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MAN AND FIDELITY: A STUDY IN MARCEL

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By

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The aim of the following study is the limited one of seeking to determine the place and significance of fidelity within the general scheme of Marcel's philosophy. It is not merely the writer's own conviction, but far more importantly Marcel's own statement that fidelity occupies a "truly central position" in his philosophy, that justifies such an investigation. ¹ Despite Marcel's explicit statement, however, no study of his thought known to the writer has taken fidelity as the focus of its concern. On the other hand, Marcel has not elaborated on his statement nor has he ever given a detailed account of the connections of fidelity with other parts of his philosophy such as his concept of existential man, the theory of the thou, or the fundamental exigencies of man. A detailed study of the place and significance of fidelity in Marcel's philosophy, therefore, may contribute to a better understanding of one of the outstanding thinkers of the mid-twentieth century by focusing on a theme which has been neglected by other students of Marcel.

As the aim of the thesis is limited, so is its scope. Marcel is not only a philosopher; he is also an artist, the author of nearly thirty plays. But an adequate study of Marcel's drama

¹See CF, p. 149 and cf. BH, p. 42. For a key to the references to works by Marcel cited in the notes, see the List of Abbreviations following the Table of Contents.
would require book-length treatment. For this reason only Marcel's published philosophical work, in itself sufficiently voluminous, is included within the scope of the thesis.

Furthermore, this is in no sense a historical or comparative study. While it is not possible to study Marcel in a void, as it were, it does not seek to draw specific comparisons between Marcel and any other thinker or to exhibit the development of his thought over the course of half a century from absolute idealism to what may be called concrete existentialism. The only exceptions to this limitation are an attempt (in the Introduction) to clarify and interpret Marcel's own reference to himself as a "neo-socratic;" and such explanation of Marcel's early life experiences and philosophical interests (in Chapter One) as is necessary to make clear what Marcel is trying to do and the general nature of his philosophical effort.

Finally, the thesis does not develop the religious aspect or implications of Marcel's thought. This limitation does not mean that the writer thinks this aspect or those implications unimportant, either in themselves or for understanding Marcel. Nor does it mean that the religious aspect is simply ignored. While the full argument justifying this limitation may be found in the concluding chapter, it may be said here by way of anticipation that in the writer's view Marcel's philosophy does not necessitate an essentially religious interpretation, although it is oriented toward the
religious. But Marcel intends his fundamental analyses of certain phenomena of human existence to be in themselves essentially philosophical. Consequently no specific reference to the religious is made (except in one or two places where the explication of an argument requires it) until that point in the investigation has been reached when it is natural, so to speak, to do so.

The thesis is based upon a study of Marcel's published philosophical work, an oeuvre which in terms of time extends over half a century from about 1909 to 1964. Very little attention has been given to secondary works on Marcel, although a number of such works are listed in the bibliography either because they were consulted to some extent by the writer or because they may prove useful to others who may wish to read about Marcel. The relative neglect of secondary works by no means indicates the writer's judgment as to their value; it only reflects his virtually exclusive concentration on Marcel's own published work as the only really valid basis for an investigation of this kind.

Since it is not possible to place and assess the significance of fidelity within the general scheme of Marcel's philosophy without at least sketching its general outlines, the thesis begins with a statement of Marcel's basic problem and a consideration of his philosophy as his own response to this problem. The first chapter also seeks to indicate to some extent why Marcel's response, insofar as it was philosophical, took the form that it did as well
as to clarify the method Marcel employs to deal with the basic problem from the standpoint of philosophy. Subsequent chapters discuss Marcel's concept of existential man and the significance of love, hope, fidelity, and creative fidelity. The chapters on fidelity and creative fidelity contain the writer's assessment of the place and significance of fidelity in Marcel's philosophy. The thesis concludes with critical evaluation and some general observations regarding Marcel's philosophical outlook, method, and orientation.
ABSTRACT

The aim of the dissertation is to determine the place and significance of creative fidelity within the general scheme of Marcel's philosophy based upon a close study of the whole body of Marcel's published philosophical writings from 1909 to 1964. The results of the study justify Marcel's own assertion of the centrality of fidelity to his thought. In general, creative fidelity is Marcel's recommendation on the concrete level for the felt emptiness and meaninglessness of contemporary life. Positively, creative fidelity is the concrete manifestation of love's recognition and affirmation of something of permanent value in the other; negatively, it is the concrete manifestation of love's refusal to despair. Creative fidelity is the service of a free man which enables him to transcend the limitations of space, time, and death, and which confers unity and meaning on his life. The life of the creatively faithful man is a living testimony to his truth, love, and freedom. Specifically, the element of fidelity is necessary for man as an indicator of authentic love, an essential condition for meaningful human relationships and an ordered social life, the way in which man can transcend the present and relate significantly both to the past and the future, and to overcome a functional view of the self. The element of creativity is necessary both because man is free and neither his love nor his service can be compelled, and because
fidelity without creativity can easily deteriorate into blind obedience or rigid conformity. By his power to create man can acquire a new quality and transfigure both himself and his world. An examination of certain unresolved difficulties with the doctrine of creative fidelity and the theory of the thou with which it is intimately related leads to the further conclusion that while Marcel's thought ultimately has a religious orientation and his analyses are therefore susceptible to a religious interpretation, nevertheless there is no absolute necessity to give a religious interpretation to these analyses and even if they are not so interpreted, they retain a philosophical significance and value.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Listed below are the abbreviations used in the footnotes to refer to works by Marcel. Unless otherwise mentioned in the notes, abbreviations refer to existing English translations listed in the bibliography.

BH - Being and Having
CF - Creative Fidelity
DW - The Decline of Wisdom
EB - The Existential Background of Human Dignity
HV - Homo Viator
MB-I - The Mystery of Being, Vol. 1
MB-II - The Mystery of Being, Vol. 2
MJ - Metaphysical Journal
MS - Man Against Mass Society
PE - The Philosophy of Existentialism
PF - Philosophical Fragments 1909-1914
PI - Presence and Immortality
PM - Problematic Man
PP - The Influence of Psychic Phenomena on My Philosophy
RM - Royce's Metaphysics
S - Searchings
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INTRODUCTION

A first acquaintance with any single work by Marcel may leave the reader bewildered and perhaps even intellectually "disoriented," especially if he has been nourished on a more traditional and academic type of philosophy or is familiar primarily with the analytic approach which now dominates the contemporary Anglo-American philosophical scene. Even commentators familiar with and sympathetic to recent developments in Continental philosophy have complained about the elusiveness of Marcel's thought and the difficulty they experienced in trying to summarize it. And Marcel has himself spoken of "the unbearable discomfort I experience when someone asks me . . . to state in a few words 'in what consists my philosophy.' This request is enough to annihilate any awareness I might have of it."¹ These and other difficulties which one encounters when trying to unravel and understand Marcel's thought have their principal source in three peculiarities of his philosophy; namely, (a) the diverse forms of exposition employed by Marcel, (b) his method, and (c) certain basic characteristics of his thought. Some brief comments,

therefore, on these three aspects of Marcel's philosophy seem called for in order to introduce the reader of the following pages to Marcel's thought-world and general outlook as well as, hopefully, to prevent any initial misunderstanding of what Marcel is trying to do and the way he proposes to do it.

A. Forms of exposition

One reason an initial acquaintance with Marcel may leave an impression of confusion is due to the diverse forms of his exposition. His books are largely collections of articles, papers, conferences, lectures, and diary-journals. The interrelationships between these various pieces, written at different times and for different occasions, and the various themes they deal with are often subterranean, to say the least. For this reason a reading of a single work of Marcel's can be very misleading. But if one studies the whole body of Marcel's published philosophical work, one very often finds that one part of it illuminates another part which previously had seemed impenetrably obscure. For the purpose of this study I have drawn upon the whole body of Marcel's published work in philosophy in an effort to focus on and clarify the place and significance of fidelity in his philosophy. Needless to say, this does not guarantee that this study is free of errors either in exposition or interpretation, but I have tried neither to overlook nor neglect any text relevant for a study of
fidelity in Marcel's general scheme of thought.

B. Marcel's method

Marcel's method is first presented and discussed in Chapter One, and an attempt at critical evaluation is to be found in Chapter Six. Something, nevertheless, should be said about it here by way of anticipation.

Marcel calls his method "secondary reflection," and says it has a two-fold purpose; namely, (1) to overcome the distortion or mutilation of experience consequent on primary, or analytic, reflection based on the subject-object dichotomy; and (2) to resist the attacks of the critical reason which might subvert the integrity of non-objectifiable experience. But Marcel's actual procedure is somewhat different than this statement of purpose might lead one to suppose. In fact he employs several methods to achieve his purpose. There is little in the way of "orthodox" philosophical argumentation to be found in Marcel, and what there is generally is employed negatively to refute opposing views rather than positively to establish his own position. When carrying out his "secondary reflection" Marcel very often uses the method of phenomenological description of the experiences he is trying to elucidate. But sometimes he uses what today would be called

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^2 See MB-I, pp. 102-103 and MB-II, pp. 69-70, 74-75.
linguistic analysis. Other times he makes what can only be called situational analyses, i.e., phenomenological descriptions of a whole complex of meanings to be found combined in a given, concrete situation. And frequently Marcel will attempt to draw out the "existential" implications of a concrete example introduced for a specific purpose.

The employment of these several methods even within the limits of a single article or paper can certainly startle or even baffle the reader, an effect only heightened by Marcel's propensity for taking the longest way home. For Marcel, a straight line is seldom the shortest distance between two points and the usual course of his exposition is sinuous, to say the least, and sometimes it can only be described as tortuous. There are good reasons, of course, for this surface quality of Marcel's prose and mode of exposition: there can be no doubt but that Marcel knows what he is doing. Some of these reasons are intimately bound up with the fundamental characteristics of his thought and can be indicated in a general way in connection with them.

C. Fundamental characteristics of Marcel's thought

There are four, all intimately interrelated, which seem to call for special mention here, viz., Marcel's thought may be characterized as personal, concrete, unsystematic, and inconclusive.
1. **Personal.** In saying that Marcel's thought is personal, it is not being suggested that his philosophy is disguised autobiography or that its content is so peculiar to himself that it lacks general philosophical interest or value. To be sure, Marcel is involved in his thought in a way perhaps foreign to traditional philosophy, as the first chapter seeks to make clear. But what is meant here by calling his thought "personal" is that Marcel is interested in the concrete subject, the subject qua subject, rather than the subject as knower, as subject of knowledge. This initial interest in the subject as such virtually requires that Marcel seek a new method of philosophizing lest he convert the subject back into an "object" of knowledge, a procedure which would be self-defeating because the specifically personal dimension of human existence eludes objective treatment (see Chapter 1, Section 4).

2. **Concrete.** This characteristic of Marcel's thought is a consequence of his intention to focus on the subject qua subject, on the personal dimension of human existence. That is to say, to treat the subject as unobjectified and, in its totality, as unobjectifiable, meant that Marcel had to eschew abstractions as incompatible with his fundamental interest and philosophical purpose. The object as such, according to Marcel's analysis, exists from the viewpoint of "others," finally of "nobody," i.e., of thought in general. If the personal, all that "comes from me," is eliminated, what remains is a network of abstractions which only by a
"singular illusion" can be taken as the reality we actually experience.\(^3\) Thus if Marcel is to focus on the person, the subject as such, his philosophy of necessity will have to be concrete. To be concrete means to deal with the whole man in his situation, for it is only abstract man who has no situation. It also means to deal with man globally, and not just emphasize the rational element of human nature. And this means to recognize the reality of the non-objectifiable dimensions of human experience, especially the realm of feeling. The reality of the non-objectifiable is, by definition, felt rather than thought, yet it is the matrix out of which even thinking arises. This reality, however, is very vulnerable to subversion by the critical reason in its function as primary reflection. Marcel has had, therefore, to devise a language of indirection in order to refer to and indicate the non-objectifiable, the concrete and personal dimension of existence. This is the chief reason for the peculiarities of his argumentation and mode of exposition. Marcel is attempting to indicate and draw the existential implications of that which is essentially inexpressible by means of language. Marcel has warned us as late as 1962 that "it must be remembered that my thinking takes it departure from feeling, from reflection on feeling and its significance."\(^4\)

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\(^3\)MJ, pp. 281-282.

\(^4\)EB, pp. 82-83.
3. **Unsystematic.** Marcel’s philosophy is unsystematic both in its presentation—as was mentioned above—in its content, and in his intention. There is no doubt that this characteristic is such that it is sometimes difficult to make out the significance of what Marcel is saying. But Marcel rejects as absurd the notion of "my system." "Philosophy," he has said, "has increasingly appeared to me as an open inquiry..." His work, he tells us, is the very opposite of a treatise through the whole of which a sequence of thought is logically developed. He has avowed that he has nothing in common with a scholar who has a fixed program and who is conscious of reaching a definite point. Marcel's own view of his work is that it is in the nature of a series of probes, soundings, or researches. Underlying these considerations is a basic conviction of Marcel that

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

It is not to be expected, then, that Marcel would seek to emulate Leibniz or, "less obviously," Hegel.

4. **Inconclusive.** Since Marcel’s interest is focused on the

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5 CF, p. 61.


7 PE, p. 124.
personal dimension of human existence, he emphasizes the concrete and rejects both abstraction and systematization. Inevitably such a philosophy will seem inconclusive if judged from the standpoint either of science or of traditional philosophy. This is because Marcel is not trying to furnish definitive solutions to objective problems. Indeed, the "problems" Marcel is concerned with admit of no objective answer in the usual sense of the term, as will be seen when the basic "problem" to which his philosophy as a whole can be considered a response is presented at the beginning of Chapter One. Marcel's reader, therefore, must not demand or expect what Marcel neither can nor pretends to provide. This does not mean, however, that Marcel has nothing definite of value to say concerning those matters into which he does "probe," as, it is to be hoped, the following study will show.

In the light of these fundamental characteristics of Marcel's thought it might seem that his philosophy lacked any unity, but this would be deceptive. Despite all appearances to the contrary, there is a unity of subject matter underlying all of Marcel's published philosophical work. His thought is always focused on man qua subject, man considered concretely in a given historical situation defined with respect to an "image of the universe" changing in time and expressing his nature and exigencies as these are
realized in a given era. If Marcel is to be labeled an "existentialist," it is in this light that he should be awarded the distinction of that much-abused term.

But Marcel has said he prefers to describe himself as a neosocratic rather than as an existentialist, understanding by the former term someone who maintains a continuous attitude of interrogation, who emphasizes communication realized as dialogue addressed to a person, and who has a negative attitude toward results reached "by any kind of physics," which can never escape "objective categories." I believe this self-description is apt, more appropriate indeed than Marcel himself directly suggests.

It is true that Socrates was a great interrogator and that he pursued his philosophical "researches" through dialogue with his pupils or with anyone else in Athens who had the patience to listen to him or the temerity to engage him in dispute. It also seems to be true that he never attempted to construct a "system" or give "final" answers to the questions he raised. All this is similar to Marcel's own procedure. But it may not be illegitimate to draw another parallel between Marcel and Socrates.

It is possible to see as one of the principle themes of modern

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8 CF, p. 180.
9 MJ, p. xiii.
philosophical thought since Descartes an argument over the nature of the object of knowledge, an issue central for the explanation and validation both of the process and the result of man's thinking about the world and himself. More precisely, it is a question of the relation between thought and reality. Any answer to this question will involve answers to certain other questions, e.g., the nature of thought and the nature of reality; ultimately, perhaps, one would also have to answer the question as to the nature of the knower. It may be that these questions are unanswerable; it may be that it is a mistake even to raise them. But it is simply a matter of fact that they have been raised.

In modern times answers to some of these questions, various though they may have been, have been heavily weighted on the side of the object and of the objective at the expense of the knower, the concrete human being. It could be argued that one consequence of this emphasis, particularly since the rise of the empirical sciences, has been the elimination from the domain of knowledge or of the knowable--the objective domain--of many values closely associated with the subject as person: personal dignity, freedom, justice, love, meaning of life. It has been a tendency of modern thought, that is to say, to relegate these values to the domain of the subjective in the pejorative sense, meaning by that the purely personal, the accidental, or the arbitrary.
If it is true that one trend of modern thought has been as described, i.e., that the emphasis on the objective has resulted in a reduction--at least in philosophy--of the concrete individual to the subject of thought in general, then it is only to be expected that thinkers should appear who would attempt to redress the imbalance. There is a sense, then, in which it would be correct to speak of existentialist thinkers in general as representing a "turn" from the objective to the subjective in a non-pejorative sense. A distant parallel to this "turn," it will be recalled, occurred in the early days of Western philosophy; namely, the shift in emphasis from physics to man effected by Socrates, a shift in emphasis which constituted the beginning of classical Greek humanism insofar as philosophy was concerned. This emphasis was retained in Western philosophy, albeit with many modifications (especially in the Middle Ages), until almost the end of the nineteenth century, after which it seemed to be in a process of being displaced by a new emphasis on physics resulting from developments occurring in that science around the turn of the century.

It is not possible, however, to cast Marcel simpliciter in the role of a latter-day Socrates. Too much has happened since the time of the ancient Greeks--science itself, for one thing. When Socrates placed man in the center of his interest, he asked questions to which he and his successors tried to provide "objective"
answers, and this is something Marcel does not even attempt to do since he believes the very "logic" of objectivity renders any such attempt futile. Like Socrates, however, Marcel can be seen as representative of a "turn" from physics, placing concrete man in the center of his philosophical investigations. But for Marcel this is not only a turn from physics, but from the "objective" as well, a turn from any attempt to demonstrate the truth of certain propositions about man in general, i.e., abstract man. Hence Marcel may be said to be correct when he describes himself as a neosocratic if we understand that, like Socrates, Marcel attempts to effect a shift in emphasis from physics to man, but, unlike Socrates, cannot properly be described as rational or intellectualistic in his fundamental approach to the "problem of man."
CHAPTER I
THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION:
MARCEL'S DIAGNOSIS AND RESPONSE

Marcel may properly be associated with those contemporary thinkers who have made concrete or existential man and the human condition the primary concern of their philosophical interest. That is to say, Marcel is not a thinker who immerses himself in the technicalities of "professional" philosophy for their own sake, but rather grapples with those technicalities, as well as with some of the classical problems of the western philosophical tradition, for the sake of his interest in and concern for "man's fate." This interest dates back over half a century, to Marcel's student days at the Sorbonne prior to the First World War, and in the broadest sense his philosophy may be characterized as a reflective response to contemporary man's situation as he, Marcel, understands it. Before turning to an examination of Marcel's own formulation and diagnosis of this situation, however, a few remarks of a general nature may prove useful, particularly in showing that Marcel's "reading" of this situation is by no means eccentric or peculiar to himself.

When one thinks of "the contemporary situation," one is apt, sooner or later, to think of the Bomb. But while the Bomb undeniably casts a long shadow, it is more symptom than cause of
the current malaise. As one eminent British scholar used to say (when occasionally menaced by it during the course of a conver-
sation) the Bomb makes no real difference since the world has
been expecting to come suddenly and painfully to an immediate end
since at least the eleventh century, as anyone who had ever read
Wulfstan would realize. While it may be doubted whether many
have read Wulfstan these days, this anecdote is indicative of the
widespread agreement that something is seriously wrong with
contemporary life and that we live in perilous times. I do not
refer only to the threat of nuclear destruction; that apocalyptic pos-
sibility is only one of the more sensational indicators of the conse-
quence of a misuse of science and technology. Rather what many
seem to fear is less the extinction of the species than a threat to
its humanity, to man's very existence as a human being. In the
last analysis, perhaps, this comes down to saying that man today
is confronted with a situation which appears to pose a threat to
the survival of certain values hitherto deemed essential for even a
minimally satisfying life.

It is surprising how far back into the nineteenth century one
can trace prophecies of impending disaster uttered by people with
the most varied national, political, and social backgrounds.

1The late C. S. Lewis, related by Nevill Coghill in Light On
C. S. Lewis, ed. by Jocelyn Gibb (London: Geoffrey Bles,
1965), p. 64.
Whether it be Burckhardt prophesying total war, Proudhon foreseeing a new absolutism, Baudelaire lamenting the destruction of culture, Tolstoy denouncing universal corruption, Thoreau fulminating over the lust for wealth, or Durkheim analyzing the meaninglessness and restlessness of modern life, there was an amazing agreement that things were bad and certain to get worse. In addition to their pessimistic prognosis, these men of the nineteenth century also shared an ambiguous attitude toward the new industrial civilization in process of being created as a result of the application of technology to daily life. They were hostile to the uses to which the new discoveries were being put, although, on the other hand, few suggested that the new technology could, or should, be suppressed. Their concern was rather with the changed quality of life brought about by applied science. This ambiguous attitude has been carried over into the twentieth century and has provided a theme to critics as varied as, to mention only a few of the more prominent, R. H. Tawney, Elton Mayo, Lewis Mumford, A. R. Heron, Aldous Huxley, Albert Schweitzer, and Albert Einstein.

If we consider the projected trend—assuming nuclear disaster can be averted—an ambiguous attitude toward technology is

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3Ibid., pp. 192-204.
not surprising. Here is one glimpse of what may be in store for us:

The largely humanist-oriented, occasionally ideologically-minded intellectual-dissenter . . . is rapidly being replaced either by experts and specialists . . . or by generalists-integrators, who become in effect house-ideologues for those in power, providing overall intellectual integration for disparate actions. . . . In the technetronic society the trend would seem to be towards the aggregation of the individual support of millions of uncoordinated citizens, easily within the reach of magnetic and attractive personalities effectively exploiting the latest communication techniques to manipulate emotions and control reason.4

Lewis Mumford suggests much the same outcome with his concept of the "megamachine," viz., a totally organized and homogenized social system in which society functions like a machine and men like its parts, achieving a total coordination by "the constant increase of order, power, predictability and above all control."5

Marcel's own diagnosis of the contemporary situation is, in many respects, as alarming as those just mentioned above and has much in common with them. This is only to be expected, since it is simply a fact that our technological civilization based upon applied science, with all the problems it has spawned, is the most distinctive and single most important element of the situation in which man finds himself today, and is common to us all. Marcel

views this situation, however, from his own perspective which is influenced by factors involved in his own, personal situation, i.e., his situation insofar as it is his and not only common to everyone. Consequently, Marcel's diagnosis of man's contemporary situation also differs in some respects from those previously mentioned, and his approach as well as his formulation of the basic "problem" confronting man today is also distinctive.

Since Marcel's philosophy may be considered a significant part of his complex and personal response to his total situation, some acquaintance with the various factors influencing his response, to the extent that Marcel has informed us of them, should contribute to a better understanding of his philosophy as a whole and the place and significance of fidelity in his general scheme of thought. This chapter, accordingly, will be concerned with Marcel's own diagnosis of the contemporary situation, with certain early experiences which influenced his philosophical interests and his approach to those problems with which he is most concerned, and with his method for dealing with those problems. The chapter is divided into five sections, viz., (1) the contemporary situation according to Marcel, (2) concrete aspects of this situation, (3) early formative experiences of Marcel, (4) inadequate approaches, according to Marcel, to the philosophical study of man, and (5) Marcel's method.
1. **The Contemporary Situation: "A Broken World"**

We live in a broken world, Marcel says, a world which, like a watch whose mainspring has ceased to function, appears unchanged to the outward eye but whose heart has stopped beating. It is a world whose inhabitants the more keenly feel its divisions, the more by means of its technology it achieves an all-embracing surface unity.\(^6\) It is a world dominated by objective and scientific thinking which has produced wonders surpassing the finest dreams and wildest fancies of the ancients, a world of marvelous techniques cunningly devised to cope with a swarm of problems such as the ancients never dreamed or imagined at all.\(^7\) Yet it is also a world in which problems tend to get out of hand, a world in which solutions generate problems more complex than those the solutions were devised to alleviate. It is a world in which man is at the mercy of his own technology, increasingly incapable of controlling his own control of his technics.\(^8\) It is a world in an "eschatological" situation, suffering from the constant threat of self-destruction.\(^9\)

According to Marcel, the effect on man generally, situated in such a world, can only be described as pathetic. His freedom is increasingly restricted and he may be in danger of losing it

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\(^6\) MB-I, pp. 26-27, 43-44.  
\(^7\) PE, p. 13.  
\(^8\) ibid., pp. 30-31.  
altogether by a gradual spread of totalitarianism around the planet.\textsuperscript{10} Man tends to suffer an identity crisis \textit{vis-à-vis} the state and even his own fellows, both tending to view him solely in terms of his social role or function.\textsuperscript{11} If he seeks an objective answer to the question, "Who am I?" from the sciences, he is unable to recognize \textit{himself} in the conglomery of chemical, biological, psychological, and social functions proffered him.\textsuperscript{12}

Such a world is a prey to despair because it seems empty, hollow, lacking in meaning.\textsuperscript{13} Contemporary man's tendency to reject any view of himself unless it is presented within the frame of reference of the "purely natural" as dictated by the requirements of objective and scientific thought contributes to his sense of helpless insignificance and especially to his feelings of hopelessness and depreciation when confronted with the thought and fact of death.\textsuperscript{14} Although man is the only being we know capable of adopting an attitude not only toward his own life but toward life itself, the broken world in which he lives--incessantly busy, its attention directed outward, aggressive, quarrelsome and dominated by the will to power--interposes the most serious obstacles which

\textsuperscript{10} MB-I, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., pp. 36-38.
\textsuperscript{12} PE, p. 12; cf. MB-I, p. 184, 250; EB, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{13} PE, pp. 12, 27; cf. MB-I, p. 200.
\textsuperscript{14} PE, pp. 27, 30-31; CF, pp. 93-94; MB-I, pp. 212-213.
hinder the necessary work of reflection and imagination which are the pre-eminent means at man's disposal for discovering what point there might be after all to the business of living. Indeed, Marcel goes so far as to assert that this world rests, in a certain sense, wholly on a "massive refusal" either to reflect or to imagine.¹⁵ This inability or refusal to reflect only serves to increase man's confusion and leads to a lack of principle or to a decreased sense of value and an increased sense of aimlessness.¹⁶ If all this were not enough, despite the growth of collectivized life in all its forms, public and private, all over the world, real community is less and less to be found among men today.¹⁷ There is, instead, more and more suspicion, mistrust, treachery, and malice aforethought. War follows war, massacre succeeds massacre, horror is piled upon horror.

