

Gabriel Marcel, in the lecture he gave in Germany, on the occasion of being awarded the Peace Prize in 1964 stressed his lifelong conviction that only in a world in which mutual love, he characterizes as fraternal love, is the universally common lived experience could peace be assured on a permanent basis or pursued on a continual basis.¹⁸ To the contrary, a society of individuals in which general equality for all members is demanded and claimed, assented to and conceded is doomed as incapable of fostering peace within its borders and in relation to other countries. Discord and war is the inevitable outcome. By reducing people to a common denominator spelling out the status of equality assigned to each individual and setting aside any consideration of differences in lived

¹⁷ Gabriel Marcel, "Le Philosophe et la Paix," in *Paix sur la Terre* (Aubier, Montaigne, 1965), 41-59; Idem, "The Philosopher and Peace," trans. Viola Herms Drath in Gabriel Marcel, *Philosophical Fragments: 1904-1914*, ed. Lionel A. Blain (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), 7-19.

¹⁸ Carlo Schmid, "Laudatio," in Gabriel Marcel, *Paix sur la Terre*, 15-39.

concrete existential conditions and circumstances, it would seem that an equal opportunity would be offered to each for the protection of life, liberty, and property with the free exercise of the pursuit of happiness. Equality would favor autonomy, privacy, self-sufficiency, and independence in seeking access to the goods available to satisfy each one's preference as to needs and desires without undue interference by others and with a healthy competition with others. Thus the prospect of harmony and order would seem to be consolidated.

Yet discord and disorder are inevitable in as much as the value of the goods would depend on the wishes and expectations of each individual since in the depersonalizing world of equality there are no goods which as fundamental conditions for social existence each person would have a fundamental right to have and to hold.¹⁹ There is no natural given hierarchy of values called for by the human being as to knowledge, skills, wealth, health, play, religion, or art. Everything is reduced to a thing, to an object, or to a means considered in the abstract without connection to an actually existing person as present to the other and as in action in relationship to the other. Each item out there in itself is available to whoever can reach out to it. For each of the equals would inevitably try to rise above the others.²⁰ Each individual as equal would compete with others to get the more in having instead of seeking the as much as in being. An inevitable tension arises in this world of domination and power with the resulting loss of empowerment and the advent of personal disenfranchisement of the many. Equality rights allow and justify limitation in acquisition and having only as a result of agreement, consent, compromise, bargaining, or arbitration when workable by the parties involved or in violence, riots, revolution, conflicts and ultimately war as short-cuts or a more finalizing way. Each individual conceived as equal in the abstract seeks superiority with regard to the other, feeling equally entitled as equal, to whatever is available.

In democratic countries with constitutions based on equality by agreement, it often happens that many people are deprived of the equal opportunities the claim of equality was supposed to guarantee. In socialist countries where equality is offered as part of an ideology, the distribution of goods is often far from being fair. This results in a world where having and possessing are prevalent as the normal human aim and endeavor instead of a world of being and sharing a personalist and existentialist

¹⁹ Gabriel Marcel, "The Philosopher and Peace," 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

lived experience sought after as an ideal. Equality creates a dangerous tension within a society and between countries leading to violence in domestic affairs and civil wars as well as international and worldwide wars. The rationalist analysis simplifies matters by seeing the world in the spirit of abstraction leaving aside, as if that were possible, the actually existing person living in a real community. For Gabriel Marcel, only a fomenter of ideology would fall into this trap. In fact, "never could a philosopher who deserves the name take seriously the thought of equality in its application to human beings."²¹

For Gabriel Marcel, peace can only be assured in a world of fraternal love--"un monde fraternel"--in which creative fidelity with personal reciprocity in availability to each other is the universal lived experience. The essential condition for peace is the presence of real communities based on the reality of human fundamental rights identified as fundamental conditions for social existence. This spirit of community is manifested when each person looks up to the other person and rejoices at the presence in that person of qualities and values it does not yet possess but which each person considers to be a value for the meaningfulness of its own being.²² An awareness of one's own insufficiency and a sense of humility makes real the role of the other for the self so that through interrelationship and intersubjectivity persons in actual situations promote availability and openness toward each other. Being persons for the others becomes a means of personal enrichment. This awareness of the other as this actually existing individual person brings home the knowledge of the universality of the human condition with all human beings actually sharing common experiences of birth, growth, maturing and death with joys and sorrows, with successes and failures, with meaningfulness and irrelevance, as operational or stymied, as promoted or demeaned.²³

This concrete universality of lived experience also gives value to the recognition of the great value found in the fact of great differences between individuals and between groups of individuals who make valuable contributions to each other through communication in dialogue and through reciprocity of consciousness in the presence to each other.²⁴ This makes for creative fidelity with a sharing in love and truth through the authenticity of a warm heart and a clear mind free of ill will and

²¹ Ibid., 9.

²² Ibid., 9-10.

²³ Idem, *Creative Fidelity* (Farrar, Strauss and Company, 1964), 8-9.

²⁴ Idem, *Man against Mass Society*, trans. G. S. Fraser (Lanham: University Press of America, 1978), 9, 268.

prejudice and filled with benevolence and understanding. There results in a deep appreciation of the person whatever the status the person has as to gender, race, age, wealth, health, athletic prowess, aesthetic taste, language, culture and nationality and a sincere desire for communion and cooperation. There will be a tendency to seek justice by pairing down the level of the misery of extreme poverty and by readjusting the disparity of opulence to reduce the tension between the "haves" and the "have nots" since all share in common human values and are enriched by the uniqueness of their own self as unique persons as individuals and as in groups respecting each other's spiritual space as well as physical space.