In short, this broken world of Marcel's, the description of which is intended to be an essential characterization of our situation today, is a work in which, despite its scientific and technological triumphs, men increasingly feel that life is pointless and their own lives meaningless; a world in which love, trust, fidelity, and hope are increasingly difficult to sustain. This means, for Marcel, that it is an increasingly inhuman world and, as such, a

¹⁵MB-I, p. 44.
¹⁶Ibid., p. 176.
¹⁷Ibid., pp. 34-35.
world in which the very existence of man as a human being is threatened. Needless to say, it is also a world in which man finds little satisfaction or happiness.

This view of our contemporary world is certainly bleak and may even strike the reader as exaggerated. Marcel himself scatters these observations widely apart in his books, and from book to book. It may well be that he felt that if he dropped it all down in one place like a massive block of concrete, as has been done here, that it would prove more than any but the most staunchly pessimistic of readers could stomach.

In this connection, there are three observations to be made in order to guard against misunderstanding. In the first place, Marcel is not making any insidious comparison between our own and earlier epochs. That was, indeed, the very point of the anecdote given near the beginning of this chapter. Marcel is perfectly aware that people did not have things easy in the ninth century, although he does believe mankind as a whole was not imperiled in the ninth century in the way it is today. Marcel's point is that this is our situation now; we live today, not in the ninth century.

In the second place, Marcel does not mean to suggest that the sun has ceased to shine or the birds to sing in our time.

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18 Cf. MB-II, p. 187.
Parents still love their children and some children still love their parents; some husbands and wives still love one another; lovers still embrace; literature, music, art, remain; there is still food and even fine cuisine. If all these things had altogether failed us, what would there be left to do but commit suicide? Yet while all these things not only make life tolerable but also give intense pleasure to many, they do not and will not fill up the growing sense of emptiness and hopelessness that Marcel finds characteristic of contemporary life.

Finally, the American reader, anyway, needs to remind himself that Marcel has in his own lifetime twice seen European civilization nearly destroyed by war, and he has twice lived through the horrors war can bring. It only natural that he should be acutely aware of the fragility of human culture and civilization, and of possible threats to them.

Having stated the basic problem of contemporary man and characterized his situation in a general way as Marcel sees it, let us now review briefly some of its more concrete aspects which Marcel thinks contribute to or complicate human life and aggravate the sense of emptiness many feel today.

2. Concrete Aspects of the Contemporary Situation

In the final analysis, according to Marcel, the problem of the emptiness of contemporary life is generated by man's response to
the limitations of an industrial society with its technologically oriented culture and the theoretical outlook on man and the world elaborated by the empirical sciences upon which, ultimately, that society depends for its survival. While Marcel has included specific observations and concrete illustrations of contemporary life in nearly all of his works, two late books, *Man Against Mass Society* (Les Hommes contre l’humaine, 1951) and *The Decline of Wisdom* (Le Déclin de la sagesse, 1954), are especially rich in material of this kind. I have drawn mainly from these two volumes for the summary below, arranging the material under ten headings.

In this itemization—indictment might really be the more appropriate term—of the negative side of industrial civilization, Marcel constantly refers to the use and abuse of techniques. It is important, therefore, that the reader know how Marcel understands this term. Marcel defines "technique" as "a group of procedures, methodically elaborated, and consequently capable of being taught and reproduced, and when these are put into operation they assure the achievement of some definite concrete purpose." So defined, and from the context, it is clear that Marcel thinks of a technique as ultimately oriented to a practical operation which will effect a change primarily in the material

19 MS, p. 32.
environment. He further characterizes techniques as specialized and perfectible forms of knowledge which tend to give rise to new forms of specialization. Indeed it is in the technical domain alone that Marcel thinks the term "progress" retains a fullness of meaning. From the definition alone it is also clear that Marcel does not see anything evil in technics as such. Everything depends on the kind of concrete relationships that tend to grow up between technical processes on the one hand and human beings on the other. After these remarks on Marcel's use of "technique," let us now turn to his characterization of those features of the contemporary world which he believes most responsible for the sense of emptiness so widely felt today.

a. **The very nature of technique.** Technique of necessity permits the acquisition of power, which is always subject to abuse. The greater the power acquired, the greater the mischief ambitious men can inflict upon their fellows. The social relations which tend to obtain in industrial society spawn the "rootless" masses who live a life far below a level which can be considered truly human. Moreover, a view of life formed by and based on the "technical approach" results in a general pragmatization of human relationships.

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20 DW, pp. 7-8.
21 MS, pp. 82-83; cf. DW, pp. 8-9.
with a consequent loss of the more human values of love, trust, and service.\textsuperscript{22}

b. \textit{Abuse of freedom--resentment}. The common ideology of an industrial society is "freedom and equality," a vulgar misunderstanding of which leads to extravagant expectations and demands. Actually this ideology serves to mask oppressive administrative rule. Its underlying psychological dynamic is resentment of man against his neighbors. This resentment must spread because the nature of industrial and administrative organizations deprives the individual of interest in his work by reducing his creativity. His interest is then deflected towards others whom he tends to see as a threat to his job. Present-day life is therefore characterized by a "radical insecurity" which compels the individual to seek almost any source of support--which further decreases the actual liberty he enjoys.\textsuperscript{23} Inevitably such trends only heighten an atmosphere of mutual suspicion, mistrust, disloyalty, and betrayal.

c. \textit{Massive rejection of the past}. The significance of this phenomenon, for Marcel, is not any alleged irrelevance of

\textsuperscript{22}DW, pp. 10-11, 14, 16.
\textsuperscript{23}MS, pp. 27-32, 206-208.
the past to modern, technological society. By "past" he means the spiritual heritage of European culture, recognition and appreciation of which is connected with gratitude and creative memory. Gratitude is a response uniting giver and recipient and involves an active struggle against inward forces of distraction and dispersal, which is a form of faithfulness. The masses, however, are alienated from this culture and are incapable of gratitude, being concerned to satisfy their more or less just claims, a concern strengthened by their felt resentment.24

d. Crisis of values. Marcel thinks the very term "value" is symptomatic of the crisis. Taken over by philosophers from political economy, it suggests one system can just as well be substituted for another since all measurement, being an object of an initial choice, is essentially relative. The confusion created by this notion and the proliferation of "value systems" ultimately can only lead to the "unhealthy taste for immediate enjoyment," (could we say a philosophy of the Now?), and growth of a spirit of negation.25 Such tendencies only foster expediency and lack of principle.

24 DW, pp. 24-28, 34.
25 MS, pp. 169-170, 184, 188.
e. **Loss of control.** Man's inability to control his own technology, the notorious and ominous fact that his machines dominate him rather than the other way around, has already been noted in the preceding section. 26

f. **Lack of reflection—loss of wisdom.** Mention has also already been made in the preceding section about the lack of reflection in contemporary life and how this relates to the prevailing confusion of values and sense of emptiness. 27 Obstacles to reflection appear to be inherent in industrial society: the massive application of technique in all areas of life tends to create a world hostile to reflection and to wisdom, the offspring of reflection. Wisdom relates to measure and its universal constant is *ne quid nimis*. It is the fruit of slowly-developed maturity, presupposing patience, continuity, and a certain detachment from current events. Life today, however, is dominated by a rage for instaneity inimical to all these qualities. This demand is itself a by-product of a machine rhythm that puts a premium on speed. 28 This lack of reflection contributes to the multiplication of means divorced

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26 Cf. PE, pp. 30-31.
27 Cf. MB-I, pp. 44 and 176.
28 DW, pp. 10-12, 40-41; cf. also MB-I, pp. 180-181, for some barbed remarks on the effects on higher studies and scholarship generally.
from the values they are supposed to serve.29

g. The cult of technique. What began as a collection of means are increasingly valued for their own sake and become the focus of an obsessive cult. Science and technology tend to become identified with one another, especially on the mass level. The greater this tendency, the more techniques become emancipated from control in the service of a humane ideal. The theoretical outlook taking its inspiration from this development encourages men to view themselves as accidental products of the universe and it encourages, de facto, if not in intent, both a pantechnicism and a mechanized society in which men are reduced to their social function, with a consequent depreciation of their human value as such.30

h. Depersonalization. Life tied to the rhythm of the machine and subject to the necessities of large organizations tend to depersonalize human relationships, which more and more are evaluated in terms of utility and efficiency.31 The repercussion of this development upon men themselves is almost incalculable, increasing their sense of insecurity, damaging

29DW, p. 49.
30MS, pp. 61-65, 68, 71-72.
31Ibid., pp. 201-202, 302-304.
their self-image, undermining their self-respect, intensifying their feelings of helplessness, suspicion, and mistrust, encouraging disloyalty, and helping to "deaden" human feeling.

i. **Loss of human dignity.** This is an inevitable consequence in a world which no longer believes the individual to be sacred and which tends to judge people in terms of their utility and function. The primacy of the technical rivets man to his own desires conceived in terms of "a lowest common denominator" of material well-being that encourages covetousness and envy, degrades the individual and enslaves him both to collectivized organization and to an image of himself as a machine to be scrapped when he becomes socially unprofitable. This can only increase his sense of emptiness and personal worthlessness. What others value is his output; what he values is not himself but his "achievement." Love is virtually impossible with such an attitude. 32

j. **Techniques of degradation, from propaganda to concentration camps.** A natural, if not logical, consequence of the loss of human dignity is a world devoted to the primacy of the technical. At its most extreme it can take the form of a

32 Ibid., pp. 86, 95.
whole body of methods deliberately employed to attack and destroy the self-respect either of individuals or whole classes. If successful, the victims are forced to despair of themselves not only at an intellectual level but in the very depths of their being.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 42, 45, 49, 66.} Examples range from "third degree" police methods through apartheid to mass campaigns of humiliation and systematic persecution of whole populations.

In summary, it seems evident that Marcel thinks of the emptiness of contemporary man as intrinsic to the situation in which man finds himself today. It also seems clear that he thinks our situation an increasingly inhuman one which appears certain to get worse: a downward spiral difficult to arrest because of the very dynamism generated by an industrial society which \textit{de facto}, if not in so many words, assigns the primacy to technics instead of to man himself. Human beings become increasingly reduced to the level of mass man deprived of adequate objects of love and hope. Suspicion, mutual distrust, and insecurity are the common lot of all. Gratitude and loyalty become increasingly rare, and men are more and more cut off from or tend to forget their past. The future seems uncertain to the point of indifference--just more of the same or worse. The inevitable outcome, for Marcel, is that people are alienated both from an inhuman society and from
their own deepest needs, and as a consequence experience feelings of sadness and insignificance. In short, the mass of men increasingly live a degraded existence far below that level of love and intelligence which is truly human and bestows meaning on life. Such a condition is a standing invitation to despair and a standing temptation to suicide, individual or collective.

In the light of the above diagnosis of the contemporary situation, Marcel locates the sources of illness ultimately in man himself. Over and over again, in the context of the very passages referred to above, Marcel refuses to recommend any "techniques" to overcome contemporary man's sense of emptiness. Over and over again he calls for a restoration of values, for a renewal of love, a return to wisdom, real fraternity, the restoration of the notion of human dignity, the practice of reflection.

Nor should we forget Marcel's flat statement that the world of technics "can exist only in so far as it is willed and accepted." In the final analysis the root of the problem, for Marcel, lies in the lack of love on the part of men, the lack of a fidelity, which is the very bloom of love, binding together past and present and

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34 Cf. MS, pp. 9-10.
35 Cf. PE, pp. 12, 27.
36 See MS, pp. 9-10, 35-36, 100-101, 188-189, 206-207, 244; cf. 261-268; and DW, pp. 18, 20, 56.
37 MB-II, p. 49.
which, with love, points towards a future that, together with love and fidelity, confers a quality of hope on the present. These three, love, fidelity, and hope, are vital: without them man cannot enjoy a meaningful life or even manifest his existence as a human being. And, Marcel would add, there is no technique that can reawaken love, inspire fidelity, truly be a source of hope.  

From all this one might gather the impression that Marcel was utterly pessimistic, if not reactionary. But he is neither. Immediately after stating that a functionalized world can only exist if it is willed and accepted, Marcel adds: "But a man may be involved in that world and yet retain the power to reject it. He rejects it in the degree to which he succeeds in humanizing the relations which unite him to his superiors, to his equals and, most of all, to his inferiors." Moreover, Marcel thinks it possible for man to do this.

Nor does Marcel think of himself as a reactionary, in the sense that a call for a renewal of life and love might seem to require anyone who heeded it to stand aside from the contemporary world and let it go down to destruction. Unless the philosopher takes charge of the world of modern techniques, so the objection goes, is he not consigning it to ruin? It is not the philosopher's

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38 Cf. MS, pp. 97, 188-189.
39 MB-II, p. 49.
business, Marcel replies, to take charge of the world, and even if he tried the world would only enslave him. Besides, Marcel adds, there is no such thing as philosophy with a capital "P". There is only the life of reflective thought which can and ought to be pursued by everyone, or anyway by people such as doctors, lawyers, and administrators. 40

Marcel is, then, no "orthodox" philosopher playing the familiar philosophical "game." He simply is not interested, for their own sake, in defining problems, refining analyses, articulating arguments, reaching conclusions, prescribing solutions, or manipulating the apparatus of learned scholarship in the usual way. For better or worse, his thinking is a response to his situation, not a search for solutions to traditional philosophical problems as such. Not every thinker responds in this way. To be sure, no man can entirely divorce himself from his own time, but it is not always the case that a man's times are reflected as directly in his work as they are in Marcel's. St. Thomas, for example, is certainly a medieval thinker, but his magisterial pages seldom give any hint of the violence of the thirteenth century any more than the frescos of Ghirlandaio directly reflect the uproar of Renaissance Florence.

Being his, Marcel's response is personal, and much more

40 Cf. MS, pp. 271-272.
personal in expression than another man's, especially another thinker's, might be. Similarities there are bound to be between thinkers in a given age, but there are certain to be significant differences also. The sources of these differences are doubtless varied and in great many instances it may be impossible to determine them. Thus, for example, in the twentieth century, even within the same general philosophical tradition, Russell and Wittgenstein--certainly the later Wittgenstein--diverge widely in their thinking, but there would be little point in trying to trace these differences to personal factors. The objective nature of their philosophies is such that little would be gained, philosophically, if one were to try, however interesting in itself such an attempt might be. But Marcel's philosophy, on the other hand, is personal. He has himself said that he becomes "more directly and personally involved as I go along." 41 His thinking has been generated by his very participation in life and is a response to and an attempt to understand the significance of that participation. It is very much an expression of the kind of man he is, and the kind of man he is is very much bound up with the experiences he has undergone. Indeed, for Marcel, philosophy is "experience transmuted into thought," and he has gone to some pains to emphasize that reflection and contemplation, the particular office of a

41 CF, p. 59.
philosopher, should be the activities of a participant, not of a detached spectator.42

For this reason, and also to better understand the personal sources of those basic characteristics of Marcel's philosophy briefly considered in the introduction, some insight into the factors which have influenced Marcel's attitude toward philosophy in general and man in particular are of value not only for understanding his fundamental philosophical aim and purpose, but also for understanding certain of his basic concepts.

3. Early Formative Experiences of Marcel

By his own testimony, there were five aspects of his personal life experience which were of decisive importance in developing Marcel's philosophical outlook: (a) the invisible "presence" of his deceased mother, (b) his early love of music and the theatre, (c) his acute sensitivity to personal, and especially family, relationships, (d) his experience with the French educational system, and (e) his family's cultural background.

a. **Presence.** Marcel has said this his whole childhood "and probably my whole life" was overshadowed by the death of his mother whom he lost when he was only four.43

Although he retained but a dim memory of her, everyone

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42 Cf. CF, p. 26; MB-I, pp. 97, 99-102, 150-152.
43 PE, p. 109; S, p. 96.
spoke of his mother as "an exceptional person, marvelously adjusted to life." This sense of the "presence" of someone nevertheless absent is crucial for understanding Marcel's subsequent philosophical development of love, hope and fidelity. Presence is one of those "deep inner" experiences from which, according to Marcel, existential philosophy takes its point of departure for everything it affirms. There can be no love without fidelity, and fidelity "refers invariably to a presence, or to something which can be maintained within us as a presence, but which . . . can be just as well ignored, forgotten and obliterated. The contrast between the character and personality of his aunt who reared him, and the felt presence of his mother produced in Marcel a "disparity . . . (a) . . . hidden polarity between the seen and the unseen . . . (which) . . . played a far greater role in my life and thought than any other influence which may be apparent in my writings." It will be well to keep in mind that the felt presence of his mother is Marcel's paradigm case of "presence." Presence, for Marcel, is essential for authentic existence; it is life based on fidelity and filled with

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44PE, p. 109.
45MB-I, p. 262.
46PE, p. 35.
47Ibid., pp. 112-113.
love and hope.

b. **Music and the theatre.** Marcel's love for music and the theatre began early and has persisted throughout his life. Music in particular, he has said, has been the passion of his life and as late as 1961 he referred to great music as expressing a universality in the individual which is central to his thought. ⁴⁸ This concept of the universal in the individual has also influenced his method (see below, Section 5), which may strike some as subjective, but which Marcel believes to have an universal validity analogous to the universality of music, which for all its universality is not understood or appreciated by everyone. Marcel's passion for the theatre also developed early and has influenced his thought in two ways. It contributed to an explicit refusal on his part "to abstract from all concrete details of my life that detail which made my life my own in all its irreducible originality," and secondly, it was directly connected with his purely philosophical investigations because it served as a means to deal with the subject as such, with its reality as subject. ⁴⁹ Marcel's love of music and the theatre (he has written over 25 plays) meant that he is something more than a

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⁴⁸*EB*, p. 26; *S*, p. 100.
⁴⁹*EB*, p. 20; *PE*, p. 107.
philosopher: he is also an artist. As an artist, he is primarily concerned with his feelings and with participation. But as a thinker, he is primarily concerned with thought and understanding. The combination is rare in the history of Western thought, although there is the glittering example of Plato to serve as a precedent. These two urges, exigencies Marcel calls them, the demand to understand and to feel, and the urgent need to express oneself in artistic form, can generate a dynamic tension which can produce remarkable results in both fields. This is the case with Marcel whose whole philosophical drive is rooted in an inner exigency which he strives to understand and which he refused either to objectify or to dismiss as a fiction or a purely subjective fancy.

c. **Personal relationships.** The third of Marcel's formative experiences is rooted in his early developed sense of the "density" of personal relationships. He has not specified details nor would it be desirable to repeat them here if he had. It is enough for us to know that he experienced temperamental differences with his family which led to conflicts and to an early conviction of the existence of *insolubilia* in even the most simple human relationship. He claims to have perceived "directly that there is a certain radical
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weakness in the faculty of judgment" and that he was forced to assume the existence of a domain beyond speech "in which harmony can be discerned and in a sense even re-
stored. . . ."\textsuperscript{50} The perception of insolubilia in human relationships unquestionably was one of the hidden factors that eventually issued in Marcel's positing a realm of the metaproblematic and attempting to work out an ontology based on intersubjectivity, the I-thou relationship which cannot be conceptualized and consequently cannot be treated as a problem amenable to a "technical" solution.\textsuperscript{51} Fidelity is also one of these "metaproblematic" relationships, as are love and hope.

d. **Educational experience.** Marcel's experience with the French educational system prior to World War One seems to have invoked in him feelings of resentment very similar to those felt by students half a century later. He has branded the (unreformed) French school system as "abstract and inhuman" and attributed his "growing horror of the spirit of abstraction" to his experience with it.\textsuperscript{52} After thirty years he still felt his resentment, declaring "my intellectual

\textsuperscript{50}PE, pp. 206-207; cf. S, p. 97.
\textsuperscript{51}Cf. MB-II, pp. 8-10.
\textsuperscript{52}PE, pp. 113 and 114; cf. S, pp. 97-98.
development in fact suffered a setback throughout the whole of that time, while my health has never wholly recovered from the effect of those years." The years spent as a professor of philosophy seemed to have confirmed him in his distaste for academic philosophy and in his own view of philosophy as a vocation, a calling—not as a way to earn one's living. As a consequence, Marcel has never felt a need to conform to the tastes or fashions prevailing in the academic world or to follow traditional and accepted modes of exposition or argument. This attitude is obvious in his writings and may sometimes be a source of bewilderment for his readers.

e. Cultural background. Finally, there is Marcel's love of the past and the western cultural heritage which is rooted in his family background and for which he largely gives credit to his father, whom he describes as a man of the widest culture with a lucid and exact mind. In the small volume, The Decline of Wisdom (see above, Section 2), Marcel has expressed his love of and concern for the western cultural heritage. One entire chapter of this book is devoted to an

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53PE, p. 111.
54Cf. PF, p. 31; PE, p. 124; CF, pp. 4, 60, 62, 64; HV, p. 7, and S, publisher's biographical sketch.
analysis of the notion of "spiritual heritage," linking the concept to awareness, recognition, and gratitude, all of which are also conditions for the existence of love and fidelity. Two other points worth mentioning in this connection are, first, that despite his method and unusual mode of exposition, Marcel does not completely break with or reject the past; and secondly, for Marcel a love for the past and a desire to preserve the best of its values and achievements also implies some kind of fidelity. 56

From this brief survey it may perhaps be easier to see why, given the proper "catalyst," Marcel would center his philosophical interests on concrete man in his situation. The sense of his mother's presence which he so constantly felt and his early sensitivity to personal relationships could only reinforce his interest in the personal dimension of human beings. His love for the theatre only strengthened this concern, for what else is great drama but human action arranged in a pattern, raised to an intensity of passion, and vibrating with a personal significance that outlasts the actual performance? At the same time, Marcel's negative reaction to the "spirit of abstraction" of the French educational system of his day could only strengthen and confirm his fundamental orientation toward the concrete and the personal, reinforce his growing

56 See DW, pp. 21-36.
aversion to any "system" of thought dominated largely by purely formal considerations such as logic or the deployment of highly generalized categories to effect high-level abstract explanations of phenomena. Finally, to have thoroughly assimilated the cultural heritage of Western civilization virtually guarantees that one will be a humanist of one kind or another, for this heritage has emphasized man, taken as a whole, and human values ever since its rise in ancient Greece.

But one ingredient more was necessary, it seems, to catalyze this combination of experiences and generate that inner exigency from which, according to Marcel, all genuine philosophy proceeds. This ingredient was the sense of tragedy of human life, and for Marcel it came with the outbreak of the First World War which shattered his pre-war world of security and gave him a real "existential" shock. Anyone who has ever read the Metaphysical Journal cannot but be aware of the amazing change in tone between its first and second parts, the first with its abstruse vocabulary and rarified atmosphere of almost esoteric idealism, and the second with its epigraph:

It is private life that holds out the mirror to infinity; personal intercourse, and that alone, that ever hints at a personality beyond our daily vision. 57

The sense of tragedy of life introduced Marcel to the themes

57 MJ, p. 129.
of despair, suicide, and death as predominant aspects of the human condition in our time, themes characteristic of existential philosophy in general. It was during this same period, during and immediately following the war, that Marcel became acutely aware that the very concept of man as the "human" animal had fragmented, perhaps beyond recovery. The application of the methods of empirical science to the study of man threatened to destroy the concept of the unity of human nature and substitute for it the concept of man as an agglomeration of social functions or to reduce man to a mere organism of some kind. This functionalizing of the human being provoked, at least in Marcel, a genuine "identity crisis" and seemed to threaten with dissolution everything he loved and held dear.

The felt tension between the personal sense of tragedy and suffering, on the one hand, and the ambiguity of a functionalized concept of man on the other, is, I believe, one essential key for understanding Marcel's philosophy. Unless their struggles, suffering, and death can somehow be made meaningful, men lose heart. But the meaning of life, of suffering, of death, cannot be determined except in the light of an answer to the question "What is man?" or, in more personal terms, "Who am I?" In the final analysis, Marcel says, all other questions lead back to this one.

and so, he asserts, it can properly be said to be the only
metaphysical problem there is. Moreover, Marcel has identified
the specific character of his own "inner exigency," that meta-
physical need which corresponds to the philosopher's own person-
ality and which is, for him, the source of all authentic philosophy.
His own exigency was precisely the need to answer this question,
"Who am I?" 

But although the question is easy enough to formulate, it is
not so easy to decide how to attempt an answer to it. If the
question is approached in the wrong way either no answer may
be forthcoming or a misleading answer may be given which could
plunge man into despair. To a great extent this is a matter of
method because the method one uses largely determines the kind
of results one gets. The remainder of this chapter, therefore,
will be concerned with a consideration of those approaches to the
problem of the identity of man which Marcel rejects as incorrect
and with an attempt to elucidate the method he has chosen for his
own.

4. Two Inadequate Approaches to the Study of Man

Marcel rejects two well-tried approaches to the study of man
as inadequate. He rejects both for essentially the same reason,

59EB, p. 16; cf. also MJ, pp. 288 and 290; PE, p. 17;
BH, p. 124; CF, p. 67; MB-I, p. 103.
namely, that the use of either method depends upon converting man into an abstraction, a fiction, and thereby creating an illusion that the question, "Who am I?" has been answered when in fact it has not been answered. These two approaches are that traditional to western philosophy, which may for convenience be termed the "rational" approach, and the contemporary scientific approach. One thing they share in common, it should be noted at the outset, is that both methods are alleged to yield objective knowledge of man.

Historically, there are two versions of the rationalist approach, the traditional, rooted in Greek philosophy and predominant throughout the Middle Ages; and idealism, in modern times stemming remotely from Descartes but proximately from Kant, and predominant roughly in the first and final quarters of the nineteenth century and in the first decade of the twentieth. Both versions emphasize reason or mind at the expense of the rest of human nature. Both abstract from the concrete circumstances of human life, man's situation. For the traditional version, man is a rational animal who ought to be able to dominate his lower nature and his circumstances, but for one reason or another--not always clear--he is seldom able to do so. Idealism has tended to emphasize man as impersonal subject of knowledge, a transcendental ego with no discernible link to the empirical self, situated at no time and nowhere. In both versions of the rationalist approach
man is deprived of his historical character and his concreteness. He is deprived of his reality as a subject and his actual life, his concrete existence, becomes unintelligible. Man is not pure reason or a disembodied ego situated nowhere at no time. These abstractions are caricatures of the concrete, living reality. They may seem to answer the question, but in reality they are a cheat and cannot give man that sense of significance which would make his actual life meaningful.61

The scientific approach is, if anything, even more inadequate in Marcel's eyes than the rationalist approach because it reduces man to a bundle of functions and altogether deprives him of his identity.

... the particular disciplines concerned with 'man's nature' threaten to dissolve it into an infinite number of different components, each of which, far from being a separate element endowed with an intrinsic reality of its own, is in turn dependent upon a whole complex of factors apart from which it cannot be conceived. Hence in talking of man's nature we risk an infinite regress which is bound to appear to a person as an outright dissipation of what he would spontaneously mean in speaking of his substance or of his own being.62

It is due to the misplaced idea of function that the individual appears to himself and to others as an agglomeration of functions with no clearcut hierarchical interrelation, which is a prime factor responsible for contemporary man's feeling of emptiness and

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61 Cf. MB-I, pp. 163-164; MS, pp. 155-156.
62 EB, p. 18.
meaninglessness. According to Marcel, man depends chiefly on the idea he has of himself for his sense of meaning; if this idea is degraded, man is also degraded. The outlook on man fostered by the scientific approach, however, tends to do just this because it tends to reduce man to a mere object, a thing like any other body, and one which falls wholly within the domain of a materialistic psychology.

For Marcel, the fundamental difficulty with both approaches is their inevitable abstraction, an inherent characteristic of all objective thought. It is not that Marcel denies the distinctiveness of human reason or the value of the scientific knowledge of man and the world. Rather he is concerned to show that the view of man arrived at by purely objective methods is incomplete and, in the case of man especially, mutilates the reality. He sees as one of the greatest dangers of the present day the possibility that the "technical environment" will become the pattern of the universe for us all, i.e., its "peculiar categories" will be claimed as finally valid as "objective" conceptions of the world. Since applied science, technology, can remake the environment, it tends to reconstitute the world in its own image and confronts man with an enormous "system" which it is less and less easy to see a logical

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63 PE, p. 12; MS, p. 72.
64 MS, pp. 19-20.
possibility of altering in principle. Consequently, Marcel is very concerned to show that the "objective" approach to the study of man, in either of its versions, cannot do justice to the reality. But he is especially concerned to oppose "scientism," the belief that the same techniques which have worked in the physical sciences can be used to create an exact science of man.

As early as 1919 Marcel noted that to think the object is to think something for which the person does not matter. The very attitude of philosophical naturalism, according to Marcel, is that the whole universe is an "object" for which the "I" does not matter in the sense that the "I" is not taken into account. Three years later he observed that inasmuch as "objectivity" is defined by the universality of certain characteristics which can be recognized "by any mind in good faith," the object tends to be reduced to "a totality of formal arrangements" bearing on pure symbols.

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66 This view has been described by one scholar as resting on three assumptions, viz., (1) that the mathematized science of natural phenomena is a model science to which all other sciences ought to conform; (2) that all realms of being are accessible to the methods of the sciences of phenomena; and (3) that all reality which is not accessible to the sciences of phenomena is either irrelevant or, in a more radical form, illusionary. Cf. Eric Voegelin in Social Research (December 1948), cited by William H. Whyte, Jr., The Organization Man (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), footnote (1), p. 26. Marcel would reject all three of these assumptions, above all the third.

This latter observation makes it clear that as early as 1922 Marcel was convinced that the personal dimension eluded objectification. Finally, in later years Marcel has adopted as his own the viewpoint of Husserl and his school that consciousness is, before anything else, consciousness of an object, which means, for Marcel, that the subject of consciousness in some sense is always distinct from the object of which he is aware, even in the case of self-consciousness. 68

Certainly from a realist standpoint the object is by definition independent of the subject, and, according to Marcel, even most idealists agree that, regardless of how it is to be explained, "phenomenally" everything happens as if realism were true. 69 If by definition the object is not the subject, then however much we try to objectify the subject something will of necessity always be left out. Consequently the "objectified" subject will at best be only an aspect or partial view. Unquestionably we shall have increased our knowledge in the process, but we still will not be in a position to give a satisfactory answer to the questions, "Who am I?" or "Who art thou?" The best we can do is furnish an inventory of personal characteristics or other kinds of information suitable perhaps for a police dossier, but not sufficient to meet any

68 See MB-I, pp. 63-64; cf. also p. 57.
"identity-crisis." The very logic of the subject-object dichotomy defeats us. 70

The subject "objectified," according to Marcel, is just what man becomes when he is made the object of study by the various empirical sciences. Depersonalization of the individual is the inevitable outcome if the partial view of any one science is taken as definitive. Nor are matters much improved by trying to coordinate the latest results of all the various sciences which study man. For one thing, without an agreed-upon principle defining the hierarchy of interrelationships between these various results a unified picture will not emerge, and, to the best of the writer's knowledge, no such principle has been agreed upon. Even if such a principle were agreed upon, the domain of the personal, the subject as such, would still elude us. Impersonality is "built" into the very modus operandi of the empirical sciences.

But if the personal dimension eludes an "objective" investigation and it is man as subject, not man simply as knower or pure reason, that we seek to understand, then it is the concrete existence of the human being that must be probed in search of this understanding. The object as such exists from the viewpoint of

70 I do not wish to leave the reader with the impression that this is all to be said about this complex and difficult problem of epistemology, but all I am trying to do here is to present Marcel's own view, which he reached via post-Kantian and neo-Hegelian idealism, a school of thought in which the subject-object dichotomy looms large in the substructure of its metaphysics.
"others," finally of "nobody," i.e., of thought in general. If the personal, all that "comes from me," is eliminated from the objective world, what remains is a network of abstractions which only by a "singular illusion" can be taken as the reality we actually experience. This reality can only be discovered through an investigation of man in his concrete existence, that is to say, not abstract but existential man. Existential man is always in a "situation," and this "situation" is as much a part of him as he is a part of it. Thus any philosophy worthy of the name today, Marcel asserts, is impossible without an investigation of our condition as existing and thinking beings. And the human condition includes man's situation. Indeed, Marcel goes so far as to say explicitly that he believes "condition" is the term which increasingly should be substituted for "nature" in present day philosophical anthropology, and that as far as his own thought is concerned he considers it to be "the essence of man to be in a situation..."

What this situation is, in addition to its general features briefly considered above, is the subject of the following chapter.

Marcel's existential or concrete philosophy, however, does not mean a return to traditional empiricism. Rather, Marcel tells us, to philosophize "concretely" means to philosophize 

\[\text{hic et nunc},\]

\[\text{71 MJ, pp. 281-282.}\]
\[\text{72 CF, p. 4.}\]
\[\text{73 Ibid., pp. 91 and 83. Italics are in the original.}\]
as he puts it. 74 This means "no concrete philosophy is possible without a constantly renewed yet creative tension between the I and those depths of our being in and by which we are; nor without the most stringent and rigorous reflection, directed on our most intensely lived experience." 75 What Marcel means by this somewhat mystifying statement is that there is something which is inexhaustibly concrete at the heart of reality or human destiny the understanding of which does not proceed by successive stages as in the case of the empirical sciences. 76 And what he means by "inexhaustibly concrete" is that it cannot be conceptualized or observed, but only acknowledged. 77 Why only acknowledged? Because it is felt as a global reality which can easily be dissipated by an improper analysis of the critical reason. 78 This is why Marcel could say in his old age, when delivering the William James lectures at Harvard, that "it must be remembered that my thinking takes its departure from feeling, from reflection on feeling and on its significance." 79 But it must also be pointed out that by "feeling" Marcel does not mean simply "emotion"—e.g., plain old garden-variety anger or joy. What he does mean will be discussed in Chapter Two.

74 ibid., p. 61.
75 ibid., p. 65.
76 ibid., p. 66.
77 ibid., p. 69.
78 ibid., pp. 70-71.
79 EB, pp. 82-83.
But Marcel creates a serious difficulty for himself as a consequence of his criticism of the inherent limitations of objective thought and his rejection of both the traditional and the scientific approaches to the study of man. If the possibility of satisfactorily answering the question, "Who am I?" depends upon knowing man in his concrete existence, and the reality of this existence in the last analysis eludes objective thought, how can we even formulate it, and what validity would such "knowledge" have even if we could formulate it? This very serious problem raises the question as to what Marcel does consider to be an adequate approach to the study of man. It raises the question, that is, of his method, consideration of which will conclude this chapter.

5. Marcel's Method: Secondary Reflection

Marcel was himself acutely aware of this problem from his early twenties. At that time (1910-1911), he tells us, he agreed with Brunschvicg that there had to be a strict connection between truth and verification. From this position he was led "irresistibly" to affirm the existence of an order beyond the verifiable "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." Eight years later he put the dilemma more succinctly: either objective fact or interior

80EB, p. 25.
disposition. "Every time I run into it I have the feeling of facing a mountain that must be moved." And he added that at its deepest level the problem consisted in the effort to discover how objectivity regarding the purely individual is possible. 81

In a book published in 1940 (Du Refus à l'invocation, published in English as Creative Fidelity), Marcel returned to the problem after nearly a decade of practice of "concrete" philosophizing. Citing Brunschvicg's challenge: "Believe or verify, the alternate is exhaustive," Marcel says he rejected this alternative because "some of the supreme human experiences implied the apprehension or state of something transcending any possible verification." 82 Verification, he explains, involves the notion of a depersonalized subject and the postulate of "normal conditions of experience." Marcel, however, regarded the depersonalized subject--the cogito of the idealists--as a fiction; while certain wartime experiments with telepathy, and with what are now called parapsychological phenomena, had convinced him that the postulate did not have universal application. 83 He mentions music and aesthetic appreciation or creation as sufficient to indicate "realms of experience" which possess a particular order or intelligibility

81 MJ, p. 203.
82 CF, p. 6.
83 Cf. PP, pp. 8-12.
subject to conditions which cannot properly be specified; if they are unspecifiable, it is because they inhere in the subject himself. Marcel therefore expressed his disagreement with traditional empiricism which maintains that experience is decisive because the question, for him, is one of knowing what experience is decisive and how it should be internally qualified.84

Finally, in 1949, in the very first of his Gifford Lectures, Marcel once again addressed himself to the difficulty. In that context he restates the problem first in personal, then in more general, terms. Will not such a philosophy as he has in mind reduce to an account of the successive states of a particular being, Gabriel Marcel, and if so, what guarantee is there that it will have any more than subjective value? Or more generally, either a choice between the actual, individual man with his own states of being, or generalized thinking with universal validity.85

Clearly the objection is serious and Marcel must find some way to avoid both horns of the dilemma if his work is to be of any value, as he recognizes when he insists that there must be some "intermediary type of thinking."86 He refers to "incontestable examples" of such thinking even outside philosophy and once more cites the appreciation of art.87 But this time he goes

84CF, pp. 4-7.
85MB-I, p. 11.
86ibid.
87ibid., pp. 11-13.
further, observing that in fact philosophical questions are pre-eminent among those which cannot be answered by a simple yes or no. The philosopher begins by asking the ordinary questions everyone asks, but then progresses by reflection to a second type of question which cannot be dealt with so simply. Marcel gives as an example the question, "Do you believe in God?" At first blush, it may seem that this question could be answered by a simple "Yes" or "No," but deeper analysis reveals the ambiguity of the terms and then it becomes clear that the proper response in the majority of cases ought to be, "I don't know whether I believe in God or not--and I am not even quite sure what 'believing in God' is."88

The discomfort we feel, the almost spontaneous protest we voice, against disjoining truth from universal validity is rooted, Marcel argues, in the notion of technique. We assume that truth is something to be "extracted" by established procedures and that we know a priort the relation between the self and the truth it recognizes. This view of the matter is, however, based ultimately on a false metaphor of truth as a physical thing obtained by physical processes, of techniques. But the notion of technique is less and less applicable as "the intelligence passes beyond the limits of a purely technical activity."89

89Ibid., pp. 22-26.
Therefore, to use his own words, Marcel's philosophical inquiry is based on a certitude neither rational nor logical, but existential. That is, reflection "revives" for our inspection and analysis certain "spiritual states" which the philosopher finds first of all, of course, within himself. Reflection can, however, manifest at various levels. There is primary reflection upon our pre-reflective, pre-critical experience, and there is secondary reflection. Primary reflection is chiefly analytic and tends to dissolve the concrete unity of experience, while secondary reflection endeavors to reconquer that unity, to restore the concrete beyond the disconnected and discontinuous determinations of abstract thought. Marcel's analysis of the mind-body problem may be cited as example. Most of the time we do not think much about consciousness vis-à-vis the body, but if something happens (such as fainting) or if we happen to read philosophy, then we may strive to form separate concepts of "mind" and "body." Of course as soon as we do this we are compelled to ask what relation subsists between these two entities. Answers have been various and unsatisfactory whether they took the form of dualism or some form of monism. Marcel approaches this classic problem by first showing the shortcomings of the theories advanced to

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90CF, p. 15.
91Ibid., p. 120
92MB-I, pp. 102-103; CF, p. 22.
explain what is perhaps really inconceivable. He then points out how these various theories depend upon rupturing the felt unity between body and self by the analytical and abstracting reason. Finally, reflecting on this primary reflection and the reason for its shortcomings, Marcel arrives at the fundamental datum of incarnation implicit in the felt experience of "my body." (See Chapter Two for a discussion of the problem and an extended exercise of secondary reflection.)

Such a method consists, for Marcel, in taking a felt experience, one of those concrete, spiritual states previously mentioned, and then "working ... up from life to thought and then down from thought to life again ...." Moreover, with this method the use of examples is not merely an "auxiliary process," but an essential part of the method. One does not begin with a concept which the example serves merely to illustrate; rather the idea grows and develops from the soil of the example which is itself as concrete as possible and drawn from life, from the human situation.

One consequence of this method appears to be that the transitions Marcel effects in the progression of this thought are seldom logical. They are, rather, concrete or, as he sometimes prefers

\[93^\text{MB-1, p. 51.}\]
\[94^\text{Ibid., p. 143.}\]
to state it, "existential." He purports to describe and analyze what he finds to be there, and to reflect on its implications. It is difficult to illustrate this procedure apart from an extended consideration of an actual example, which is the business of the following chapters. We may, however, resort to an imperfect analogy, e.g., the factual relationship of the various properties of rubber. As Hume pointed out long ago, the properties of rubber cannot be deduced logically from its idea. We have to form our concept of rubber on the basis of our experience of its qualities, and as far as we know a priori rubber might exhibit any sort of property subject to the proviso that there could not be a strict contradiction (e.g., elastic and not elastic at one and the same time and in one and the same respect). But the analogy is imperfect because the qualities of rubber are empirically verifiable, while Marcel's discoveries and the implications he draws from them usually are not.

Another consequence of Marcel's method for his mode of exposition should receive mention here. For Marcel, the investigation of the domains of the concrete and the personal means, as has been said, the investigation of a region that is largely non-objectifiable. Our language, however, is usually inadequate to translate experiences of this kind since language itself tends to objectify, and when an attempt is made to use it to transcend objectivity the result is apt to strike the reader as unintelligible.
Contrasting himself with Heidegger in this regard, Marcel has said that rather than coin neo-logisms, he prefers to revalue current words, i.e., "set about discovering their original and concrete meaning." Many of the terms Marcel employs are drawn from or closely associated with the Judaic-Christian tradition—terms like incarnation, presence, mystery, hope, fidelity or faith, etc.—and this may bewilder or mislead his readers. But in fact Marcel does not make a theological use of these terms nor does he presuppose the truth of Christianity or of any other religious belief, however minimal. It just happens that Western culture generally, and the Judaic-Christian tradition in particular, serves as linguistic frame of reference for the exposition of his thought. Failure to bear this in mind can completely sidetrack understanding. Marcel's entire effort is directed at indicating as clearly as the nature of the case permits what cannot be expressed directly without violating the very integrity of these experiences under investigation.

Such a philosophy, which endeavors to steer a path between the empirically verifiable on the one hand and the logically demonstrable on the other, and yet at the same time avoid the arbitrary or the capricious, is not "addressed" to everyone. It is not

\[\text{95MJ, p. ix.}\]
\[\text{96Cf. PE, pp. 44-45.}\]
merely that only the learned or those especially interested in philosophy would be its most appropriate audience. That is true of any specialized branch of learning. By its very essence, Marcel suggests, it is not addressed to everyone. This is not because he thinks his basic research is erroneous but because, being essentially concrete, it does not meet the requirements of universal validity as understood by science and logic, and cannot therefore compel assent as logic and science can. But Marcel is convinced that his philosophy has a universality other than that of validity in the usual sense, referring in this connection to the universality of art as an example.\footnote{MB-I, p. 13.} It is true that great masterpieces do generate an impact which "transcends . . . the limits of what we call individual consciousness," and it is also true, as Marcel himself emphasizes, that this impact is not generated in everyone, no matter how long they may be exposed to them.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 11-12.}

The significance of Beethoven's last quartets or some of Shakespeare's sonnets may be endlessly debated even by those who love them, but there does seem to be a sense in which it is true to say that both their validity and their appeal is "universal." And it is equally true that there are those who remain impervious to their appeal. Marcel, however, is not deterred or intimidated
by this fact. He acknowledges that this disparity seems indecent, especially in a world which has acquired a habit of thinking "statistically" and is influenced by "democratic" norms, but he insists that the critical thinker must remain unswayed by these influences and continue to assert the existence of ranges of human experience not suitable for the application of "an over-simplified criterion of universality." 99

Hence Marcel's philosophy is essentially an appeal to his listener or reader. It can never be embodied in dogmatic exposition which conclude to solutions which can be, in theory, the common property of all. 100 The reader may, perhaps of his own desire, perhaps through no direct fault of his own, remain "impervious." He may turn his back, so to speak; close the book and just walk away, rejecting or incapable of recognizing the existence or the significance of the experiences Marcel explores or the value of the discoveries he thinks he has made.

Such a method certainly has its dangers, and it is reassuring to know that Marcel is aware of some of them. One that comes immediately to mind is the temptation to label difficulties as "non-objective mysteries," thereby escaping from the struggle and torment of precise and rigorous reflection. Such a procedure

100 MB-I, p. 262.
can have as one of its most disquieting features "a very special appeal to the eloquent amateur."\textsuperscript{101} There is, moreover, the danger that the method will be employed in the name of various kinds of "deep inner experience" which are the points of departure for existential philosophy but which, because they cannot be renewed at will, are always in danger of losing their "substance;" \textit{i.e.}, of ringing hollow because contrived.\textsuperscript{102} Marcel is aware of these dangers and tries to guard against them.

With these strictures in mind, let us now turn our attention to Marcel's philosophy of man, remembering that he does not approach man from the plane of the abstract but rather of the concrete, and that he is convinced that the dimension of specifically human existence can only be recognized and, in part, understood by the \textit{whole} being of a person. The reason, as we shall see, is that human existence, for Marcel, is participation in so far as participation cannot be objectified. Since we all share an unavoidable and practically irresistible tendency to objectify this participation, and the human subject as well, thus converting man into an abstraction, it will be Marcel's endeavor, employing secondary reflection, to delineate the human condition without succumbing to this tendency and without at the same time becoming unintelligible.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{101}Ibid., p. 261.
\textsuperscript{102}Ibid., p. 262.
\textsuperscript{103}Cf. BH, pp. 120-121; CF, pp. 23-24; EB, p. 23.
CHAPTER II
EXISTENTIAL MAN

Three notions are fundamental for understanding Marcel's philosophy of existential or concrete man, viz., incarnation, participation, and situation. Before discussing these three ideas, however, something must be said about Marcel's underlying philosophical aim and purpose, as well as about his choice of a point of departure for the analysis of the human condition. Accordingly this chapter is divided into four sections; namely, (1) Marcel's philosophical aim and purpose, (2) incarnation, (3) participation, and (4) situation.

1. Marcel's Philosophical Aim and Purpose

Marcel's underlying philosophical aim is twofold. First, he seeks to persuade his reader of the reality of a dimension of human existence which persistently eludes the grasp of objective thought. And secondly, he wants to attempt a tentative mapping of the outstanding topographical features, so to speak, of this dimension. His fundamental purpose in carrying out this two-fold aim is to combat the sense of emptiness and insignificance so strongly felt by contemporary man. But, as was mentioned in the preceding chapter (Section 4), this enterprise is beset with

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1PE, pp. 2-23, 44; CF, pp. 4-6; MB-I, pp. 15-16, 44-46, 250; EB, pp. 5-9, 25.
difficulties because the domain of the personal as such is not open to objectification without distortion. Marcel is not therefore in a position to establish valid conclusions which conform to the canons of logic and the accepted norms and criteriology of the sciences.\(^2\)

If, then, he is to have any hope of success in carrying out his aim and purpose, Marcel must choose his starting point with great care, showing, on the one hand, that the objective approach is inadequate to deal with the problem, and, on the other, that there is a point of entry into the problem which is readily accessible to anyone interested enough to avail themselves of it.

Just what is the problem? Broadly stated, it is how to combat the felt emptiness and insignificance of the contemporary world. What is the answer? Clearly, a life of "fullness" and significance. But what is "fullness" and what would constitute a life of "significance?" These latter two questions cannot be answered except in relation to what man is, concretely, in his existence, for in truth it is man who feels empty and insignificant in his world, not the world itself which is empty and insignificant.

Viewed in this light, the question which must be first answered before a prescription can be given for combating the emptiness and insignificance of the contemporary world is "Who is

\(^{2}\)PE, pp. 13 and 30; in MB-I, see Chapter 2, "A Broken World," pp. 22-47 passim; see also pp. 248-249; cf. MS, pp. 103-104.
man?" Thus for Marcel the fundamental problem is to answer the question, "Who am I?" All other problems of a philosophical nature will eventually lead one back to this problem. The reader will have noticed the shift in emphasis from "man" to "I" in Marcel's formulation of the fundamental philosophical question. The reason for this shift, it may be surmised, is that Marcel is trying to emphasize that the question must be answered on the plane of the concrete, the individual and personal; not on the plane of the abstract, the generic or specific.

Prima facie science can to some extent answer the question, "Who is man?" but it cannot answer the question, "Who am I?" As pointed out in Chapter One (Section 3), objective answers may result in information about man, but the more data is accumulated, the farther we seem to be from the very knowledge we seek. The more data we have about man as a species or as an individual abstractly considered (as in psychology), the more the individual feels overwhelmed and lost by the mass of information obtained. "Who am I?" The child of my parents? The product of my society? The outcome of unconscious psychological dynamics? A result of unimaginably complex and fortuitous genetic programming? The sum of my personal history to date? Even if precise answers could be given to each of these conjectures, I

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3EB, p. 16.
still would not know who 1 am. More philosophically, I would simply be accumulating predicates, theoretically an endless process: X+Y+Z . . . +N. Therefore Marcel flatly rejects "the idea of there actually being a legitimate answer, an objectively valid answer, to the question. . . ."\(^4\) The fundamental datum of all metaphysical reflection, Marcel therefore concludes, is that "I am a being who is not transparent to himself, that is to say, my being is a mystery to me."\(^5\) A mystery because I cannot exhaust my reality conceptually, so to speak, and if I try to deal with my being scientifically or analytically, i.e., convert myself into some kind of "problem" for which I seek an objective answer, I may be tempted to dismiss the non-objectifiable dimension as meaningless or as a mere epiphenomenon of matter-in-motion, viz., as somehow unreal.\(^6\)

But while there is and can be no objective answer to the question, "Who am I?" yet it is possible to indicate the direction in which an answer of another kind is to be sought. It is possible, that is to say, to show (not demonstrate) that human existence comprehends and opens out on regions that are just as real as those which can be objectified. The basic feature of the human condition, according to Marcel, is that man is "a being

\(^4\)MB-1, p. 184.  
\(^5\)MJ, p. 290.  
\(^6\)MB-1, pp. 249-250.
placed at the point of juncture, or of co-articulation, of the vital and the spiritual, \"and the dimension of the spiritual is just what Marcel proposes to explore.\" The reality of this dimension can be indicated by taking as a starting point certain very simple and immediate experiences easily and frequently overlooked, but also easily accessible to nearly everyone capable of reflection. Reflection on these experiences leads to a recognition of the first basic feature of the human condition, viz., that I am an incarnate being.