Persons celebrating each other in invocation and communing with each in disponsibility will bring about the reality of communities and of a world where peace reigns and flourishes. And for Gabriel Marcel, this is the hope, the "ardent anticipation," that all his works were intended to foster.²⁵ In all this, he keeps in mind the role of the philosopher as a promoter of peace and the limited perimeter, within the political arena, is allowed him as an "engagé" in the cause of peace. And Gabriel Marcel never wants us to forget that the fundamental insight into the problematic of peace arises for him from his experience with music, both as a composer and as a listener. Music gives him an in-depth feel for the transcendence involved in the world and beyond this world as a condition to having a resolution of the problem of peace in all its mystery.²⁶

C. PERSONALIST PHILOSOPHY OF THE CONCRETE AND PEACE

Gabriel Marcel further shows how Personalism as a philosophy of the concrete brings out the fact that a concrete existentialist approach builds a concern for the individual person in its situation as a spiritual being possessed of dignity which enhances the prospect of peace while abstraction creates an atmosphere of indifference and exclusion where the absence of respect for the human values of each person leads to war. Gabriel Marcel analyzes this condition for peace and war in *L'Esprit*

²⁵ Idem, "The Philosopher and Peace," 19.

²⁶ Ibid., 18; Idem, *The Existential Background of Human Dignity*, 50.

*d'Abstraction, Facteur de Guerre (1951).*²⁷

In the complementary texts of the *Preface* and the *Conclusion of Man Against Mass Society (Les Hommes contre l'Humain)*, Gabriel Marcel emphasizes how both in his theoretical philosophical thought and in his social and political activities he expressed from the very beginning of his career and throughout his intellectual life a "distrust of abstraction."²⁸ He writes: "The dynamic element in my philosophy, taken as a whole, can be seen as an obstinate and untiring battle against the spirit of abstraction."²⁹ He adds: "And when I was still very young I grasped the truth that it is impossible to build true peace on abstraction."³⁰ Dealing with life in the spirit of abstraction requires the choice of one aspect under consideration to satisfy the mind's need for clarity, precision and distinction to be able to handle and master the data at hand with efficiency and power to the exclusion of the other aspects which are present in the given concrete existential situation and pregnant with meaning for the person. Choice is terrible by what it leaves out, as André Gide proclaimed.³¹ Choice causes a loss of fervor, presence, the existential, and the unique. With the spirit of abstraction is left out the sense of connection between human beings and with the environment, the feel for mutual respect and reciprocity of consciousness, the role of community and universality, the sensitivity for the worthiness of the person and the uniqueness of the circumstances, the awe in the encounter with the mystery involved in human lived experience and the spiritual value involved in human existence.³² With the spirit of abstraction which is the product of passions comes a decomposition and a deadening of reality which leads to abasement and alienation, fanaticism and propaganda, imperialism and domination, indifference and exclusion, discord

²⁷ Gabriel Marcel, "L'Esprit d'Abstraction, Facteur de Guerre," in *Les Hommes contre l'Humain* (Paris: La Colombe, 1951), 114-121; Gabriel Marcel, "The Spirit of Abstraction, as a Factor Making War," in *Man against Mass Society*, trans. G. S. Frasier (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 153-162.

²⁸ Gabriel Marcel, "The Universal against the Masses, I and II" in *Man against Mass Society*, trans. G. S. Frasier (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 1-11 and 257-273; 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

³¹ André Gide, *Les Nourritures Terrestres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1935), 20: "Tout choix est effrayant, quand on y songe."

³² "Gabriel Marcel, *Man against Mass Society*, 273.

and violence, divisiveness and destruction, antagonism and war.³³ The presence of the other as this actual person in its uniqueness or as a member actively involved within a group with its own diversity is no longer there to call for a caring response of availability and disponibility towards meaningful exchange and sharing in the adventure and risk of life.³⁴ The spirit of abstraction resulting from the making of generalizations, the creating of a common denominator, and the producing of an ideology excludes what is involved in being an individual on one's own and in communion with a neighbor. Whatever is dealt with is reduced to an idea, a thing, or an object which are not anchored in the actual existential concrete reality of everyday life in the world.

This spirit of abstraction is quite different from the commitment to the universal which involves openness, through knowledge and love, to the individual person involved in its existence in actually lived situations and which implies a turning toward the other with a reciprocity of consciousness and intersubjectivity stressing inclusiveness with a respect for diversity and with a need to be available and a will to enter into communion with the other. The main poverty is not a lack of money or a lack of success, but a lack of love.³⁵ The passion involved, when considering the universal, is love which is conducive to harmony and peace. For Gabriel Marcel, the universal implied in the real community "is the awareness of participating together in a unique adventure, in a fundamental and invisible mystery of human destiny."³⁶ The lived experiences which individuals in their diversity have in common promote reciprocity and intersubjectivity which promotes harmony and peace.

CONCLUSION

Gabriel Marcel thus developed a comprehensive Personalist Ontology of Peace which clarifies the role of truth, fraternity, and the concrete in the promoting of peace and which emphasizes the impact of opinion, equality and abstraction in the fostering of war. Throughout his life, Gabriel Marcel reworked his ideas and arguments about peace and war through his plays and through his philosophical works and continuously reflected on his published works to bring us a comprehensive

³³ Ibid., 10.

³⁴ Ibid., 267-269.

³⁵ Gabriel Marcel, *The Existential Background of Human Dignity*, 122-123.

³⁶ Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 8-9.

analysis which is still valid and meaningful today in our turbulent and unsure world. He truly deserved the Peace Prize awarded him, in 1964, by the Borsenverein der Deutschen Buchhandels.³⁷

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³⁷ Carlo Schmid, "Laudatio," in Gabriel Marcel, *Paix sur la Terre* (Paris: Aubier, Montaigne, 1965), 5-39.