2. Incarnation

We are, Marcel says, or can become, conscious of a strange duality within ourselves; namely, that we are both a definite somebody and a \"non-somebody.\" That is to say, I can become aware that I am a particular individual and yet somehow, in some mysterious sense, not a particular individual. This, he says, is the central fact about ourselves. What Marcel is drawing attention to is the living, felt experience that somehow we are more than the totality of the information we can give about ourselves at any given time. Answers in terms of birthplace, parents, heredity, or social role are inadequate. No one can

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\[7\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 250.}\]
\[8\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 251-252.}\]
\[9\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 105-106.}\]
say where he comes from nor will any of these objective characteristics really establish his felt identity, still less his potentiality, unless a sort of coup de main is effected by just stipulating that identity is established or constituted by such characteristics.

There is no question of denying those objective characteristics which characterize us as individuals in a public world and define us as one kind of body in a world of bodies subject to laws common to that world. Rather it is a question of refusing to accept this objective account as final just because it separates us as an identifiable body from the self that we are or can become aware of if we turn our attention to that "massive, indistinct sense of one's total existence. . . ." This experience of the self as a "non-somebody," according to Marcel, consists in recognizing that the definite, objective characteristics constituting the self as a particular individual, as an identifiable somebody, as he puts it, are contingent in relation to a mysterious reality which is not really an object of knowledge. This is the self as subject.

It is important to forestall a possible misunderstanding of Marcel's meaning. He is not making a roundabout reference to the soul as a non-material substance. He is referring to a definite, if scarcely expressible, experience that is common

\[\text{\textsuperscript{10}}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 114.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{11}}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 107.}\]
enough but perhaps more rarely alluded to today than in the past. He is referring to what the English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins has called "the taste of myself":

... when I consider my selfbeing, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of I and me above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of walnutleaf or camphor, and is incommunicable by any means to another. ... Nothing else in nature comes near this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this selfbeing of my own ... searching nature I taste self but at one tankard, that of my own being.  

Again, when arguing against the identification of the existent self with a universal mind, Hopkins says:

The universal cannot taste this taste of self as I taste it, for it is not to it, let us say to him, that the guilt or shame, the fatal consequence, the fate, comes home; either not at all or not altogether.

This self we "taste" is that subject in relation to which the definite characteristics that constitute the self as a particular individual are contingent. Its reality is felt and because it is felt, not thought, it is always possible to deny it verbally, to brand it as an illusion, an epiphenomenon, a consequence of linguistic confusion, or whatever. I have said it is always possible to deny this self's reality "verbally" because Marcel thinks seriously to deny it is tantamount to an existential scepticism that few would

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13 Ibid., p. 151.
care to embrace and that no one could sustain psychologically. Since to some this last assertion may seem more obvious than it is, while to others it may seem either intolerably obscure or simply a non sequitur, it may be helpful to spell out just what Marcel means.

Marcel asks if, to use a fashionable term, we can specify a paradigm case of existence, i.e., an existence such that if it were denied any other existence would be inconceivable. The answer is: "myself, in so far as I feel sure that I exist." This felt conviction Marcel terms the "existential indubitable." If I deny my own existence, I have no basis for affirming the existence of anything else at all for the existence of nothing else can be as certain as my own, and it is only as other existences are in some way in "contact" with my own that I can affirm they also exist. My attempt to deny my own existence really runs up against this "indubitable" and would involve me in a total skepticism in so far as existence is concerned.14

Should the reader be shifting uneasily in his chair, wondering if all this has any connection with Descartes' cogito, ergo sum, and thus with all the controversies that that allegedly incontrovertible proposition has generated down through the centuries, then he has the writer's sympathy. Marcel is a Frenchman, and

ever since the Father of modern philosophy first propounded his indubitable, the ghost of Descartes is apt to be found lurking somewhere in the background of every French thinker. If we wanted to be "neat"—and just to that extent inaccurate so far as Marcel is concerned—we might say Marcel has rejected the cartesian cogito, ergo, but has retained the sum. But with a difference, however.

The difference is this. The "I" in "I exist" is not to be isolated and treated as a sort of mental object or concept. Marcel gives two reasons for this stricture. First, any object is a determinate something, a "that." If one should question one's own existence, meaning to ask oneself, "Do I exist?" and taking the "I" separately as referring to some object, then no answer is or can be forthcoming, not even a negative answer. "I" is the very negation of a "that," of any "that" whatsoever. Secondly, Marcel accepts Kant's argument that existence is not a predicate, and infers that to separate the "I" from "exist" is to treat existence as a predicate qualifying a subject and therefore to pose a vicious, because spurious and consequently unanswerable, question.15

15Professor Jerome Shaffer has argued that Kant's argument should be rejected because if it were valid all real predication would become impossible. I am inclined to agree with Shaffer, but I do not wish to get into that particular controversy. All I am doing here is attempting to clarify Marcel's position on the reality of the self as a felt experience and his reasons for refusing to insert the fine blade of analysis between "I" and "exist." The interested reader may consult Jerome Shaffer, "Existence, Predication, and the Ontological Argument," Mind, Vol. LXXI, N.S., No. 283, July 1962, pp. 309-311.
Thus if "I exist" is the paradigm case of existence, it is so only on condition that it is treated as an indissoluble unity, i.e., globally. 16

The reason why Marcel insists so strongly upon the global experience of the self may also be seen if we consider some of the difficulties which result from trying to refer the "I" to some intellectually apprehensible object. If it is referred simply to one's body considered simply as a body, then that peculiar "taste of self" is lost because the objective characteristics of the body do not constitute the reality or the experience of this self. The consequence is we shall have negated the very experience we are trying to understand. On the other hand, if we refer "I" to consciousness, we are de facto back with the cartesian cogito, with "I" conceived as referring to thought. Now it has often been pointed out that Descartes' conclusion is illegitimate, that all he had a right to conclude is "there is thought," not that he was the thinker, an existent anterior to the thought. Even if one should be disposed to argue this point, Descartes' conclusion is still open to the destructive criticism of Hume which reduces the reality of the ego to the empirical self. But a constantly shifting stream of consciousness is not at all what Marcel means by an "existential indubitable" or what Hopkins meant by the "taste of self." To be

16 MB-I, p. 110.
sure, one can try to fix this up, as Kant did, by postulating a transcendental ego, converting the ego of the cogito into a purely impersonal logical form—the subject of knowledge—and let the empirical ego go on its own way by itself. But this solution leads to the abstract schematizations of idealism, a development toto caelo different from the concrete, personal philosophy Marcel is trying to work out. Furthermore, we cannot experience the transcendental ego, either globally or piecemeal, and it is our felt experience of the self which is our actual, concrete point of departure. Indeed, as Marcel observed early in his philosophical career, the more we adopt an idealist position, the more problematical existence, any existence, will come to seem.\textsuperscript{17}

Thus, Marcel argues, seriously to deny the "existential indubitable" leads to an existential skepticism. On the other hand, the attempt to objectify the self, to refer the "I" in "I exist" either to the body or to consciousness, is also self-defeating for it results either in the negation of the very experience of the self or to its banishment to a realm of the transcendental. But transcendental is just what the self is not, anymore than it is a stream of consciousness. Earlier Hopkins was quoted to illustrate the concreteness of the sense of self. Marcel puts it another way: when I say "I exist," "... I glimpse more or less obscurely

\textsuperscript{17}In 1925; see "Existence and Objectivity," MJ, Appendix, pp. 219-220; BH, pp. 104-105; \textit{cf.} CF, pp. 65-66.
the fact that my being is not only present to my awareness but that it is a manifest being." Marcel explains that by "manifest being" he means an "exclamatory awareness," which he compares to a young child leaping about and calling out his presence to the world. Of course this "exclamatory awareness" of one's existence is considerably subdued in the adult, encrusted as he usually is with the habits and routine of daily life. But it does not always require a catastrophe to bring this awareness to the surface, as anyone knows who has ever submitted himself to the dangers and discomfort of mass transit in a large city during the rush hour.

We must not suppose, however, that to acknowledge the reality of this datum is thereby to understand it. Marcel has already said that man is a mystery to himself. This mystery is rooted in that very existential duality with which we began, namely, that we exist both for ourselves and for others: we are both a "non-somebody" and a definite "somebody." This means that I cannot consider myself apart from my body, i.e., my body insofar as it is mine. The emphasis falls on the possessive adjective. But it also means that I can to some extent view my

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18 MB-I, p. 111.
19 Ibid., p. 112.
21 MB-I, p. 113.
body objectively, as it appears to others, i.e., insofar as it is not mine. It may appear that Marcel is saying that man has two bodies, an object-body and a subject-body. But of course he is not really saying that. These are only two ways of experiencing the same thing, for I not only experience my body as mine, something no one else can do; but I can also apprehend my body "objectively," as just one body in a world of bodies.

Confronted with this peculiar duality, it is only natural that we should seek to explain it, i.e., to clear up the mystery. But it is just Marcel's point that this datum is intransigent to objective explanation. This is, perhaps, another way of saying that self-knowledge—in the classical sense—is impossible, and also that the belief of idealist philosophers that the mind is transparent to itself is an illusion.²²

Marcel points out that if we adhere to the categories of traditional logic, which remain faithful to the distinction between subject and predicate, we shall be led either (1) to consider consciousness and the body as two distinct things between which some determinable relationship must exist, a relationship capable of abstract formulation; or else (2) to think of the body as something of which consciousness, improperly so called, is the predicate; or (3) to think of consciousness as something of which the

body, improperly so called, is the predicate. The reader will of course recognize this as a statement of the classical mind-body problem together with its three major solutions: dualism, materialism, and idealism. Marcel rejects each of these proposed solutions in turn as inadequate.

**Materialism** identifies the self with the body as a physical object. But my body as a physical object, Marcel replies, clearly does not imply a self. This alleged identity denies that very "principle of intimacy," that sense of self, which is the basis for all assertions of existence. Furthermore, I can adopt certain attitudes toward my body, evaluate it, alter my "relations" to it; hence, I cannot be identified with this body. But, on the other hand, Marcel is not opposed to the materialist formula "I am my body" if this is taken as a negative judgment: "It is neither true nor meaningful to assert that I am other than my body." Paradoxical as it may seem, Marcel entirely agrees with materialism that we cannot assert any truth about the relation R between an unknown X and my body. Not, however, because the self is identical with the body but because the relation cannot be thought.

There are many versions of idealism, but in general it may

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23 MB-I, p. 115.
24 CF, pp. 17-19.
26 CF, p. 19.
not be too great a simplification if we say it consists in the effort to identify the self or "I" with a mind existing by itself at no particular time or place. This solution, Marcel argues, is achieved at the price of renouncing existence. This mind is identified with the subject as knower, the subject of thought in general, for whom the world is an object of knowledge. The more the objective world of knowledge is proclaimed the only real world, the greater the primacy of the ideal over the existential is asserted. This is because existence is a function, so to speak, of the concrete self, and if this self is set aside, the objective world can be treated simply as a "given" plus the elaborations of thought, without ever specifying the "how" of the given or else assigning it an ideal ontological status. Marcel finds this view paradoxical, and even goes so far as to suggest there may be a contradiction involved in trying to say something about the world from a point of view outside the world in which the self actually finds itself.27

In view of these criticisms of the defects and shortcoming of materialism and idealism, one might suppose that Marcel would accept some version of dualism. But he does not. In all forms of dualism, Marcel observes, body and consciousness (mind, soul) are treated as things, which in logical discourse become terms alleged to be linked together by some definable relationship.

27 Cf. BH, pp. 19-20; CF, pp. 64-65; EB, p. 22.
We have already seen when considering materialism that Marcel does not believe such a relationship is conceivable. Of the several versions of dualism he considers, Marcel rejects psycho-physical parallelism because it allows no place for the intimacy of relationship we experience and mean to express by the phrase, "my body." Psycho-physical interactionism may appear to avoid this difficulty, but such a theory cannot make clear either the nature or the "how" of the alleged interaction. Still another version of dualism, a very ancient one, views the body as an instrument or kind of apparatus used by the self. This amounts to asserting a kind of gap between my body and me, and if taken literally, Marcel argues, leads to an infinite regress. An instrument is a means of extending an original power of the person who uses. This is true whether we speak of a pen, a knife, or a telescope. If, then, we treat the body as an instrument, of what is it the instrument? We will be obliged to imagine a physical soul and attribute to it the powers we formerly ascribed to the body. But this is to convert the soul (or mind, etc.) into a body—a mental body, an astral body, or what you will—which in its turn must be the instrument of a third body, and so on ad infinitum. Either we must mount the ladder endlessly from physical instrument to physical instrument, or halt the regression

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arbitrarily and maintain "that an instrument can be utilized (but how?) by a principle (?) which has a nature quite different from itself. This amounts to saying that an instrument may possibly be an instrument of nothing."29

Thus by a process of elimination Marcel arrives at a preliminary statement and clarification of what he calls the "central fact" of human existence and the "central datum" of metaphysics as well, viz., that we are incarnate beings (stressing the verbal rather than the substantive form of "being"). "To be incarnated is to appear to oneself as body, this particular body, without being identified with it nor distinguished from it--identification and distinction being correlative operations which are significant only in the realm of objects."30 "I am my body in so far as I succeed in recognizing that this body of mine cannot, in the last analysis, be brought down to the level of being this object, an object, a something or other."31

It is only reflection that can bring us to acknowledge this datum, and we can always refuse to reflect or we can always interrupt the process of reflection. On the one hand I have the capacity to perceive my body to a certain extent from the outside and to treat it as just another body from which I ideally divorce

29MJ, p. 333; cf. CF, pp. 18-19; MB-I, 122-123.
30CF, p. 20.
31MB-I, p. 124.
myself; on the other hand, I can pursue to the end a chain of reflections that compels me to acknowledge that my body and my self cannot be thought of either in isolation from, or in relation to, or even as identical with, one another. 32 I am my body insofar as it "presents itself to me as something felt; I am my body only in so far as I am a being that has feelings." 33

By beginning with the common experience of this "strange" duality of being both a somebody and a "non-somebody," which lead to reflection on what is meant by the expression, "my body" and concluded to the fact that we are incarnate beings, we have already delineated one basic feature of the human condition. This fact of incarnation, however, is one of feeling rather than of thought. It cannot be objectified. It would seem, therefore, that Marcel has himself "locked up" in a realm of feeling and not only has concluded to a radical subjectivism, but even runs the serious risk of solipsism. After all, strictly speaking, can I really feel anything other than my body? Moreover, must I not make use of my body in order to feel my body? And if I must, is this not that instrumentalist view of the body which Marcel has tried to exorcise by exposing its inherent difficulties?

In fact Marcel denies everyone of these alleged consequences

32 C F, p. 22.
33 MB-i, p. 125.
of maintaining that the fundamental datum of human existence is felt rather than understood. Incarnate being actually refers to the fact of being in the world, which is to be construed as a participation, not as a relation or communication. Existence (that is to say, human existence) is participation "in so far as participation cannot be objectified." Feeling, as it turns out, is itself one mode of participation. In the last analysis, this means that man is not a separate entity cut off from the world and consequently from others. To clarify this second essential feature of the human condition, i.e., participation, Marcel proceeds to reflect on feeling, to ask what it is and what makes it possible for us to feel.

3. Participation

We have seen that, according to Marcel, the central datum of human existence is that man is an incarnate being, and that incarnation is a mode of participation, of being in the world. This datum is felt rather than thought. And for Marcel feeling is also a mode of participation. An analysis of feeling, therefore, is one way for Marcel to clarify what he means by participation. But there is little use, Marcel says, in asking what makes it possible merely vaguely to "feel." To achieve more precision, we

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34 CF, p. 21. The underlined phrase is also emphasized in the original.
36 Ibid., p. 22.
must ask how sensation in general is a possibility. 37

Insofar as we approach this question objectively, we cannot help construing sensation as some stimulus sent from an unknown source in outer space and intercepted by what we call the subject thought of as a physical receiving apparatus. In other words, we think of sensation on the model of the transmission and translation or decoding of a message. Marcel challenges this account of sensation, essentially on the ground that every kind of message presupposes the existence of sensation. 38 And he infers that if sensation cannot plausibly be conceived as a message, then it must involve the immediate participation of "what is normally called the subject" in a surrounding world from which it is not cut off by any "veritable" frontier. 39

According to the message model of sensation, an emission of some kind is given out by X and received by Y, a subject who then transcribes or translates the emission into the language of the senses. A good example is an odor. Between me and the petunia patch something is transmitted; a physicist might describe it as a perturbation or vibrating pattern of varying wavelengths. Once this patterned atmospheric commotion reaches my nose it is translated into the language, or, if one prefers, transcribed into

37 MB I, p. 129.
38 Ibid., p. 133.
39 MS, pp. 331-332.
the key, of the sense of smell.

But it is necessary to ask what a translation really consists of. What we do when we make a translation is to substitute one set of given elements for another set of given elements at least partly different in kind from the first set. Both sets must be fully accessible to the mind. Whether he is translating from one language into another or decyphering a cryptogram, the translator must have access to a code equating the elements on both sides of the transaction. But with sensation nothing even remotely comparable with this takes place. The physical event prior to sensation, which I am supposed to be translating into the language of sensation, cannot be said to be a datum in any sense whatever. We are, to use Wittgenstein's adjective, "hypnotized" by the picture given to us by physical science and "confuse that conceptual picture with the fact of having an objective datum."40 "The essence of the physical event as such, considered as the basis of sensation, is that it is not and cannot be given to the consciousness which purportedly translates it into sensation."41 Either (1) we acknowledge that the physical event as such is not a datum, is not literally given to any sense at all, whatever modification it may exercise on our bodies insofar as our bodies are considered

40 MB-I, p. 132.
41 CF, p. 25.
purely objectively; or (2) we must postulate the existence of unsensed sensa to bridge the gap between physical events and sense data, something in every respect like sensations except that nobody is aware of them. But this latter maneuver really will not help, because if we treat the unsensed sensum as itself a message sent out from an emission post we are right back where we started. If, on the other hand, we treat the unsensed sensum as something primary and unanalyzable, then it cannot be a message and we must abandon the message theory of sensation.  

This conclusion has great importance for Marcel's idea of existential man. The previously discussed "existential indubitable," that exclamatory awareness expressed by "I exist," is no mere subjective certitude nor does solipsism menace us—as it would otherwise—if sensation cannot be construed as the translation or transcription of a message sent out by an emission post whose nature and very existence would remain in doubt.  

We are in the presence of an immediacy which cannot be mediatized by any thought process. It is not a question of thought at all, but rather of something we are.  

Sensation, the very existence of feeling, bears witness to what Marcel calls "submerged participation" in

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42MB-I, pp. 129-133; see also CF, pp. 24-26; MJ, pp. 327-329.
43MB-I, p. 135.
44Ibid., p. 137.
a reality—spatial metaphors are unavoidable—which envelops us like a womb, penetrates our very being, and to which we can open ourselves.45

Participation: "sharing, taking part in, partaking of"; these are some of the terms Marcel uses to characterize this notion which lies at the very heart of his philosophy of man.46 As Marcel recognizes, the term covers a wide range of related meanings from the crudely physical to the "non-objective," which is the level of meaning that concerns us here since feeling as a mode of participation, and participation itself as a basic fact of the human condition, is at its roots non-objective.

At the lower end of the scale of meanings we have what is objective, what can be possessed, like a piece of cake in which we share. Here participation means merely to receive a fragment of a physical whole. But, Marcel points out, participation need not always have this character. I can participate in various ways in the performance of a play, a concert, or a ceremony, whether as a performer, actor, celebrant, or as a member of the audience. It is worth noting in passing that a member of the audience can also participate actively in the performance, and indeed, as any "performer" in the live arts will tell us, must do so

46 Ibid., p. 137.
if the performance is to be successful. The audience should not be merely passive for the performance is not merely a spectacle. This observation bears directly on the nature of feeling, as will be seen presently.

Even in the examples just cited, however, there remains the objective character of what is shared; one is of a number of people present at and taking part in the performance. But such participation can have also a more ideal character. Marcel gives the example of a bed-ridden invalid who associates himself through prayer with some national ceremony of thanksgiving for the end of a national calamity.47 Nations are perhaps less prone to indulge in *Te Deums* than in former times, but the example is clear enough. In English we have, and still use occasionally, the expression "I'll be with you in spirit" to refer to a situation in which we wish actually to participate but which, for one reason or another, we are prevented from doing so. To be sure, all we may mean by the expression is something like: "I'd like to be with you but I can't; however, you have my sympathy and support." But clearly one could mean much more than that; one could mean active association with the occasion even if one cannot be physically present. This not infrequently happens when some invited guest cannot be present on some public occasion honoring

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someone for their past services, or on the occasion of some public memorial service. A soldier away from his family, especially at Thanksgiving or Christmas, may serve as another example of this kind. In cases of this sort very little is objectively given, perhaps only a card or letter, or an announcement on radio or television, or simply the knowledge that it is Christmas Eve. Yet any obstacle created by illness or distance can appear as quite contingent and ultimately as of no great significance.⁴⁸

The strictly objective element, however, can be entirely eliminated from our examples, thereby giving us a glimpse of what non-objective participation means. Again Marcel gives the example of a thanksgiving celebration, but this time divorced from any kind of announcement as to time, place, or occasion. Such a celebration is only a particular instance of an act of adoration with which one can actually associate oneself at any time. Here is participation which no longer requires a datum of any kind or even a notification. Moreover, the number of people participating ceases to be relevant; one cannot even be sure that the question of how many people are joining in has any meaning.⁴⁹ As this example may leave some readers feeling a little "flat," it may be just as well to cite one a bit more secular from a contemporary

⁴⁸ Cf. Ibid., p. 139.
⁴⁹ Ibid.
philosopher altogether different from Marcel. In a letter to a friend Bertrand Russell once wrote:

I often have imaginary conversations with Leibniz, in which I tell him how fruitful his ideas have proved, and how much more beautiful the result is than he could have foreseen; and in moments of self-confidence, I imagine students hereafter having similar thoughts about me. There is a "communion of philosophers" as well as a "communion of saints", and it is largely that that keeps me from feeling lonely. 50

"Communion" is certainly a mode of participation, and whatever Russell might say today, the passage will serve as an example of non-objective participation. There must be few students of philosophy that have not at one time or another felt that they were participating in the almost ageless--and endless--human enterprise of striving to understand themselves and their place in the world. Furthermore, it is quite possible, though perhaps it is more rare, deliberately to associate oneself "in spirit" with the efforts of the past without resorting to imaginary conversations with particular philosophers. This association can certainly be felt--whatever its objective value may seem to some--and is

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50 The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, Vol. 1 (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), pp. 245-246. The letter is dated April 22, 1906. It is only fair to the reader--and to Russell--to point out that Russell may have still been to some extent under the influence of idealism. I know of no reason, however, why he should repudiate his view or that he ever did so, although, of course, he would not ascribe to it the significance that Marcel would. Even if he did repudiate it, this would not affect its usefulness as an example.
something quite different from the pursuit of a professional career. Nor does one need to have a book in one's hand, a particular philosopher in mind, or the companionship of colleagues in order to participate in the philosophical enterprise.

Of course it will be observed, and very justly, as Marcel himself acknowledges, that even this non-objective participation presupposes some idea on which it depends (the idea of God or of a common philosophical enterprise in the case of the examples given). This idea is itself the principle of the emergence of non-objective participation, according to Marcel, but emergent participation implies the kind of submerged participation which was the conclusion of Marcel's analysis of sensation.51

Inevitably we must resort to images to convey what Marcel has in mind, but such images must not be taken literally. To speak of "submerged participation" inevitably arouses an image of man immersed, like a fish, in some mysterious ocean from which he emerges to "participate" in surface activities in the light of day. If we focus on the image we will fix our attention upon the visible shape that participation takes and may fail to realize that this visible shape is not the essential thing. It is not so much the fact of participating in this particular performance or that particular activity, a material act of Thanksgiving or the "communion of

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51 Cf. MB-I, p. 140.
philosophers' as the case may be, as it is the significance of the very will itself to participate that Marcel is trying to call to our attention. This may be seen more vividly if we take the extreme case, not perhaps so rare after all, of the person who desires very strongly to participate in some task but who does not particularly desire to take his share in some objective good which may come from the task successfully completed. Such a person may expose himself not only to suffering but to death, even to a frightful and agonizing death. One small crumb of solace that can be drawn from the misfortune of having to live in an age of war and revolution is the opportunity to observe firsthand or to learn indirectly of the great risks run and sacrifices made by many brave men and women who felt compelled to participate in dangerous tasks, sometimes against the grain of their own social background. One thinks at once of the many reported acts of aid and comfort at risk to life and limb extended to the Jews by all kinds of people during World War II. In many instances these were not a result of isolated acts of daring or heroism, but of deliberate faithful participation in underground cells and organizations.

This will to participate, Marcel asserts, is itself possible only on the basis of a kind of human consensus, a consensus which can only become intellectually articulate to itself at the cost of a tremendous effort. "Consensus" here is intended literally, i.e., a common feeling about something and so by definition
something felt rather than thought. Intellectual expressions of great currents of common human feeling, "rationalizations" they are usually called, are possible, even common, when it is a question of war or revolution. But the will to participate, and the reality participated in, certainly can transcend human relationships. "Think, for instance," Marcel says, "of the incredibly strong link that binds the peasant to the soil," or the sailor to the sea. A peasant feels the soil linked to his inner being, not only to his acts but his sufferings. He experiences the soil as a sort of inner presence.

Thus in Marcel's view participation is a fundamental fact of concrete human existence and the will to participate which manifests itself so pervasively in human life is rooted in a kind of participation, of which feeling is one mode, that cannot be objectified but which is nonetheless real for all that. While, as the examples

52 Ibid., p. 142.
53 Ibid., pp. 142-144. Peasants are scarce in America, a land of farmers, i.e., rural entrepreneurs. If I may be excused a personal intrusion at this point, I would like to say, as the son of a father who created a flourishing orchard out of a wilderness of sandburs and scrub oak in the spare time remaining after fulfilling his duties as a minor civil servant (a father who had to rely almost entirely in accomplishing this feat on the strength of his arms, one tired horse, and the erratic assistance of two reluctant sons) that Marcel's description of the "peasant mentality" is quite accurate. There are no words in the English language known to me which adequately express that "incredibly strong link" to the soil. "Participation" is as good as any; certainly none weaker will do.
should make clear, not all participation is feeling, all feeling is a mode of participation. Sensation is also construed as participation and the sense we have of our own existence is also a mode of feeling, and therefore of participation.

Participation is a term that suggests activity rather than passivity, and this is precisely how Marcel understands it except perhaps in the limiting case where to participate means merely to receive a share of a certain given whole. This harmonizes also with his view of feeling, which he considers to be something essentially active, again except for the limiting case of pure impression on the analogy of a piece of wax receiving an impress from a seal. Feeling, Marcel argues, is not passive, is not suffering. It is receptiveness, the act of receiving. To receive, like participation, covers a wide range of meanings from a purely passive impression to receiving a person in one's home. There is this active element in feeling which involves opening oneself to something. What is received, or who is received, is welcomed or accepted in a way that borders on welcoming. "I hold in principle that reception, hence receptivity, can only be considered in connection with a certain readiness or preordination."

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54 Cf. MB-I, pp. xi, 154.
55 Ibid., p. 144.
56 Ibid., p. 145.
57 CF, pp. 28-29.
58 Ibid., p. 89.
The term "responsiveness," in contrast to insensibility or apathy, is perhaps "the least inadequate term to use."59

On an earlier page it was observed that incarnate being refers to the fact of being in the world construed as participation; and that, for Marcel, existence is participation insofar as participation cannot be objectified. We have, however, "an irresistible tendency to objectify this participation and construe it as a relation. But if we do this, we will involve ourselves in insoluble difficulties such as those reviewed briefly when we considered sensation conceived after the model of a message."60

Another serious consequence of this tendency to objectify participation, and especially the fundamental participation Marcel refers to by the term "feeling," is to banish the self, the human being as such, from the world. As has already been pointed out, there is, on the one hand, a tendency to reduce the human being to a conglomerate of objective processes, biological, chemical, and physical; and, on the other, to convert the self into an abstraction, into a discarnate ego located nowhere, or into the abstract and impersonal subject of knowledge. In either case man in the concrete, existential man, is lost sight of and an abstraction or a whole bundle of abstractions will have been substituted for

59 See Mb-I, pp. 145-146; CF, pp. 27-29; 88-92.
60 CF, pp. 23-24.
him. Without existential man, however, there is no problem of emptiness, of that sense, i.e., feeling, of meaninglessness and insignificance which is the very problem above all with which Marcel is concerned. Marcel's observation, referred to in the preceding chapter, must not be forgotten, "... natural man is a historical reality and is defined with respect to a universe changing in time ... (and) ... this world still expresses his nature in its various forces and exigencies as these are realized in any given era." Abstractions feel nothing, neither crisis nor fulfillment. Marcel's insistence on the existential, then, is justifiable if he is to come to grips with the problem rather than obscure it by a veil of theory.

To insist on existential man is to insist on considering and attempting to understand man in the concrete. But man in the concrete cannot be understood apart from the circumstances in which he finds himself—his situation, as Marcel calls them. Indeed, for Marcel it is the essence of man to be in a situation, meaning by "man" existential or concrete man. Thus we come to third and last fundamental characteristic of existential man to be considered in this chapter; namely, situation or the fact of being in a situation.

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61 Ibid., p. 180.
62 Cf. Ibid., p. 83.
4. **Situation**

It must be admitted at the outset that the notion of situation, in the sense that interest Marcel, "is very difficult to define."\(^{63}\) By "situation" Marcel does not mean merely external circumstances, not even taken in all their concrete complexity. There is, once again, the danger "of transforming the notion into that of a set of objective relations, that is, of relations cut off from the being that I am. . . ."\(^{64}\) And, once again, it is not so much a matter of definition as of elucidation, something which cannot be done in a few sentences or a single brief paragraph.

Marcel himself, in an initial effort at clarification, cites a spatial example, that of a hotel that is badly situated. Underlying such an assertion one must of course grasp certain objective relationships between the hotel and its surroundings. Let us say the hotel is near a tannery which emits disagreeable odors. If the hotel is badly situated, it is because to be located near a tannery cannot but interfere with its purpose of harboring travelers, who will certainly not enjoy smelling the tannery.\(^{65}\)

But we also speak of ourselves as in being in a bad or a good situation, and while these assertions also imply underlying objective data, as in the example of the hotel, in the case of a

\(^{63}\)MB-I, p. 177.
\(^{64}\)Ibid.
\(^{65}\)Ibid., p. 178.
man these data refer to a being capable of saying, "my situation," and this means, according to Marcel, that they refer to man's existence as something which he does not passively suffer but actively lives.\textsuperscript{66} That is to say, there is a kind of mysterious interiorization or internalization of the circumstances, as with the peasant and his land, such that it is actually not quite correct to refer to them either as purely external or as purely internal. Moreover, by virtue of this interiorization one's situation is truly one's own and thereby becomes in a sense both one's fate and one's opportunity. But opportunity can as well be the occasion for disaster as for triumph. Everything depends upon the individual's response, which is itself in part a function—if it may be so expressed—of his realization or understanding of what the situation is and that it truly is his.

Many years before he developed his remarks on situation in the Gifford Lectures or in his earlier article on the phenomenology of being-in-a-situation,\textsuperscript{67} Marcel noted down the following key sentence in his journal: "Ours is a being whose concrete essence is to be in every way involved, and therefore to find itself at grips with a fate which it must not only undergo, but must also make its own by somehow re-creating it from within."\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{66}Ibid., p. 178.
\textsuperscript{67}In 1949, cf. MB-I, Ch. VII; and in 1940, CF, pp. 82-103.
\textsuperscript{68}In 1933, BH, pp. 116-117. Italics in the original.
This sentence makes it clear that Marcel is not meaning to affirm
that the individual is solely responsible for the circumstances in
which he finds himself, or that he denies the influences of either
heredity or environment because of some claim that man is radi­
cally free--à la Sartre. What Marcel thinks is the truth of the
matter is both more complicated and more subtle.

We can view the world as a spectacle and to the extent that
we try to observe it objectively, including ourselves and the
circumstances of time and place in which we find ourselves, this
is what we tend to do. But it must never be forgotten that we
are not observers only. We also participate in this scene, and
the emotion the "spectacle" can and does arouse in us is enough,
or should be enough, to remind us we are not mere machines
for the objective recording of the spectacle. Just because I am
more than a recording apparatus, just because I not only observe
but also participate, I can become aware of my situation and en­
joy the possibility of coming to grips with it. 69 When I have
actually achieved an insight into my situation I will find, Marcel
maintains, that I have also transcended the categories of inner and
outer, contingent and necessary. By this Marcel means, if I
understand him correctly, that these categories can no longer be
meaningfully employed to express either the situation as I have

come to recognize it or the alteration in my consciousness after achieving the insight or recognition.

A man will only seek to understand his situation if something leads him to question himself and his life. This self-questioning is a signal for a "turn inward" that Marcel refers to as a state of "ingatheredness."70 Now this ingatheredness--contemplation or recollection, as he sometimes calls it71--is not a retreat from life. On the contrary, it is an effort, it can be a very intense effort, to come to grips with one's life in its concrete manifestation. Concrete, it must be emphasized. If, Marcel argues, my real self were some kind of abstract self (the "ego," in the final analysis pure reason) in relation to which the given determinant conditions that constitute what some philosophers call the empirical self are contingent, then the ingathering process also would be a process or operation by means of which one withdrew from the circumstances of life toward reason. But, as we have already seen and will shortly illustrate concretely, this is just what it is not. To treat the concrete self of given circumstance as contingent to a kind of transcendental "kernel" is to treat it as a kind of husk which can and ought to be stripped away. If, however, we try to strip away the husk, viz., abstract the self from the

70 Ibid., p. 156.
71 Cf. Ibid., and PE, pp. 23-24.
given circumstances, we will not be left with the naked self in its essentiality. Rather we will be left with a fiction at best, and most likely with nothing at all.\(^{72}\)

We may take a case. Try to conceive of Napoleon apart from the concrete circumstances that we always associate him with: born in Corsica of such and such parents shortly after the middle of the eighteenth century; young and a soldier at the time of the overthrow of the ancien régime; a brilliant military commander confounding the established dynasties and the old social order; keeping Europe in a tumult for fifteen years; leading the flower of the Grande Armée to its destruction on the frozen steppes of Russia; brought to bay and finally defeated in the most famous battle of modern European history; dying in exile on St. Helena. If we abstracted the man from all these circumstances, whoever or whatever would be left, it would not be the victor of Austerlitz. What would be left? It is impossible to say. Napoleon is inconceivable apart from them.\(^{73}\)

Marcel has devised a neo-logism to refer to this inseparability of existential man and his life circumstances; namely, "the non-contingency of the empirically given." What Marcel intends to convey by this rather peculiar phrase is that, on the one hand, it

\(^{72}\)MB-I, pp. 163-164.

\(^{73}\)Cf. MB-I, pp. 166-167, where Marcel cites Vermeer as an example.
is impossible to conceive of man in the concrete apart from the circumstances of his situation, and, on the other, that we are not to interpret these circumstances in terms of causality which, according to Marcel, is relevant only to the domain of the objective and for scientific explanation. Furthermore, even these life circumstances are not to be conceived as merely external to the individual. The "non-contingency of the empirically given" may also be "affirmed, in fact, by the subject itself, in the process of creating itself qua subject." That is to say, it is possible that a man's given circumstances, if he becomes inwardly aware of them through the process of ingatheredness, can become constitutive of a new self. With this notion we transcend the categories of inner and outer, for clearly the given circumstances cannot become constitutive of a "new self" if we think of "the self's situation, as having a real, embodied, independent existence outside the self. . . ."  

A man's given circumstances may become constitutive of a new self. It is not an inevitable development even if he does realize them "inwardly." In a poem about Napoleon, the subject of the above example, Walter de la Mare has given beautiful expression to Napoleon's inward realization of the "non-contingency" of

74Ibid., p. 165.  
75Ibid.  
76Ibid. Emphasis in the original.
his given circumstance, in this instance the disastrous retreat from Moscow:

What is the world, O soldiers?
   It is I:
   I, this incessant snow,
      This northern sky;
Soldiers, this solitude
   Through which we go
Is I.

There is no indication from his subsequent behavior, however, that Napoleon acquired a new self from his experience or, for that matter, even that he achieved the insight the poet has attributed to him for his own purposes.

Marcel cites a wonderful example of his own from classic French literature to illustrate both the insight into situation and the alteration of the subject's consciousness as a result of the insight. The work is Corneille's tragedy Cinna, or The Mercy of Augustus. Briefly, Augustus' situation is this. He has discovered that a man who is his creature and who owes everything to him is heading a plot against his life. His initial reaction is one of anger and a desire to take vengeance on ingratitude. But something within himself restrains Augustus from yielding to these impulses, and he begins to reflect on his own situation, how he got to be where he is and the kind of man he has become. His musings, the product of his newly-achieved state of "ingathered-ness," culminates in the great soliloquy of Act IV, Scene 2:
Cease to complain, but lay thy conscience bare:
One who spared none, how now should any spare?
What rivers of red blood have bathed thy swords--
Thou, turned a murderer even to thy friends,
Was not thy very tutor stabbed by thee?
Durst then tax Fate with an unjust decree,
Now, if thy friends aspire to see thee bleed,
Breaking those ties to which thou paid'st no heed?
Just is such treason, and the Gods approve! ...
See traitors' swords in treacherous blood imbrued,
And die, thou ingrate, by ingratitude!

In Corneille's play this soliloquy is the turning point of
Augustus' life. The Emperor decides to pardon his enemies. It
is after this decision that he really becomes Augustus, the bene-
ificent founder of the imperial system, working for the rest of his
life to blot out the memory of his bloodstained past. In the last
analysis the Emperor appeared to himself not as a mere victim of
ingratitude but as responsible for the very situation in which he
was entrapped. It was not merely a matter of turning inwards,
of introversion, but of conversion, although not in any strictly
religious sense. Augustus did not remain unchanged: we are
presented with an act of inner creativity or transmutation.

Being in a situation, then, implies for Marcel, the possibility
and the opportunity of creative development. "... we can lay
it down that to be in a situation and to be on the move are modes
of being that cannot be dissociated from each other; are, in fact,

77 MB-I, pp. 159-161.
78 Ibid., p. 162.
two complementary aspects of our condition." 79 Indeed, this is the nexus that links creativity to existence. 80 But this creativity depends essentially for its possibility on the subject's recognition of his situation. To fail to seek this insight, to fail to recognize one's situation, is to fall prey to confusion, to be unable to make out what is the relative importance of any one activity as compared to one's other activities. Although our examples have concerned those who have been somewhat pompously called "world-historical figures," clearly Marcel intends their application to be quite general. To recognize one's own nature or self at any level permits at least the possibility of inner creativity, but recognition is only possible for the person who is effectively acting, who participates in his situation and "ingathers" his forces in order to try to achieve the recognition. One does not have to be a world-historical figure to do this, and one's activity may be exercised within narrow limits imperceptible to an outside observer. 81

These last remarks bear importantly on the theme of man's feeling of emptiness and meaninglessness. Marcel suggests that there is only a difference of degree, not of kind, between an

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79 Ibid., pp. 171, 165.
80 Ibid., p. 171.
81 Ibid., pp. 175-177.
ability to feel and an ability to create. Both presuppose the existence not only of the self, but also of a world in which the self can recognize itself, act effectively, and "expand." There is no guarantee, however, that everyone will enjoy such a favorable situation and, in fact, Marcel thinks that nearly all of us share to some degree a situation common to contemporary man and unfavorable to this development. Contemporary man, Marcel thinks, is strongly influenced by the idea he forms of life. He tends to identify living with the subsistence of a complicated mechanism, and to view death as the breakdown of that mechanism, the scrapping of an apparatus. Such a view, according to Marcel, almost inevitably leads to the devaluation of an existence doomed to eventual total, and meaningless dissolution. "Everything occurs as though a certain anonymous quality of social life progressively invaded me to the point where it ultimately abolished in me any temptation to see in my destiny a line of development. . . ." In other words, the situation of modern man is such that ingatheredness and inner creativity, as Marcel tried to illustrate them with the example of Augustus, are increasingly difficult to experience.

This is a possibility, even a real danger, because of the

\[82\text{CF, p. 92.}\]
\[83\text{Ibid., p. 94.}\]
very nature of existential man, an incarnate being in the world who participates in the reality in which he is inserted, as it were. As stated before, Marcel does not think man is an autonomous, self-contained whole. The being that can say "my situation" is open and exposed. "... to be situated is to be exposed to ... influence." This exposure, however, this openness of the subject, does not mean that the subject is not or cannot be selective, that he is molded by his situation as if he were jelly. As we have seen, there can be a creative response even under very difficult conditions. After all, Marcel says, even the functionalized world of today can exist only insofar as it is willed and accepted: a man may be involved--situated--in that world and yet retain the power to reject it. This is also possible because of the openness of the subject and the power he has to respond creatively as he tries to relate himself to other human beings and to the reality in which he participates.

These considerations, however, bring us to the threshold of a new chapter in which we shall consider three of the most important responses as Marcel delineates them, viz., love, hope, and fidelity.

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84MB-I, p. 178 and CF, p. 87.
85Cf. MB-I, pp. 179-181.
86MB-II, p. 49.
CHAPTER III
THE EXIGENCIES OF MAN

In the preceding two chapters we have considered both Marcel's diagnosis of the situation in which contemporary man finds himself and his reflections on existential or concrete man. In the present chapter we shall be concerned with what Marcel calls certain fundamental "exigencies" of existential man, exigencies which, according to Marcel, must be satisfied if life is ever to appear to man as having that meaning and fullness for which he craves and without which he cannot be happy. The satisfaction of these exigencies, however, cannot be achieved merely by the application of ever more refined techniques. Rather their satisfaction ultimately depends upon the way men respond to one another and to themselves, and these responses, in turn, depend not only on what men are, but on what they desire to become or to make of themselves. In the last analysis, therefore, for Marcel everything, including the kind of world men make and whether it will continue to be habitable in the fully human sense, depends on whether men will come to recognize and seek in the proper way to satisfy these exigencies.

"Exigence" is a term frequently to be met with in Marcel's writings and something ought to be said about it at the outset. It is usually translated as "need," but this does not convey its real
force, which, as Marcel tells us, is equivalent to the German *Forderung.* It should be understood as referring to "a deep-rooted interior urge," and even this falls short of the mark. In all that comes after, therefore, this term "exigence" should, unless otherwise qualified, be understood in the nature of a concrete demand of human nature, concretely considered.\(^2\)

The use of the term "exigence" in the plural is in keeping with Marcel's own practice. In some passages he refers to an exigence for transcendence; in others, to an exigence for being or an ontological exigence.\(^3\) In still another passage he refers to an exigence for perennialness.\(^4\) This plurality of exigences is, in one sense, justifiable because insofar as they are amenable to conceptualization, they can be referred to logically distinct objects. The exigence for transcendence refers to God. The exigence for being refers to the spiritual dimension of human existence and also ultimately to God. The exigence for perennialness refers to indefinite duration.\(^5\)

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1See MB-I, note, p. 48.
2Cf. MB-II, pp. 41, 42.
3Cf. MB-I, ch. III; MB-II, ch. III; cf. also MJ, pp. 183, 288; PE, pp. 9, 13; BH, pp. 38-39, 102, 114; CF, pp. 93, 143-144, 147.
4MB-II, p. 68.
5See MB-II, pp. 3-4; 35-36; 66-69. That the ontological exigence ultimately refers to God, apprehended through faith as the "Absolute Thou," is the burden of the argument of the entire second half of the Gifford Lectures, especially from Ch. V. ad fin. Cf. MB-II, pp. 76, ff.
In a deeper sense, however, it is true to say that for Marcel there is only a single exigence which gives rise to the others, viz., the exigence for love, a demand or, better to say, a hunger so imperious and so insatiable that it can never be satisfied except it triumph even over death. It is through love that man apprehends the reality of the personal dimension, both of himself and of others. It is through love that man participates in that reality with them and they with him. It is the lack of love which accounts for the emptiness of the contemporary world and for its increasing depersonalization and inhumanity—a world unfit for human beings. It is the reality of that which is revealed through love, and through love only, that is omitted by the objective approach to man and that is excluded by its very nature from the domain of science and of technics generally. It is for the sake of this reality that Marcel has eschewed both the rationalist and the contemporary, scientific-empirical approaches to the study of man. It is to defend this reality that he has elaborated his own method of secondary reflection. Just as the Medievalists frequently devised their subtle and proliferating distinctions to defend the truths of theology, so it can be said of Marcel that he distinguishes and analyzes in order to defend the truths of love.

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6MB-II, p. 169.

7See Ibid., pp. 69, 74-75.
This interpretation of the core of Marcel's thought is in harmony with his expressed view that ultimately men interest him not insofar as they are rational, but insofar as they are worthy of love. Ultimately, it is love that confers meaning on life—as all lovers know—and generates the hope which is the only and the final answer to skepticism and to nihilism, skepticism's legitimate offspring. Ultimately, it is fidelity which furnishes the only concrete criterion for authentic love and is itself the "locus" of being, another way in Marcel's terminology to say "the place of love."

It is scarcely an exaggeration, therefore, to characterize Marcel's position as a philosophy of love. If we are to understand the place and role of fidelity in that philosophy, therefore, we must first understand what he has to say about the nature and significance of love. While it cannot be stressed sufficiently that in Marcel's view love, hope, and fidelity ultimately are inseparable and constitute an "indissoluble unity" in the life of existential man, nevertheless love is the common root of the other two and must be the point of departure for an understanding of what Marcel considers to be the meaningful life. Since it is the main

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8 MJ, p. 211.
10 Cf. BH, p. 41.
11 See MB-II, p. 191 regarding the indissoluble unity of love, hope and fidelity.
theme of this study, fidelity will be considered at length in the following two chapters. The present chapter, accordingly, is limited to an explication of the place in Marcel's philosophy of love and, more briefly, of hope.

1. The Exigence for Love

At this date in western history, it would perhaps be too much to expect any thinker to have anything especially original to say about love itself. Such originality as anyone may have to contribute to the subject is more apt to be in relating love with other phenomena, and even in this respect there may be little to be said that will be, strictly speaking, new. What is distinctive about Marcel's doctrine is the immense significance he assigns to love as revelation: as revealing the dimension of the personal reality of the other. Marcel's doctrine of love, accordingly, is best approached by way of his doctrine of intersubjectivity or the theory of the thou. This approach will also provide an opportunity to discuss Marcel's views of the self, openness, and presence, as well as to relate the doctrine of love with the exposition of existential man given in the preceding chapter. Following the exposition of the theory of the thou, this section will conclude with a consideration of Marcel's view of the quality of love.

a. The theory of the thou (intersubjectivity)

The theory of the thou is involved with or indirectly
related to so many elements of Marcel's philosophy that, in order to avoid initial confusion arising from sheer complexity of detail, it will prove useful to the reader to give a summary view of the theory as a whole together with its place in the general scheme of Marcel's thought.

If contemporary man feels alienated and "empty," it is, in the last analysis, Marcel says, because his world is no longer habitable in the human sense, because it is loveless, and a world lacking in love is an inhuman world consigned over to death.\textsuperscript{12} In such a world, abetted and encouraged by a cultural complex ultimately based upon and dominated by the technological, man increasingly tends to treat his fellow men as objects, as impersonal \textit{hims} or even \textit{its}, "a bunch of possibilities to be made use of, or threats to be neutralized."\textsuperscript{13} This attitude toward one's fellow man implies "existentially," for Marcel, that the individual becomes more and more centered on himself, more egocentric and "closed" to the other. Man has, however, the capacity to reverse this development by opening himself to others, welcoming them into himself, as it were, and welcomed by them.\textsuperscript{14} Love is the medium by and through which this

\textsuperscript{12}See MB-II, pp. 166-169 and PI, p. 231.
\textsuperscript{13}MB-II, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{14}Cf. BH, p. 107 and CF, pp. 71-72.
miracle can be accomplished, for it is by and through love that the being of the other is both revealed and attained: the other no longer appears as an object, a him, but a subject or person, a thou, a living center who (not which) evokes a reaction of love and respect. A community of presence is created through love, participation in a shared life which Marcel also calls "intersubjectivity." Intersubjectivity, the life of love, is experienced as fullness and as fulfillment, the precise contrary and the only authentic antidote for the emptiness, sadness, and inhumanity of the contemporary world.

With this generalized scheme in mind as a guide and frame of reference, let us now turn to a detailed account of the theory of the thou.

As was seen in the preceding chapter, according to Marcel's analysis man can be conscious of himself in two irreducible ways, as object and as subject. As object, man is but one body among others in a world of space and time, and subject to the laws and conditions prevailing in that world. But as subject, man is incarnate being-in-the-world whose body is a mysteriously felt presence which he expresses linguistically by the phrase, "my body." The unity of self

15 Cf. MB-II, pp. 63-64.
and body is non-objectifiable and the paradigm case of existence and of participation in reality. Sensation is itself a prime example of the immediacy of this participation and of the fact that man can somehow open himself to a reality other than himself. In other words, for Marcel sensation is to be thought of as an immediacy of feeling and participation, and not primarily as representation.

This dual consciousness that the individual has of himself has both an epistemological and a personal aspect. That is to say, it correlates with knowledge on the one hand and with human relationships—including the individual's relationship with himself—on the other. If the individual should adopt an "objective" attitude toward himself or others, he views himself or them as a subject possessing or having characteristics (in logical terms, predicates). That is to say he takes a detached attitude towards himself qua subject, attention being focused on the predicates and the correct attribution of predicates. As such, the objective attitude is essentially impersonal, and is a fundamental condition for all objective thought. It is the basic condition both for judgment and the propositional form of objective knowledge, as well as for the possibility of determining more or less precise answers to detailed and specific questions.\[16\] Objective

\[16\]Cf. MS, pp. 155-156.
knowledge is, of course, essential for that manipulation of the "objective" reality upon which human survival depends, and man's capacity for objective, rational thought has long been considered in the west to be at once his greatest glory and that which constitutes a gulf between him and the other animals.17

It is a notorious fact, however, that men find it far easier to maintain a detached, objective attitude towards others than they do toward themselves or toward certain things, such as property, which they somehow identify with themselves. One reason for this lack of objectivity towards oneself is the individual's awareness, however obscure, that at every given moment he transcends the totality of predicates that an inquiry either by himself or others would disclose. By "transcend" is meant that global awareness of ourselves which we have and which eludes all objectification; that felt presence of our bodies, for example, which makes it practically impossible for anyone, however they may theorize, seriously to treat their own body as if it were merely a cluster of predicates or a bundle of perceptions.18

But there is also another factor besides this global

17 Cf. MS, p. 82; PM, p. 53.
18 Cf. S, pp. 82, 91.
awareness which is crucial for the attitude one commonly has towards oneself and which is very frequently absent from one's attitude toward things or others. This factor is a certain lack of interest which has frequently infuriated poets, wives, and lovers, and once goaded a British Labor Party Minister to refer to a colleague on the bench as "that desiccated adding machine on my right."\textsuperscript{19} Marcel tells us this interest "in the last analysis is love. . . ."\textsuperscript{20} In other words, objectivity requires that both a distinction and a certain distance be established between the subject and the object if the process of cognition is to occur. If we trans­pose this distinction and distance into linguistic terms, then we may say that the object is what we think about, what we make statements or assertions about. Objective knowledge is about things or objects, and the very preposition in English seems to imply both distinction and a certain distance.

Normally, however, this distance and this distinction is not maintained either in our attitude towards or in our thinking about ourselves.\textsuperscript{21} In regard to themselves and to the

\textsuperscript{19} The minister, whose name I do not remember, was referring to Sir Stafford Cripps.

\textsuperscript{20} MJ, p. 200.

\textsuperscript{21} This sentence is an excellent example of how the structure of language can impose a sort of betrayal. One is virtually compelled to use the prepositions "towards" and "about" if an awkward and extended circumlocution is to be avoided, with the result that the sentence literally states the contrary of the meaning it is meant to convey. For a similar complaint by Marcel, see MB-I, pp. 158-159.
"world" of their interest men are seldom detached; to the contrary, they are usually very committed indeed. This is not surprising, for if the capacity for objective thinking may be said to be natural to man, so may self-love. And the self that man loves is his being in its totality, his concrete existence exposed as it is to all the influences, the threats and dangers, the possibilities for frustration or satisfaction, which constitute his situation, the reality in which he participates whether he likes it or not. The tension between "head and heart" is, therefore, not unexpectedly an ever-recurring phenomenon in human life, both individual and collective.

That this tension, rooted in the very human condition, can be a source of trouble is surely undeniable. All too often the "heart" has a propensity to interfere with the efficient working of the "head." Sentiment and emotion all too often deflect reason from its proper operations and lead to wishful thinking; i.e., to seeing things not as they are but as we would like them to be: to ignoring evidence, overlooking relevant factors, engaging in loose and invalid reasoning in order to reach conclusions we desire to embrace or to avoid conclusions we find distasteful. It is just this kind of undesirable influence of feeling and emotion on one's thinking that is condemned by the use of the terms
"subjective" or "personal" in a pejorative sense. It is just to exclude or to reduce to a minimum such undesirable outcomes that logic and scientific method, with their rigorous and precise procedures, have been elaborated.

Marcel would not dream of denying any of this, What he is concerned to affirm, however, is that exclusive reliance on objective and abstract thinking, for all its merits and for all its reliability, tends to lead to the identification of objective truth (or the "world of objects," as he sometimes refers to this domain of thought) as exhaustive of reality whereas, as each can experience in his own case, objective knowledge never "exhausts" reality. As was mentioned in Chapter One, Marcel insists that objective thought is essentially analytic and reductive. The very logic of the subject-object dichotomy involves a mutilation of the unity of the subject, and consequently concrete, personal reality of the subject qua subject can never be grasped in its totality through the process of conceptualization. While objective, abstract thought, Marcel specifically affirms, has its proper use, it also has its proper limits which, if exceeded, constitute an abuse of the method of abstraction.22 In Marcel's eyes, the greatest abuse of the method of abstraction, as

22MB-I, p. 164; cf. also pp. 7-8, 148-149, 250, 257, 262-263, 265-266.
well as its greatest limitation, is precisely that it tends to lead its devotees in philosophy and science to ignore or even flatly deny those dimensions of reality which elude objectification. Indeed, Marcel thinks there is a distinct danger that the predominance today of objective thinking and scientific technique may lead to discounting the personal dimension of reality even in one's own, privileged, case.

But this possibility poses no real problem on the practical level of concrete living. The individual's awareness of his own mental life and his self-love take care of that. It is in regard to others that the limitation of the objective approach is most sharply revealed. Because man is an incarnate being, he can, in regard to himself, perceive his "connection with something which doubtless can be considered an object and, therefore, capable of being investigated by science, but which is in no way limited by this objectivity," while in the case of the other person he is limited to a perception of something which can be an object only.

That something, of course, is the other's body considered

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23"Dimension" is used here in order to avoid the suggestion of "object" connoted by the term "aspect." But "dimension" inevitably carries with it a spatial image, which is scarcely an improvement. Again, one is confronted with a language problem.

24MB-I, p. 250; cf. PE, p. 12; MS, pp. 19-20; EB, p. 18.

not as his, but simply qua body.

Now Marcel calls being that ultimate quality of self to which self-love is directed and which is valued so much that the individual desires to preserve it for its own sake alone. This being cannot be identified with the empirical self, which is in fact synonomous with concrete existence. It cannot be treated as a datum, i.e., it cannot be objectified. It can only be recognized and alluded to, chiefly by means of poetic metaphors such as Hopkins employed when speaking of the taste of self.

It is the being of the other person, otherwise inaccessible, which is revealed by and through love. Because of the very ambiguity of the existential status of incarnate beings, however, the other can also be treated solely as an object or a thing. Insofar as other people are seen as objects to be described functionally or behavioristically, and perhaps to be manipulated in our own selfish interest, that is what they will be for us. We refuse to recognize and acknowledge that they are beings, as we know ourselves to be. They are deprived of their status as subjects, living

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26 Marcel is quite clear about not only distinguishing, but disjoining ene from esse; indeed, his discussion of hope in connection with the possibility of immortality depends entirely upon their separation. Cf. MB-I, pp. 25-31; cf. also BH, p. 34 and 35.
centers with an interiority and life of their own and capable of invoking reactions of love and respect or, to the contrary, fear and even horror. 27 This dimension of the individual being qua being can be apprehended only through love:

"... for such a description cannot be divorced from the act of loving. ..." 28

This intimate relationship established between two human beings through love Marcel refers to as the I-thou relationship or, especially in his later work from 1949 onward, as intersubjectivity (which is, however, a more comprehensive term than the former). By referring to the being of the other attained through love as the thou, Marcel seeks to draw attention at once both to the reality and the non-objective character of the relationship, to its refractinariness to conceptualization. 29 Earlier it was pointed out that the

27 Cf. MB-II, pp. 29, 63-64.
28 Ibid., p. 67. The reader doubtless will recognize the familiar problem of "other minds" approached here from a somewhat different perspective and with a considerably different terminology than is traditional in western philosophy. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that Marcel is in any way offering a solution to this problem, as will be clear shortly.
29 Cf. MB-I, p. 221 and MB-II, p. 121. So strongly, indeed, does Marcel emphasize its non-objective character that it is likely that he favored "intersubjectivity" as an alternative term in order to avoid using the term "relationship," which, in one of the last pieces he has written to date (1965), he says "is suffused with generality and, what is more, it implies a concept, that is to say, objectivated data." Cf. S, p. 84. Nevertheless, it is virtually impossible to dispense with the terms "relation" and "relationship," whether one speaks of the thou or intersubjectivity.
object was what knowledge referred to, that knowledge is about objects or things. The object is, for the subject, in the third person, an it or him (her). Thou is in the second person: one speaks to the thou, viz., invokes or addresses the individual as a being similar to oneself, a living center capable of responding to the invocation or to an appeal. Thou not only connates the concrete, the personal, but also a principle of intimacy established between subject and subject which both must recognize and acknowledge for the relationship to exist or to continue. This is what Marcel calls a dyadic relationship; i.e., it excludes a third person. A fact, given or possible, admits in principle, if it is to be objectified, that anyone could perceive it under certain given conditions. For that matter, a piece of apparatus considered as an extension of the observer could also, in principle, record the fact. But in the I-thou relationship assurance and ipseity may be conveyed by such imponderables as a word, gesture, tone of voice, etc., and these would have no evidential value for a third person to whom, for Marcel, anything that can be considered evidence has an implied reference.30

The I-thou relationship is not normally achieved in depth

in an instant, although there is an initial spontaneity about it which cannot really be explained. But normally there is a gradual transition to deeper and deeper love in which the thou becomes thou more and more profoundly. Gradually the other ceases to be "somebody else" and "we become simply us."\(^{31}\) The emotions play a crucial role in this progressive intimacy of community or shared life. The realm of the I-thou is a realm of existence "to which the preposition with properly applies, as it does not properly apply . . . to the purely objective world."\(^{32}\) There is a bond of intimacy, a unity, established between the two subjects which can only arise on the basis of an invocation of one subject by the other or, as the case may be, on the basis of a reciprocal invocation. This invocation is in the nature of an appeal which can, of course, be rejected. But the point here is that it cannot even occur unless there already exists a certain community not, strictly speaking, subject to time. This community is an initial sympathy which contains the possibility of an invocation and of the establishment of the I-thou relationship in the fullest sense. It is emotion, according to Marcel, which plays a vital role in establishing

\(^{31}\) Cf. MJ, p. 146; MB-I, pp. 219-220.
this initial community and it is the emotions especially which are touched or reached by the appeal which calls for the response without which the I-thou relationship cannot exist.33

Another striking characteristic of the I-thou relationship is that in it not only is the being of the other revealed, as it were, but also it has a self-revelatory character. The transition to community, from the him to the us, forces one's hidden self to emerge. In other words, love is bound up with the emergence of the I, generally so devoid of a determinate character that Kant could interpret it as referring to a purely formal unity. "Nothing takes us more by surprise," Marcel says, "than our own emotions..."34 This doctrine of the emergent "I" would seem to be a corollary of the view that man does not exist apart from his situation which is itself significantly altered by the I-thou relationship. A concrete illustration of this doubtless would be useful at this point, but before attempting one several other aspects of the I-thou relationship should be discussed.

According to Marcel, the realm of the I-thou is one to which the preposition with properly applies as it does not apply to world of objects. The world of objects is a world

33 See MJ, p. 172.
34 See Ibid., pp. 172-173, 221; MB-I, p. 252.
of mere juxtaposition. One thing is along side another, the chair is beside the table. But objects, in this case physical objects such as pieces of furniture, are not really with each other in Marcel's understanding of the term. Human beings, also, be it noted, insofar as they also are or can be treated as objects, can and do exist, even simultaneously, in both worlds, the world of objects or mere juxtaposition and the world of intersubjectivity, of the thou or a shared community of love. This is a very common experience we have all had, particularly if we ever have happened to be the third party that "makes a crowd," The point, however, of Marcel's stressing the difference between being with and juxtaposition is to emphasize an aspect of human relationships which is apt to be distorted or overlooked entirely if they are seen from a logical point of view. If any relationship is considered objectively, it is next to impossible not to view it as external to the terms which it binds together. If I place a book on the table, I do not change either the book or the table; if I put the book back in its place on my bookshelf, again I do not change either the table or the book. But my relationship with someone who is thou to me makes a difference to both of us and so does any interruption of this relationship. Marcel chooses to designate this type of relationship internal, a descriptive term of some notoriety from
idealistic philosophy (one thinks immediately of Bradley), but there is no need to stress the label as long as it is understood how Marcel uses it, and it does not have any specifically idealist connotations for Marcel.

In this effort to elucidate Marcel's theory of the thou, it has been necessary to use terms and expressions indispensable for the exposition, but which are very difficult to clarify with precision. Terms such as being, with and thou, or the emergent I, are all difficult notions which fall strangely upon the ear, especially upon an ear tuned to a different philosophy. The reason for this difficulty is inherent in the very nature of Marcel's whole philosophical enterprise. Nor is this merely because he is trying to talk about love, which is notoriously resistant to any but artistic expression (including gesture in the wider sense of the term "artistic"). Rather it is because Marcel is trying to give voice to what is essentially unutterable, as will be seen now that the time has come to explain what Marcel means by presence. This notion leads to the very heart of the I-thou relationship as Marcel conceives it, and at the same time will serve to indicate the link with the theory of participation on the one hand and the epistemological aspect of Marcel's philosophy on the other.
As has been stated, it is through love that the I-thou relationship is established, that one recognizes and acknowledges the other qua being. On the basis of an initial community, two persons can maintain and develop a certain kind of unity, the flavor of which Marcel attempts to convey by stressing the peculiar "quality" of being with someone. But what or whom is the individual with when he is in a thou relationship with someone? Their body? Well, sometimes, but not necessarily. Moreover, it is possible to be in the physical presence of someone and still feel that he is not truly present. There is, in fact, no common participation in a shared life, no intimacy—which is just what is meant by the thou. It may be said that the other is present but that his presence is not felt. Physical communication is possible, but real communion is not.

The impact which a presence can have on others is very real; in spectacular cases it may even be measurable to a certain, limited degree. One thinks at once of such a spellbinder as Hitler who certainly possessed a genuine capacity to make himself "felt" even after discounting all the propaganda techniques of such a skillful image-maker as
Goebbels. When it is said that the "impact of presence" is very real, what is meant is that the sense of presence is not a hallucination. The term, Marcel says, refers to what is most "metaphysical" in the personality, to what is irreducible and incapable of being objectified. Without the sense of the presence of the other, one does not attain to him as being: "... he is not a being for me unless he is a presence ... this means that I am unable to treat him as if he were merely placed in front of me; between him and me there arises a relationship which, in a sense, surpasses my awareness of him. ..."

It is the very presence of the other qua being that the individual welcomes when he enters into the I-thou relationship by means of or through the medium of love. The other

35 Doubtless Marcel himself would care little for this example, but it seems easier, such is the weakness of human nature, to illustrate the reality of presence with examples Marcel would likely consider negative than it is to offer more positive instances. However, it seems undeniable that there can be what some have called "evil" or diabolical presences as well as the presence we feel when we love someone. Unless he were simply to stipulate that "presence" must always and only refer to the thou--which he does not do--it is difficult to see how Marcel could object in principle to such examples as Hitler or, e.g., Rasputin. Marcel himself discusses presence in connection with that elusive quality we call charm; see MB-I, pp. 253-254. Another example will be given presently which doubtless Marcel would find more to his taste.


abides with him and he with the other. The other's presence is felt in the individual's own life, as his presence is felt by the other. This intimacy of mutual participation and communion must be grasped from the inside, as it were, if it is to be grasped at all. From the outside, considered objectively, it cannot be grasped. Hence the temptation to make a reductive analysis of what people have said about it. This temptation, which Marcel quite literally views as a betrayal which ultimately can only lead to despair, can exist also for persons who have already established an I-thou relationship. This is because, as Marcel puts it, the thou cannot always be maintained as thou. Insofar as man is an incarnate being, he can also view the other qua object. Or one person may withdraw from the relationship, leaving the other to wonder if perhaps his former experience was "only" an illusion. Again, perhaps one just grows accustomed to the other, so that his presence gradually seems to "fade" from one's consciousness until something happens, such as a serious illness, to shock one into the effort of renewal of love necessary genuinely to receive his presence once more. 38

The difficulty of "maintaining" the thou underscores its

38Cf. PM, pp. 40-43; CF, p. 72; MB-I, p. 257.
mystery as well as the mystery of presence. Presence is, as Marcel likes to say, metaproblematic, and this term requires an explication of his celebrated distinction between problem and mystery. Briefly, a mystery is something insoluble in principle and yet not senseless. The roots of mystery lie in the fact that man is an incarnate being and any problem or question he raises that involves his own existence necessarily refers to "a datum which is not transparent to reflection, and which, when reflected, implies an awareness not of contradiction but of a fundamental mystery, becoming an antinomy as soon as discursive thought tries to reduce or problematize it." Mystery is "something which is beyond the grasp of speculative thought, preceding discursively from a given fact."  

A problem depends upon objective thought both for its formulation and its solution: there can be no problem apart from the subject-object dichotomy. Marcel insists so strongly upon this point that he is inclined to agree with the logical positivists that a problem which admits of no solution is meaningless, i.e., it is a problem badly posed. A problem confronts the subject in the same way as does the

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39 CF, p. 23.
40 PP, p. 7.
41 See EB, p. 82.
object, and the subject qua subject is, theoretically, excluded from its terms. A genuine problem is amenable to appropriate techniques which contribute to its definition.

A mystery, on the other hand, involves the very subject himself and consequently the distinction between what is "in" him and what is "before" him becomes blurred and loses its meaning. A mystery, by definition, transcends every conceivable technique. We can be, perhaps it is inevitable that we will be, tempted to try to problematize a mystery. Everything in our world, the structure of our language, our need to objectify data for the sake of understanding and survival, the natural tendency of our minds, encourages us in this direction. But the attempt to problematize a mystery, Marcel warns, will only get bogged down in the quagmire of the pseudo-problem, that marshy and treacherous ground which, according to Marcel, forms such a large part of the landscape of the history of philosophy.42

Marcel cites as mysteries which have all too frequently been "degraded" into pseudo-problems the union of soul and

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body, evil, and, significantly, love. "It might perhaps even be shown that the domain of the meta-problematical coincides with that of love, and that love is only the starting point for the understanding of such mysteries as that of body and soul which, in some manner, is its expression."\textsuperscript{43} It is not difficult to see the relevance of the notion of mystery with respect to presence. Invoking a being, i.e., a presence, the \textit{conditio sine qua non} for establishing the I-thou relationship, differs from thinking of him. To think of a being is to concentrate one's attention on a "particular system of images crystallizing either round a special image or else round a name."\textsuperscript{44} Knowledge, including knowledge about a person, is capable of being transmitted to others. But the special experience of another person as a being, as presence, is incapable of transmission. This latter realm is very far from the domain of rational knowledge. Presence cannot be treated in any way as a predicate.\textsuperscript{45}

Every attempt to objectify presence generates difficulties. If presence is conceived as a predicate qualifying an object,

\textsuperscript{43}\textit{PE}, pp. 19-20. See \textit{MJ}, pp. 303-304 for some of Marcel's early (1923) observations on love in relation to traditional concerns of epistemology.

\textsuperscript{44}\textit{MJ}, p. 171.

\textsuperscript{45} See \textit{MJ}, pp. 301-302.
then one may be driven to maintain, à la Moore, that it is a "non-natural" quality of a person—a maneuver scarcely convincing and no more enlightening than simply to say it is mysterious. Alternatively, one may try to convert presence into some sort of vaporized object, like the medium's ectoplasm, which contrasts unfavorably with the real, tangible world.46 But this would deprive presence of its felt reality and mask the critical difference in act between grasping an object and "inclining" towards a presence. A presence cannot be grasped or seized. It can only be received or excluded, welcomed or rebuffed. There is a fundamental difference in the attitude one adopts towards an object and towards a presence. The grasping or prehension referred to is, of course, apprehension by the intelligence, or comprehension. A presence is, then, in one sense incomprehensible in principle (but not in the sense of absolutely unknowable) and can only be invoked.47

The reality of the various aspects of the I-thou relationship—intimacy, being with, presence, self-revelation—may be illustrated either from one's own experience or from literature. At least one example to serve as a concrete

46MB-I, p. 255.
47See Ibid., pp. 255-256.
illustration of the preceding exposition was promised some pages back and is long overdue. A remarkable account of the attainment of the thou is related by Bertrand Russell who apparently did not anticipate the experience which, though ephemeral, nevertheless impressed him profoundly and seems to have had a lifelong significance for him. All the reader needs to know to appreciate the quotation is that Mrs. Whitehead was the wife of Russell's great contemporary, friend, and colleague, Alfred North Whitehead, and that she suffered from chronic and increasingly severe heart trouble.

One day, Gilbert Murray came to Newnham to read part of his translation of The Hippolytus, then unpublished. Alys and I went to hear him, and I was profoundly stirred by the beauty of the poetry. When we came home, we found Mrs. Whitehead undergoing an unusually severe bout of pain. She seemed cut off from everyone and everything by walls of agony, and the sense of the solitude of each human soul suddenly overwhelmed me . . . Suddenly the ground seemed to give way beneath me, and I found myself in quite another region. Within five minutes I went through some such reflections as the following: the loneliness of the human soul is unendurable; nothing can penetrate it except the highest intensity of the sort of love that religious teachers have preached; whatever does not spring from this motive is harmful, or at best useless; it follows that war is wrong, that a public school education is abominable, that the use of force is to be deprecated, and that in human relations one should penetrate to the core of loneliness in each person and speak to that . . .

At the end of those five minutes, I had become a completely different person. For a time, a sort of mystic illumination possessed me. I felt that I knew the inmost thoughts of everybody that I met in the street,
and though this was, no doubt, a delusion, I did in actual fact find myself in far closer touch than previously with all my friends and acquaintances . . . Having for years cared only for exactness and analysis, I found myself filled with semi-mystical feelings about beauty, with an intense interest in children, and with a desire almost as profound as that of the Buddha to find some philosophy which should make human life endurable. A strange excitement possessed me, containing intense pain but also some element of triumph through the fact that I could dominate pain, and make it, as I thought, a gateway to wisdom. The mystic insight which I then imagined myself to possess has largely faded, and the habit of analysis has reasserted itself. But something of what I thought I saw in that moment has remained always with me, causing my attitude during the first war, my interest in children, my indifference to minor misfortunes, and a certain emotional tone in all my human relations.48

Russell's simple and eloquent account of a deeply moving experience illustrates virtually every aspect of the I-thou relationship which has been discussed in this chapter. The most striking difference is, of course, not the intensity of its impact, but its unexpectedness. Indeed, Russell apparently was so unprepared for what happened that he seems to think of it as a kind of mystical experience. While such an interpretation cannot be simply ruled out of court, it must be remembered that Russell and the Whiteheads had been friends for many years and undoubtedly Mrs. Whitehead was in some sense, to use Marcel's terminology, already thou for Russell. What seems to have happened is that the very

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48Russell, op. cit., pp. 193-194. Russell had this experience in the spring of 1901. The emphasis in the second paragraph is the writer's.
intensity of the experience, concentrated as it was in a few moments, enabled Russell to perceive--non-objectively--with extraordinary clarity that peculiar "quality" of the other that Marcel refers to as being. It is significant in this connection to note that Russell himself speaks of love in much the same way as Marcel, viz., that only the "highest intensity" of love can penetrate to this region.

Russell's account is also a remarkable illustration of what Marcel has termed the "openness" of the subject, that fundamental characteristic of participation so contrary to all philosophical interpretations of the self as a monad à la Leibniz. To be sure, Russell speaks of "penetrating" to the core of the "loneliness" of the other, but spatial metaphors clearly are virtually unavoidable when using words to describe such an experience and are just as clearly inadequate. One could just as well, and perhaps more accurately, say with Marcel that Russell was with Mrs. Whitehead as that he "penetrated" to the core of her loneliness. Essentially, what Russell is affirming is the reality of intersubjectivity, the felt sense of presence which transcends what we may call the there-ness of the body considered solely as a physical object. This is all the more remarkable

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49 See MB-I, pp. 178, 201-202, 250-251; see also PE, pp. 39-42; CF, 44-45, 47-53.
in that initially Russell seemed chiefly to have been aware of Mrs. Whitehead in her isolation; yet, at that moment, the one thing that cannot be said is that she was truly alone. 50

Even Marcel's somewhat obscure doctrine of the "emergent I" is implicitly illustrated in Russell's account. While doubtless there was a hidden pre-history of which this intense experience could be viewed as the culmination, Russell really does not appear to have anticipated what was coming and his wonder at it has plainly reverberated down through the years of his long life. He says that at the end of five minutes he "became a completely different person." We can hardly be expected to take this literally, nor is it likely that Russell intends it literally; but it does express his sense of amazement at a genuine self-revelation. Nothing takes us more by surprise, as Marcel has said, than our own emotions. There was not, after all, a brand-new Russell created ex nihilo, and it is very plausible to describe what happened as the emergence, however it be explained, of a renewed self.

It is fascinating, too, to observe the succession of non sequiturs emitted by one of the most renowned logicians in

50 Of course I do not mean to suggest she was not alone in her pain, since she alone could feel that. She was alone in it, but not alone with it.
Europe. Whatever their connection with Russell's original insight or with one another, the connection certainly does not seem to be logical. Their mutual relationship with one another and with Russell's previous mode of thinking certainly is "mysterious" and points up quite vividly the transcendence of Russell's experience relative to discursive reason. As the habit of analysis reasserted itself, Russell tells us, the insight faded, and with the fading of the insight all the difficult problems of interpretation became acute. Was the insight genuine? Were the non sequiturs a consequence of trying to objectify and reason about the non-objectifiable? Or were they a concrete instance of the lamentable influence of sentiment on reason? Did Russell, through the intensity of love, really reach to the core of another being or was it an illusion, an event confined wholly to his own consciousness? Can such an experience be explained reductively and without remainder by employing categories from psychology, or is there a dimension of human existence which "really" does elude all the definitions and categories "valid for the purely 'objective' world?"

Even to raise these questions is to indicate, for Marcel, that mystery has not yet been recognized and acknowledged as mystery. But this only underscores what has been said above concerning the limitations of the notion of mystery for
philosophy. Marcel would employ secondary reflection to try to show the inadequacy of any explanation which denied the essential authenticity and truthfulness of Russell's insight, but it is to be doubted that any amount of reflection, primary or secondary, could convince anyone who had not had a similar experience, and there remains the possibility that "the habit of analysis" may reassert itself.

These observations are not to be taken as an epistemological digression, but rather are directly concerned with throwing light upon Marcel's fundamental philosophical position as an existential thinker. It is just because these questions can be raised but not, in Marcel's opinion, resolved by reason that one will be led to examine more closely the phenomena of love, hope, and fidelity in order to try to determine their nature and the part they have to play in the life of existential man. The alternative to such an examination would be tantamount, for Marcel, to accepting as final those depreciatory conclusions of the critical reason which would plunge man back irrevocably into the world of the technological, that world of emptiness permanent residence in which Marcel views as a form of captivity engendering despair.

It is worth noting that in the account of his experience Russell spoke of "the sort of love that religious teachers
have preached." Admittedly this is a vague expression, but it suggests that Russell had in mind something other than the usual "romantic" conception of love. It also points to what Marcel has in mind when he speaks of love. "Love" is one of the most ambiguous and widely abused terms in the language. It is necessary to consider, as clearly as the nature of the case permits, what Marcel means by "love."

b. **The quality of love**

It should be stated clearly at the outset that Marcel does not offer his readers an abstract definition of love. Apart from the fiendish difficulty of devising a definition that would shed more light than it would provoke disagreement, nothing, it will surely be agreed, is more personal, less abstract, and harder to talk about than love. Moreover, a thinker such as Marcel is uninterested in the abstract "essence" of love considered in itself, apart from the persons who love and their concrete situation. Marcel has, nevertheless, expressed himself sufficiently concerning certain characteristic features of what he considers truly to be love to make it possible to obtain a reasonably clear idea of what he does not mean by the term as well as to form a more positive notion of what he does mean. Considering the exceptionally wide range of meanings which can be assigned to the term
in current usage, there is every reason to be grateful that Marcel has, despite his devotion to the concrete, said as much about love as in fact he has said.

The first thing to be emphasized, before discussing the characteristic features of love as Marcel understands it, is cautionary. Love, according to Marcel, has little or nothing to do with biology. When Marcel says the contemporary world is empty and inhuman because it is increasingly loveless, he does not mean contemporary man is suffering from a lack of sexual gratification. Neither does he mean to suggest that there is a dearth of erotic love, meaning sexual attraction accompanied by genuine sentiments of tenderness and affection for the beloved. Marcel does not exclude the possibility that genuine love may be associated with or grow out of erotic love. "'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished," and may often occur. But erotic love presents certain dangers to genuine love, as Marcel understands it, which clearly distinguish between the two. Of course none of the foregoing remarks should be taken to imply any condemnatory attitude on Marcel's part towards either sexual gratification as such--which is, as such, a purely physical act--or towards erotic love.

A thorough reading of Marcel discloses references to seven basic features or characteristics of love as it
manifests in the life of existential man. These characteristics are its fullness, its fundamental unintelligibility, its unselfishness, its responsibility, its respect for the liberty and uniqueness of the other, its indissoluble link with some form of faith on the one hand and with hope on the other, and, finally, its impulse towards indefinite duration (which also, for Marcel, engenders or can engender hope in the life of existential man). These seven characteristics will be discussed in order to make Marcel's conception of authentic love as clear as possible.

When Marcel calls the contemporary world empty, he has in mind a contrast with fullness "which is the contradiction at once of the hollowness of a functionalized world and of the overpowering monotony of a society in which beings take on more and more the appearance of specimens which it is increasingly difficult to differentiate."51 This fullness relates to a fulfillment which corresponds to a profound requirement or demand--exigence--for it. This fulfillment is a mode of participation. Participation in what? Marcel says it is difficult to fill in the gap without relying upon an abstraction which will merely function as a stop gap, i.e., function to make a grammatically complete sentence, but not actually

51MB-II, p. 47.
increase our understanding. 52

The difficulty will easily be seen if the missing element is supplied for Marcel: fulfillment is a mode of participation in being. What does such an expression mean? It has already been seen that Marcel calls "being" that which one attains through love in the I-thou relationship. This does not imply an identity between being and love; love is a response to a being by another being. But it does suggest that love is integral to, perhaps it may even be correct to say intrinsic to, being. Marcel expresses this by a rather strange and somewhat obscure horticultural image: "... love is not something which can be grafted on the affirmation of being." 53

In other words, the two are so intimately linked that it may be said that whenever someone is truly loved they are affirmed as being, and that love is that very affirmation. Without love there is no affirmation and no recognition of being. This is the ground of the claim made at the beginning of this chapter that Marcel's philosophy is really a philosophy of love and that all the exigencies of man with which Marcel concerns himself in his capacity as a philosopher virtually reduce down to one, i.e., the profound,

52 See Ibid., pp. 47, 50-51.
53 Ibid., p. 68.
irreducible, ineradicable, overwhelming exigence of man to
love and to be loved--not for the sake of his function or
utility, but for himself: for what he is, i.e., \textit{qua} being.\footnote{Hence the somewhat misleading discussions of Marcel in some of the secondary sources which characterize his philosophy as a philosophy of being, participation in being, etc. This is certainly true, for being answers to man's need for love. But it obscures Marcel's basic thought and makes it seem more mystifying than it really is. Love is wonder and mystery enough without rendering it virtually invisible and inaccessible by enveloping it in a specialized terminology. When stated plainly, Marcel's fundamental idea may not seem very original. If so, this may be only because it is so utterly true, and perhaps because time adds to man's burden of tragedy by a gradual dulling of his sense of its wonder and mystery. It may also be the case that many, heavily scarred by life's battles and wounded early in the struggle, tend to refuse to acknowledge the power of this exigence because of the very deep, gnawing pain the awareness of its lack engenders in every human being. As for the term "being," it cannot be defined, as Marcel concedes. (See PE, p. 14; MB-II, p. 41.) This is just what Marcel has in mind when, taking incarnation as the point of departure for his philosophy in general and his ontology in particular, he says man is not a datum transparent to himself. Hence there is and can be no objective answer to the questions "Who am I?" or "What is the meaning of my life?" (Cf. MB-I, pp. 113, 184, 187, 210; cf. also MJ, pp. 290, 338; BH, pp. 11, 13-14; CF, pp. 23, 65-66.) Since "being" is indefinable, its philosophical employment would be baffling, if not completely unintelligible, if Marcel did not take as his starting point an experience available to everyone or nearly everyone. That is to say, one's own being as it is possible to attain it in ingatheredness (recollection), intimately present to the subject and yet somehow mysteriously distant; and the being of the other "attained" in love, which almost everyone has experienced at some time in their life. (Cf. MB-II, pp. 36 and 120.) Consequently Marcel cannot make use of the term in quite the traditional way of the ancients and medievals, nor does he want to: "What is Being? I shall ask myself how we can give to Being a meaning that is intelligible for us," i.e., for the twentieth century mind. (Emphasis added; see MB-II, p. 5 and also PM, pp. 52-57.) And just because it is possible to reject these experiences, or refuse them, or reduce them to other terms, being can be betrayed, can be denied, i.e., man is free: love cannot be compelled. If these experiences could be objectified}
It is in love that we taste that which fills our emptiness. "... when we spoke of fulfillment ... we envisaged what I call an experience of fulness, like that which is involved in love, when love knows that it is shared, when it experiences itself as shared." We "taste" because the exigence for love, for Marcel, is inexhaustible: "never enough, always more, always closer. ..." The thirst is insatiable, yet the abyss of love is seemingly bottomless.

Love itself is a mystery, perhaps the mystery of human life. It is fundamentally unintelligible. If we recoil from acknowledging this, Marcel says, it is because we insist on treating the other as a datum, an object—not as a being, a thou. No inventory of characteristics, no string of predicates however long, can furnish the real reason why we love. The beloved casts a "spell" upon the beloved. Love is not really a relation: it is a participation, and so enriches us. To love is not "to know adequately," for even if it should be the case that love dispenses some kind

without loss, it is doubtful if freedom would have any meaning, at least for Marcel. For some of the secondary sources referred to in this note, see the bibliography: Blackham, Cain, Collins, Copleston, and Heinemann.

55MB-II, p. 55; see also MB-I, p. 201.
56CF, p. 72; see Marcel's critique of the idea of perfection, MB-II, pp. 53-55, esp. p. 55.
57See MJ, p. 231-234; of. also pp. 63, 155, 158; MB-II, pp. 121, 153.
privileged "knowledge," it also precedes it as it precedes evaluation. It would be incorrect to interpret Marcel as referring only to the phenomenon of "love at first sight."

For Marcel, all genuine love is beyond predication and judgment, and consequently all love is in the last analysis unaccountable by the objective reason. This does not necessarily mean love is blind. One may, insofar as the beloved is judged "objectively," see all his or her faults—but still one loves. No normal parent would be in the least daunted in his love for his child, however delinquent, by any list of predicates, however formidable, compiled by the chief of some house of correction; upset, doubtless; sorrowful perhaps; but he would not cease to love his child. Love between man and woman, or between friends, may seem to present a different case. Marcel, however, would deny that these kinds of love are essentially different, although they differ in degree of intensity and intimacy from parental love. Insofar as love is genuine it lies beyond all judgment and predication, however one may judge the actual behavior of

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58 See MJ, pp. 221-222; S, p. 111.

59 A popular British novelist, the late Somerset Maugham, has said that the greatest of all tragedies is to love with all your heart someone you know is not "worthy" (i.e., that you judge unworthy) of your love. This is the theme of the latter half of his novel Of Human Bondage.
the beloved or one's friend. Although love can be wounded, it can also rise in triumph from the very ashes of apparent defeat, something difficult to account for if love rested ultimately with the judgment. Beatrice and Gretchen are images of the possible triumph. As for philia, the name of perhaps the most celebrated garden in western religious history, Gethsemane, should remind us that once a life was voluntarily sacrificed for the sake of what would seem to have been as feckless, obtuse, and unreliable group of men as were ever paid the compliment of being accounted friends.

In short, love's object—to use for a moment a term Marcel would care little for—is unique, and no predicate denotes the unique. Predicates are abstractions, and the concrete singular as such eludes abstraction. Conceivably two persons might be characterized by an identical list of predicates, but one might inspire love in a given individual, the other not.

The examples given should make it clear that for Marcel love is essentially unselfish. Love is by nature expansive and other-directed, not restrictive and egoistic. Marcel states explicitly that it comprehends philia to underscore that it is not romantic fury he has in mind. Love

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61 PI, p. 235; see also MB-II, pp. 175-176, 191.
assumes responsibility for the well-being of the other and respects the beloved's liberty and uniqueness. One danger which seems to be inherent in the romantic situation, with erotic love, is just that in such a situation the temptation can be very strong to set up a kind of closed system—a mutual admiration society—which is more akin to selfish desire than it is to love. In the romantic situation it is all too easy to convert the thou back into an object, subordinating the beloved to one's own needs. This betrayal, of course, is always possible and always a threat to the love of incarnate beings, i.e., individuals who present or can present themselves to others both under the aspect of being and as an object.

Since love is beyond all predication and judgment, it is inseparable from a kind of faith. It is, Marcel says, faith itself. When one loves, one opens a kind of unlimited credit account or trust in the other. One lays it down as an axiom that one will not be deceived, thereby anticipating, as it were, all predicates and all experience. Love affirms the being of the other, and not only his being but also the "substantial value" of that being. Love resigns itself in favor of the being which it affirms—this is the root of the

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62 See BH, p. 107; MB-II, pp. 92-94.
unselfishness of love—and in its character as faith refuses to treat itself as merely subjective. The very function of secondary reflection as a method is to defend this refusal against the critical reason which tries to subvert it by opposing "reality" to what reason is apt to condemn as illusion. This faith which refuses to be subverted is the ultimate root of fidelity for Marcel.

It is said above that love, and the need for love, are both inexhaustible. The experience of fullness is not an experience of a frozen perfection. "Never enough, always more, always closer." This insatiability is the source for what Marcel calls the exigence for perennialness or demand for the indefinite duration of love: the love undying celebrated in song and poem, spontaneously vowed, it would seem, by the lover from adolescence to senility. This feature of love is of the utmost importance in the general economy of Marcel's thought and cannot be overemphasized. If one were to be limited to a single epigraph to place at the head of a study of Marcel's thought, it would be a line from one of his own plays, Le Mort de Demain: 65

64 See MB-II, pp. 69-70, 74-75, 153; see also CF, pp. 135-137.
65 MB-II, p. 68; see BH, p. 95, note.
To say that one loves a being means "thou, at least, thou shall not die"

This may be a hard saying for some, accustomed as they may be to accepting death, like the stoics and epicureans, as both natural and final. But Marcel thinks this view ill-considered. Indeed, so strongly does he feel that he goes so far as to assert that the denial of the exigence for perennialness implies nihilism and delivers human existence over to meaninglessness and death. It means, says Marcel, to claim that everything perishes. There are no individual beings, only phantoms mistaken for beings. Love is a delusion. Life is really a simple succession of appearances, each destined to disappear, "a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing." But love will have none of this; love wants to overcome all obstacles, even death. 66

This craving for an everlasting love indicates something further about what Marcel means by being. Love is at once both an affirmation and an appreciation or evaluation. The being one loves seems so valuable, of such surpassing worth, that one cannot bear even the thought of losing it

66MB-II, pp. 65-67, 168-169. Marcel has been preoccupied with this problem since he was a child, since the time his mother died when he was only four. It is not so much the thought of our own death, Marcel maintains, that makes us feel life would be meaningless if death be final, but rather the death of the beloved. Cf. PE, pp. 112-113; PI, pp. 230-231; EB, p. 25.
forever. Being, then, is also something that lasts or should last; it is something that love demands endure. "Because I love you, because I affirm you as being, there is something in you which can bridge the abyss that I vaguely call 'Death'." Despite Marcel's emphasis on the dynamic and despite the contemporary deification of change, Marcel does not appear to believe man can be happy if everything in life is perpetually slipping from his grasp.

But the reality revealed by love can also be lost or denied. One may fail to maintain the thou as thou. One may grow accustomed to the presence of the beloved and fail to participate effectively with the other in the authentic life of intersubjectivity. Indeed, love, and therefore being, is constantly threatened by betrayal. Moreover, death is inevitable. Despair is always possible, and the denial of being which is at once the genesis and the concomitant of despair. Nihilism cannot be "objectively" refuted, for man lives in a world whose very structure is a standing invitation to despair.

For one thing, just because love is beyond all predication and all judgment, it is always possible to say the thou and the he are purely phenomenological, that they refer only

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67 MB-II, p. 69.
to mental attitudes. Moreover, it must be admitted that there are experiences common enough to make a denial of being plausible at times. A proverb of the language, "She mistook her goose for a swan," testifies to this. Who has not at some time or other felt their trust had been betrayed by spouse or friend (or even both at once)? At such bitter times it is very easy to say that what had formerly seemed most real was only deception. This appears to happen so frequently with erotic love that Marcel, as we have seen, hesitates even to identify it with authentic love. Furthermore, love can always be denied because of egoism or selfishness. One is always free to treat the other as an object, simply as an occasion to achieve one's own purposes. As if this were not enough, the dominant view of the contemporary world of science and technology tends to see man as basically just another, complicated kind of

68 See BH, p. 106; MJ, p. 64.
69 See PM, pp. 40-42.
70 But see Charles Williams for a counter-view. Williams argues that in romantic love we do really "see" the glory of the being of the other, but that the vision fades and we then may doubt our former sanity. This is admirably set out in Williams' fine study of Dante, The Figure of Beatrice (New York: the Noonday Press, 1961), cf. pp. 7-8, 14-16, 35-38. It is also a theme of several of his novels, notably Shadows of Ecstasy and All Hallow's Eve.
71 See MB-I, p. 257; MB-II, pp. 119, 121-122.
machine, and death as merely the final breakdown of that machine. Such a view influences the image men form of themselves to one degree or another. Finally, as was said before, death is inescapable.

A world which is always liable to despair, however, is also a world in which it is possible to hope. Love and hope are inseparable, according to Marcel. This chapter, therefore, will conclude with a brief consideration of this second kind of response of existential man.

2. **Hope and Despair**

Since hope is not a central concern of this thesis, only the main outlines of Marcel's doctrine will be given. To omit mention of hope altogether, however, would seriously distort the general exposition of Marcel's philosophy of existential man.

Marcel has explicitly repudiated an easy optimism that has sometimes been attributed to him. He is quite aware of the problem of evil in general and the horrors of the twentieth century in particular, and fully cognizant of the formidable difficulty of making hope, as he understands it, seem reasonable to anyone not

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72 MB-II, pp. 164-167.


74 S, p. 65.
temperamentally inclined toward seeing life as just a bowl of cherries.\textsuperscript{75} Indeed, in a late book Marcel says he is so despondent about the probable future of the human race that if he did not believe in God, he would be tempted to commit suicide.\textsuperscript{76}

The negative correlate of hope, according to Marcel, is despair; its positive correlate is love. Despair is identified with that nihilism mentioned in connection with the exigence for perennialness discussed in the preceding section. This means that for Marcel the ultimate root of despair is the acceptance of death as final, as the last word on life. The root of hope is the mystery of love, which is oriented towards immortality. In a work of his middle period Marcel defined despair as the act by which one despairs of reality as a whole "as one might despair of a person." One is unable to evaluate reality in such a way as to conclude that anything in it could withstand "the process of dissolution at the heart of things." Hope, on the other hand, "consists in asserting that there is at the heart of being, beyond all data . . . and all calculating, a mysterious principle which . . . cannot but will that which I will, if what I will deserves to

\textsuperscript{75}See HV, pp. 33-34 and S, pp. 108-109.

\textsuperscript{76}In MS, p. 249. The prominence of the theme of despair as integral to the human situation may be seen in the huge number of references to it to be found in Marcel's works. For some of the more important passages, see PE, pp. 12, 26-27, 28, 30-31; BH, pp. 74-75, 92-93, 95-96, 104, 110; CF, pp. 172-173; HV, pp. 33-34, 152; MB-I, pp. 201-202; MB-II, pp. 164-165; MS, pp. 211-227; PM, pp. 21-22, 32-33, 41-43; PI, pp. 229-230, 243; S, p. 109.
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be willed and is, in fact, willed by the whole of my being."\textsuperscript{77}

This was Marcel's view in the thirties, before he lived through the German occupation of his country during World War Two. He has retained this view of hope substantially unaltered to the present day, but subsequent to the war he shifted the emphasis from the personal to the communal, viewing hope as the response to an experience of captivity, of a yearning and unshakeable belief in liberation from time considered as a prison which prevents one from rising to a certain fullness of life.\textsuperscript{78}

This shift in emphasis led Marcel to revise his definition of hope. According to the revised definition, hope is essentially the openness of a subject who has experienced the intimacy of shared love to such an extent that he is able to hope for his ultimate liberation from death in the "teeth of will and knowledge."\textsuperscript{79} He who despairs, then, is one who is unable to do this, and there seems to be the implication that if he cannot it is because he does not or cannot love enough or well enough. But even if one does love, it is always possible to view hope "objectively", i.e., regard it as a desire which "wraps itself up in illusory judgments to distort an objective reality which it is interested in disguising.

\textsuperscript{77}PE, pp. 27-28.
\textsuperscript{78}See HV, pp. 30-32, 52-53; MB-II, pp. 178-179; EB, p. 142.
\textsuperscript{79}HV, p. 67.
Marcel's problem, then, is to convince or persuade his reader that hope, so understood, is not an illusion.

Marcel attempts to do this by first distinguishing hope from desire. He criticizes Spinoza severely for confusing them. Marcel insists on this distinction because if it is once admitted that hope can refer to anything specific, as he apparently thinks desire always does, then hope will be included in the world of objects, a world in which disappointment is always possible in principle. What is objective is subject to verification and perennialness in principle simply cannot be verified. "I hope . . . " therefore, must not be interpreted as meaning "I hope that . . . " such and such a thing will or will not happen. Therefore, for Marcel, hope is only possible on the level of intersubjectivity, of the "us." One does not hope for personal immortality as such, although one may desire it. What one hopes for is the destiny of that living link with the other.

Furthermore, hope is only possible if the categories which require a clearly defined line between fact on the one hand and what one desires or wishes on the other can be transcended.

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80PE, p. 29.
81See HV, pp. 32-33; MB-II, pp. 176-177; EB, p. 142.
82See HV, pp. 32-33, 45, 49-50, 57-58; MB-II, p. 181.
84HV, p. 10.
Marcel has already initiated this movement of transcendence by insisting on the distinction between hope and desire. He attempts to complete it by arguing that presence, that mystery of being, cannot be construed as subject to dissolution because it belongs to a domain to which the definitions and categories of the world of things do not apply. "... nothing that I can say about things ... can concern the thou."85

Marcel does indeed affirm that no one could hope if he thought his reasons for hoping were insufficient. But to base hope on the calculus of probabilities is to distort its meaning.86 If it should be objected that this means either hope is irrational or a radical fideism, Marcel replies by introducing the distinction between objective thought and "loving thought" which repudiates or "transcends" facts. For example, a mother's hope that her son, missing in action since 1944, is still alive involves an objective judgment. According to Marcel's distinction, the mother's judgment is false, but not her hope--the "loving thought" at the root of her judgment.87

Marcel's approach to hope is strongly influenced by his Christian faith. Hope, he says, is inseparable from an absolute

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85MB-II, p. 172; cf. also pp. 28-30; 66-68; MB-I, p. 268. Here Marcel invokes his distinction between ens and esse.
86HV, pp. 64-65.
87Ibid., p. 65.
faith in an Absolute Thou. It is an essentially religious bond linking the subject to his situation. The only remedy for systematized empiricism (i.e., science) is hope in the Absolute Thou.88 Ten years before delivering his first public lecture on hope Marcel noted in his journal that hope was "a purely Christian datum . . . ."89 The prominence of hope as a theme in the work of Marcel's later years is, therefore, a strong indication of the importance to him of the religious import of his philosophy, a topic which will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

From what has been said about the nature of love, particularly under its aspects as an experience of fullness and as a form of faith, and from the fact that love engenders, or at least is inseparable from, hope, it may be seen that fidelity would be an essential part of Marcel's philosophy. This may be the clearer if we recall that fidelity is the pledge of love, the sign of its authenticity; and is the locus of hope as well insofar as hope is linked with love. This is because the faithful response to loving trust is precisely that for which and in which one hopes. It is now necessary, therefore, to examine what Marcel has to say about fidelity.

89In 1931; see BH, p. 94.
CHAPTER IV
FIDELITY

With this chapter we reach the heart of this thesis, what Marcel has himself called "the truly central position occupied by fidelity in the general economy of my thought." The aim of this chapter is precisely to locate this notion in the general scheme of Marcel's thought, to exhibit its significance, delineate its features, and refer it to its proper object. It will be the task of the following chapter to relate the notion of fidelity, as conceived by Marcel, to his thesis that fidelity can and should be creative. This chapter, accordingly, is divided into three sections, (1) the place and significance of fidelity in Marcel's thought, (2) the characteristics of fidelity, and (3) the object of fidelity.

In attempting to place the notion of fidelity within the general scheme of Marcel's thought it will be necessary to mention certain of its elements which have already been discussed in preceding chapters. This will provide an opportunity, however, to take a synoptic view of Marcel's philosophy which has, up to this point, been examined seriatim.

1. The Place and Significance of Fidelity in Marcel's Thought

From the very first chapter Marcel's philosophy has been

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1 CF, p. 149; cf. also BH, p. 42; PE, p. 34.
seen as a personal response to what in his judgment constitutes the situation of contemporary man. As we have seen, Marcel shares with many of his contemporaries a dissatisfaction so intense with that situation that it amounts to a condemnation of it. According to Marcel’s own diagnosis, the characteristic features of contemporary life are its emptiness or hollowness, its sadness, the felt alienation of contemporary man from the life around him and from his own life, and the increasing impersonality of human relationships with a consequent dehumanization of modern life. This emptiness of contemporary life is aggravated by the disintegration as it were, of man’s self-image due to the misapplication of the functional concept of human nature which tends to dissolve the unity and integrity of the individual, subvert his concept of human dignity, and deprive his life of its significance or meaning. The primacy of the technological and the all-pervasive influence of scientific method, with its emphasis on the objective and impersonal, only intensifies this lamentable state of affairs by reinforcing the functional and impersonal view of man. Such a world can only be a breeding ground for unhappiness and growing despair.²

In contrast with this world of emptiness, Marcel envisages an experience of fullness which would be its precise contrary.

Such an experience, however, appears to come into direct collision with the view of man developed by the empirical sciences. According to that view, as Marcel interprets it, man is essentially the determinate and transitory outcome of the fortuitous combinations of matter-in-motion. The "reality" of the individual is reduced to a unity of chemical and physical processes which has evolved over aeons from non-conscious matter, and which is doomed to final and irreversible destruction with the dispersal of its material components at the death of the individual. Ultimately, when the planet no longer maintains the conditions necessary to sustain life, the entire race will share the inexorable fate to which the individual is now subject: to be swallowed up by death. Ultimately everything passes, everything decays, not only individuals but all their works and all their monuments. Not only do the captains and the kings depart, but the cathedrals and choirs crumble into final ruin. The Sistine Ceiling and Keats' nightingale; the St. Matthew Passion and the Olympia Apollo; the courage of Leonidas and the blood of the martyrs; the wrath of Achilles and the Light of Asia--their very memory shall perish. "Things fall apart; the center will not hold." It cannot, for there is no center. One may advert one's gaze. One may try to divert oneself by sporting "beneath the bough." One may occupy oneself with business or even with plain living and high thinking. It makes no difference in the long run. And if one cannot avoid
thinking about it, in the light of this appalling vision—for that is what it is—it is difficult to resist Koheleth's judgment: all is vanity under the sun. The Great Fizzle.

If anyone reading these lines has ever loved, really loved, any of the things just mentioned, then he is in a position to understand what Marcel means by the exigence of transcendence or the exigence for being, the demand for an experience of fullness and not of dust and ashes. If this is so when it is only a matter of a partial catalogue of mankind's cultural heritage, how much more so when it is a matter of one's very self and of those he loves. But is not this demand mere sentiment, merely the feeling heart's refusal to bow to the inevitable?

This is the very crux of the matter. If it is formulated as a problem, Marcel tells us, it will not yield an answer we can live with. Nihilism cannot be refuted. Despair is always possible; suicide is always possible. Possible, but not inevitable. Here lies one of the tasks of philosophy, as Marcel conceives it. What he has called secondary reflection can be employed to resist the attack of the critical reason and to focus on certain humble experiences which have been omitted or ignored by the objective and scientific picture of man. If this is done, man then stands revealed as something of an anomaly: one thing in a world of things, yet present to himself in a way altogether different from the way mere things are present to him or to each other. The
individual is open to reality which not only surrounds him but permeates his very being, and in which he participates. Feeling is one of the principal modes of this participation. Sensation is itself only one mode of feeling participation in this reality.

Love is another such mode, and no less real than sensation. If the individual is a mysterious being, so are others. If sensation is a mystery, no less so is the sense of one's presence to oneself and the sense of presence of the other revealed through love. Equally mysterious is that community of shared life, of intersubjectivity, which is engendered and maintained by love. Love is the channel of communion between human beings, the manifestation of their mutual respect, the guarantee of the individual's liberty and individuality. It is in the experience of shared love that man tastes that fullness which is the contrary of the emptiness of modern life. Only through and in love can man attain to something relatively permanent in the ever-changing, ever-perishing flux of things. This relatively permanent element or quality revealed through and grasped in love Marcel calls "being." It is one and the same time a reality and a value.

But man can relate to himself or to others under a dual aspect, either as a thing or as a being. Man seen as a thing or object is correlative with man as epistemological subject, as knower. Man as being is correlative with man as subject as such, with his reality as a subject which can never be fully
objectified. When man relates himself to others epistemologically, so to speak, they are objects or things to him, hims or its—third persons in a continuing dialogue with himself or others. This epistemological relationship is a determining factor of the individual's attitude in his concrete situation as far as action is concerned. Man's attitude toward things or objects is essentially one of understanding for the sake of manipulation. Marcel does not condemn this attitude as such, which is, after all, as natural to man as is his unslakable thirst for knowledge. Scientific technology is only the most recent and most sophisticated outcome of this attitude so necessary for man's very survival.

But through love man can have access to another dimension of reality closed to him if his attitude is determined solely by the requirements of valid, objective knowledge. Love is both the affirmation of this reality and of its value. Love is inseparable from appreciation or value, which the objective attitude refuses to recognize. The fullness or fulfillment for which man longs and which he can find only in and through love requires, therefore, recognition and acknowledgment of a dimension of reality which can never be attained if one insists upon the perspective of objective or descriptive knowledge as the sole criterion for judging what is real and what is illusion.\(^3\) When the individual relates

\(^3\)MB-II, p. 52.
himself to the other through love, the other is no longer an object, a him or it, a possibility which perhaps can be exploited to the individual's advantage. Rather the other becomes a thou, a presence embodying or manifesting a transcendent value (transcendent relative to the world of objects), a focal point or center capable of being invoked and of responding with love to invocation or appeal.

The individual's attitude toward another who is thou to him is quite different from his attitude toward things or toward another person regarded as an object. Authentic love is unselfish, other-directed. Love does not seek to dominate or manipulate the beloved, but respects the beloved's liberty and individuality. Of course love admits of degree, and the thou relationship accordingly admits of being arranged hierarchically from something resembling a mystical communion of souls at one extreme to a strictly pragmatic, ad hoc association which scarcely qualifies as a thou relationship at the other. But insofar as the other is recognized as being, is loved, that is to say, his or her reality is recognized as transcending the world of objects and calling for an attitude and response different from that elicited by things.

While this experience of fullness to be found only in the

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4MB-I, pp. 219-220. 
5See Ibid., pp. 255-256.
shared love with another being is at once the best and in itself
the most permanent value in human life, our "grasp" of it is still
precarious at best. It is threatened on all sides by the very
structure of human existence and the human condition: by doubt,
denial, betrayal, and, finally, seemingly by death. For love is,
at bottom, an activity of man's freedom. It is inseparable from,
even to be identified with, a kind of faith or trust in the other and
in its own affirmation of the reality and value of the other as
being. Love essentially involves belief in the other: "I am sure
that you will not betray." And it is an assurance that goes
beyond the evidence. 6

Moreover, and fundamentally, since the reality revealed in
and through love transcends all objectivity whatsoever, it cannot
be grasped or understood by human reason. It is beyond any
and all predication. 7 Man is therefore always free to denounce it
as illusory; and considering the cruelty and appalling suffering,
the disappointments, heartaches, sorrows, injustice, and general
flood of troubles to which flesh is heir to--what philosophers
rather hygienically refer to as the problem of evil--there can be
little cause for wonder if love is frequently misplaced or betrayed.
In short, the sources of and temptations to infidelity are numerous

6MB-II, p. 89.
7MB-I, p. 256 and MB-II, pp. 119, 121.
and continuous.

Thus, by the back door, so to speak, and by a negative approach, we finally arrive at our principle theme. For in the last analysis, infidelity, for Marcel, is the betrayal of love and fidelity the continued affirmation of love, its active refusal to treat itself as subjective. Viewed in this light, fidelity is the free rejection of the ever-proffered possibility to despair.  

This last statement, however, can scarcely be considered an exhaustive characterization of fidelity or of its significance for Marcel. In the domain of love there can be no criteriology, for criteriology, according to Marcel, pertains to and is only relevant in the order of the objective and the problematical. But fidelity, as Marcel says, is of eminent value for distinguishing genuine love. It is its existential "indicator."  

Moreover, fidelity is necessary for every meaningful human relationship. Just because man's world is so constituted that despair is always a possibility and death the inexorable fate of all, life can be seen as offering nothing beyond the present moment. Every bond, every vow, every commitment, can appear to be an arbitrary prolongation of the passing moment, of the hic et nunc. But to surrender to this appearance, to reject fidelity, would be

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8See MB-II, pp. 69-70, 75.  
9Pe, p. 20.
to imprison oneself within a series of disconnected, concrete, ever-changing situations from which it would be virtually impossible to extract any meaning. For Marcel the consequence of such a surrender are ruinous. Love itself could hardly be said to exist, for existence requires concrete manifestation in action, and fidelity is the supreme sign of love in act. The operation of love implies continuity and, as we shall see presently, the transcendence of time.

Furthermore, the rejection of fidelity would tend to make social life impossible. If man acts and can only act on the basis of how he thinks and feels at the moment, then "nobody could depend on anybody." The immediate situation taken as the sole basis for acting, from Marcel's viewpoint, could only encourage an attitude of betrayal leading to treason becoming first a habit, and then a rule. Such an attitude can only lead to "insanity and ruin" and hasten the disintegration of the "truly human."\textsuperscript{10} At stake here is the validity of promises of all kinds as well as a general faithfulness to commitments without which human relationships cannot be said to exist and a meaningful life would become impossible. The emptiness and frenetic quality--often declining in its later stages to a kind of apathy--of a life lived from and for the moment has been a theme on which so many moralists of the

\textsuperscript{10}See BH, pp. 110-111; CF, pp. 160-161; HV, p. 96.
past have commented that it is unnecessary to elaborate it further here.

But the significance of fidelity for Marcel has even deeper roots than those underlying an ordered and meaningful social life. Fidelity arises naturally from the very depths of love itself and manifests its profoundest need: to overcome the prison of time and space. "Prison" should not be understood simply as a metaphor. Man's urge to conquer space and time can be seen in most of his activities throughout his known history: in his feats of exploration, his technological triumphs of transportation and communication, the monumental effort he has devoted to preserving the achievements of the past and the memory of its great men, and in his efforts to divine the future, whether by augury, prophecy, astrology, or "parapsychic" communication with the world of "spirits." The human spirit is restless, men feel cabined and confined in their four-dimensional world, whatever the naturalists may say and whatever common sense may appear to dictate. To be sure, utility has played an enormous role in all these developments; but who can fail to see that even in the technological sphere the developments have frequently gone beyond the strictly necessary in any pragmatic sense?

Nowhere is this urge to overcome space and time more evident that in the love lyrics of mankind, East and West. Even in the most banal of tin pan alley lyrics lovers pledge their
undying fidelity "til the end of time." Love, then, yearns to transcend space and time, but it can only do so if it cherishes and maintains the presence of the beloved. Indeed, presence can be maintained within one even when one has been separated from the beloved by death. But the maintenance of presence in the very teeth of absence is just what fidelity means to Marcel. "Fidelity exists only when it defies absence. . . ."\textsuperscript{11} "... fidelity is the active perpetuation of presence. . . ."\textsuperscript{12} It is the contrary of "out of sight, out of mind." If, negatively, fidelity is the rejection of despair, then, positively, it is love's expression of its recognition and affirmation of something of permanent value in the other.\textsuperscript{13} Without the fidelity which is the manifestation of this recognition, there is no love in Marcel's understanding of the term, although there may be attraction and even mutual association for a definite purpose or aim. In the latter kind of relationship, however, there remains an element of selfishness, of subordination of the beloved to one's own needs and desires. Understandably, then, when the other is no longer able to satisfy this need or desire--for whatever reason--the individual will seek his satisfaction elsewhere. But genuine love, for Marcel, "in the fullest

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12]PE, p. 36.
\item[13]ibid., p. 35.
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and most concrete sense of the word . . . seems to rest on the unconditional:  
*I shall continue to love you no matter what happens.*"^{14}

Fidelity is also essential for that proper appreciation and preservation of the values of the past upon which the continuity of civilized life depends. This is another aspect of man's need to transcend time, not only forward in order to command the future, but also backward to preserve his cultural memories, lacking which a given society can scarcely make adequate use of its current experience and runs a risk of losing its identity in a manner similar to an amnesiac. Here fidelity provides the only real link between past and present, past and future: between those who have preceded us in death and to whom we owe so much and those who will succeed ourselves, for whom they and we have sacrificed so greatly. To be sure, this term "past" suggests different things to different people. For many today it may suggest only a museum, the "dead hand" weighing upon the present, or even a slavish adherence to outworn ideas and moribund customs. For those who have this kind of attitude towards the past, the invocation a few pages back not only might have failed to call forth a response, but may perhaps have put them off altogether. The mention of those luminous names, however, was intended to

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^{14}EB, p. 74. Marcel's italics.
call forth a reverberatory sympathy, an inner vibration of gratitude and admiration for value preserved and bequeathed such as the young Henry James must have felt when he went "reeling and moaning" through the streets of Rome on the first evening of his visit to the Eternal City as a young man alone, and on his own.

The example of Henry James is not accidental. James certainly cannot be branded as a slavish imitator of the past; on the contrary, he was a very creative artist. There is indeed considerable evidence that the most vital expressions of both scientific and artistic creativity are coupled with a distinct awareness and acknowledgment of past achievements in a given field. It is probably impossible to convey to anyone who has not experienced it for himself just how enriching, fruitful, and "mind-expanding" a creative study of the past can be. This kind of experience cannot be enjoyed merely by reading a lot of books or registering for a certain number of courses devoted to "culture." Something of what it is like can perhaps be suggested by a creative teacher who can to a certain extent project his own enthusiasm and love to his students, whether in a formal situation like the classroom, or more informally--and for that very reason perhaps all the more effectively--as Browning's father conveyed his love for

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Homer to his young son. 16

A love of the past which is not the expression of a kind of inner petrification is inseparable from fidelity and love. What Marcel calls our "spiritual heritage" is dependent upon our awareness of this heritage, our recognition of its value, and our acknowledgment of a debt of gratitude for benefits received. Such a fidelity does not consist in a blind attachment to the holograph copy of the B Minor Mass or an unreasoning demand that the aesthetic canons of the Greeks be slavishly followed. It can only survive in a climate of diffuse gratitude rooted, as Marcel says, in generosity and creative memory. 17 The values achieved by the past are not like possessions which can be passed on, but like the arts which must be actively acquired. 18 Gratitude, like fidelity, is not a thing of the moment, but involves the memory and an active struggle against inner forces of dispersal and distraction. Such an inner achievement is inseparable from fidelity. 19 The gratitude we feel is diffuse, Marcel says, and is not directed to a multitude of dead people but to the spirit embodied in the figure in the past who discovered for us that world of value which inspires us. 20 Thus we feel grateful to Bach not so much as a man, but

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16 See Browning's "Development."
18 Ibid., p. 23.
20 Ibid., p. 29.
as a mediator between ourselves and the marvelous world revealed by and in his music.

The link with meaning should be emphasized when considering fidelity as gratitude for the achievements of the past. Few things are sadder to observe than those who are surrounded on all sides by living reminders of what they owe to the past and for whom these are so many meaningless relics or obstacles to selfish enjoyment. Marcel speaks truly when he says that a spiritual heritage does not exist for those who have no awareness of it. This sense of meaninglessness can be seen not only in the behavior of those Romans of the Middle Ages who looked on the Forum merely as a convenient quarry to furnish building materials for their town houses, but also in the behavior of those who would thoughtlessly destroy institutional repositories of value because of their ignorance of the fragility of civilization and the immense sacrifices required to achieve and maintain it.21

Perhaps most significantly of all, fidelity is essential to the general scheme of Marcel's thought because without it there would be no way to transcend the functional view of man or for existential man to confer concrete meaning on his life. The few hints

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21 Marcel tells the story of an American officer participating in the liberation of France in World War II who told one of Marcel's friends that he should be glad his hometown in Burgundy had been virtually destroyed: "You should be grateful to us for bombing all this old stuff. Now you can have a clean new town." See DW, p. 22.
and meager observations, direct and indirect, to be found in Marcel's writings which support this statement have to be eked out with a considerable amount of inference, but the inference is sound and harmonizes with Marcel's philosophy as a whole.

When man is viewed functionally, his unity is shattered and he has the greatest difficulty recognizing himself in the agglomeration of functions to which he seemingly is reduced. A concrete philosophy such as Marcel's has no place for a unifying concept as abstract and impersonal as substance. Furthermore, Marcel has said he has always viewed that particular concept with reserve. Existential man cannot be abstracted from his concrete situation, and his situation changes to some degree from moment to moment. A purely situational analysis, consequently, could no more confer unity of action or meaning of life than can the functional view of man. Man himself is the source of that unity inasmuch as he has freedom and is capable of a creative fidelity. Unity of purpose and action is secured and meaning conferred on one's life through the free, creative, and faithful adherence to a cause, either personal or supra-personal. This amounts to saying that unity is achieved by the consecration of

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22 See PE, pp. 10, 12; EB, p. 18.
24 Creative fidelity and freedom will be discussed in the following chapter.
one's life in the service of a cause which transcends the individual even though such consecration may entail grave sacrifice, ultimately perhaps even the sacrifice of his life.

Consecration not only confers unity on existential man; it also confers meaning. A consecrated life is a living testimony or witness to the fidelity rooted in love and the recognition of something permanent of supreme value. For Marcel, this fidelity and this testimony ultimately points towards God, the Absolute Thou, and thus his thought may be said ultimately to have a religious orientation. But it is clear that fidelity as consecration, as a source of unity and meaning, also can and does exist on the purely natural level, and that should it be lacking it is difficult to see how an individual could avoid a floating life imprisoned in the hic et nunc and at the mercy of all the tyrannies, major and minor, of his environment. 25

In conclusion, the central place and significance of fidelity in Marcel's thought may be summarized as follows. In the light of

25 Cf. PE, p. 97; HV, p. 25; MB-I, pp. 200-206; MB-II, pp. 145, 166-168. It is worth noting that Marcel goes out of his way to acknowledge that he was influenced by Royce's theory of loyalty. According to Royce, the individual is only himself by virtue of subordinating himself to a cause which he freely chooses and which choice is the ultimate source of the only unity an individual can possess, i.e., a unification of the will. Royce also insisted that the cause to which one devoted oneself could not be an abstract principle, but must be either personal or supra-personal in the sense that it is a concrete unity whereby many persons are joined together in one common life. See RM, pp. ix, xii, 110-111.
Marcel's view of being, love, and of hope and despair, fidelity may be characterized, in a general way, positively as the manifestation of love's recognition and affirmation of something of permanent value in the other; and negatively as the manifestation of love's freely-chosen rejection of nihilism and despair. Fidelity is love's manifestation (albeit not its only manifestation), i.e., its concrete expression in, but transcending, a given situation. Fidelity is, then, rooted in the human condition existentially considered.

If the above is accepted as a correct placement and an accurate general description of fidelity, what of its significance? It may be said that its significance for Marcel is six-fold:

1. It is the most reliable existential indicator of genuine love.

2. It is an essential condition for any stable and meaningful human relationship.

3. A corollary of (2), it is a condition for the existence of an orderly social life.

4. It is the principal means by which existential man can, in his depths, transcend both space and time, overcoming absence, especially the absence brought by death.

5. A corollary of (4), fidelity is the living bond which joins the present with the past, especially with respect to the values and achievements of the past.
6. Finally, fidelity is the existential condition for transcending the functional view of man and for conferring unity and meaning on his life.

Marcel can scarcely be said to have been exaggerating, then, when he claimed that fidelity occupied a "truly central position" in the general scheme of his thought. Without fidelity man would lack unity and his life meaning; he could not enter into meaningful human relationships; ordered social life would be rendered practically impossible; the link between living and dead, past and present, would be severed; and death would be left with the last word. In short, without fidelity existential man would be delivered over to despair, which is, by definition, a hopeless condition.

Having specified the place and significance of fidelity in Marcel's scheme of thought, we may now focus on fidelity itself.

2. Characteristics of Fidelity

Marcel has stated that fidelity has been neglected by modern philosophers generally for three reasons. Historically, fidelity was associated with the feudalism of the Middle Ages. It is, moreover, very difficult to conceive, especially by what Marcel calls a "universalist philosophy of the rationalist type," while philosophies of empirical inspiration tend to overlook it and concentrate on other aspects of normal life. Finally, according to Marcel,
thinkers influenced by Nietzsche tend to identify fidelity with an outworn conservatism. In the light of the conclusions of the preceding section, the significance of fidelity for Marcel is such that it can hardly be regarded as the expression of a feudal phase of consciousness or a manifestation of an "outworn conservatism." Nevertheless, it may be best to begin with a clear statement as to what fidelity is not before discussing what it is.

It is not simply obedience. For Marcel, obedience is a function of an office and does not necessarily and fundamentally involve the person who obeys. Obedience only affects certain definite actions which one is obligated to carry out, but it cannot make any claims on the judgment or the feelings. Fidelity, on the other hand, does involve the human quality of the office holder (if it is a question of an office holder). Obedience can only claim a delimited sphere, and if this sphere should be extended obedience tends to become debased, to turn into servitude. Under certain conditions obedience can and should be required; but fidelity should be deserved. The chief question is to what or to whom one should be faithful, a question to which we will recur when we consider the object of fidelity.

This distinction between fidelity and obedience correlates with

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26 CF, p. 153.  
27 See HV, pp. 127-128.  
28 Ibid., p. 128.
a distinction Marcel draws between service and being useful (servir and servir à). As we saw in the preceding section, Marcel thinks of fidelity as the sign of a consecrated life which draws from this consecration its unity and meaning. A consecrated life, however, is a life of service to some high purpose or even to some deliberately chosen social end. Being useful, on the other hand, pertains to instrumentalities and not to persons. An instrumentality discharges a function: only a person, i.e., man qua being, is capable of service. Viewed purely biologically or socially, human life can be analyzed from a functional standpoint, but this is life on a lower plain than that of which man is capable. To live in the fullest sense, Marcel tells us, is not only to exist or subsist, but rather to place oneself in the service of. . . . 29

This distinction may be clearer if an example is given of a situation which excludes fidelity as such. If X accepts a salaried position, he can be said to be in the employ of so-and-so. He is paid a stated sum in order to make himself useful to his employer. But in Marcel's eyes it would be an euphemism to say X was "in the service" of Y. X's work is not an expression of consecrated service. While X accepts Y's money, he owes him a certain obedience within a delimited sphere, but he is under no obligation to feel any devotion to Y personally or to his business. X may

29Ibid., pp. 125-126.
even judge Y to be an undesirable person. If the money stops, X is under no obligation to continue to work for nothing. On the other hand, if X's employer should judge he no longer has a use for X, he may terminate X's employment. There is nothing in the relationship which obliges Y to retain X in his employ when X no longer can be useful to him.

Fidelity, on the other hand, as said above, involves the recognition of something permanent. Necessarily so, for life cannot be consecrated to the service of something essentially transient. The individual's life as consecrated service is or can become a living testimony or witness to his commitment, which, in turn, is a result of the exercise of his freedom. Thus fidelity can no more be coerced or dismissed than love itself. But while commitment is a consequence of the exercise of freedom, its possibility depends upon the fact that man can distinguish himself from his momentary situation and consequently can treat himself as somehow transcending his own life process, i.e., recognize that something can have permanent value for him. The recognition of something of permanent value is also the basis for constancy of behavior, which is one of the three positive characteristics of fidelity.

31 HV, p. 133.
32 BH, p. 42.
These characteristics are constancy, presence, and spontaneity.\textsuperscript{33} Constancy is not identical with fidelity, but it is one of its essential characteristics. Marcel defines constancy as perseverance in a certain goal. So defined, it is not difficult to see why he is reluctant to make a simple identification of constancy with fidelity. A monstrous egoist treacherous to everyone with whom he comes into contact may nevertheless exhibit great firmness of purpose in pursuit of power, wealth, or some other objective. Such behavior reflects the individual's recognition of something of permanent value to him, but does not exhibit what Marcel means by a "consecrated" life.

Presence is a more delicate characteristic to elucidate than constancy. Presence presupposes the \textit{thou} relationship which Marcel considers an essential ingredient in authentic fidelity. One who is truly faithful is \textit{with} you, and not just in a mechanical or "conscientious" way. Marcel insists on presence as essential to authentic fidelity in order to distinguish it both from that constancy of behavior of which even the egoist is capable, and also to distinguish it from outwardly correct behavior which may actually be inspired by an irksome sense of duty or even by a wish to deceive. From a behavioral viewpoint there may be nothing to distinguish simple constancy or outwardly correct behavior from

\textsuperscript{33}See CF, pp. 153-156.
true fidelity. But there is a real difference, and this difference can often be sensed by the person most concerned even though he may not be able to point to anything specific to justify his suspicion to an outsider. Nearly everyone has at one time or another "sensed" a disparity between outward behavior and inner attitude in the case of purely social "friendships," and the same observation could be made about some marriages and some political or religious affiliations.

The requirement of presence for an authentic fidelity in order to distinguish it from simple constancy and from outwardly correct behavior points to its third essential characteristic, the element of spontaneity, "itself radically independent of the will." This is the "uncoercible" element, and taken in conjunction with presence makes it clear that for Marcel fidelity is ultimately rooted in love, that the commitment of which fidelity is the concrete expression is a consequence of the recognition and acknowledgment of something in the other which is loved and affirmed as of permanent value. There can be no service, then, and no authentic fidelity, except in the name of love. And love is spontaneous: it cannot be commanded, not even by the person himself. In this connection Marcel has an acute psychological observation to make regarding friendship, but which could be applied to other human

\[\text{\textsuperscript{34}bid., p. 155.}\]
relationships as well. Suppose, he says, someone wills a consistent and perfectly correct behavior toward another not from a felt commitment but from a sense of duty. If such a person has a sensitive nature, he may secretly rebel against the discipline this sense of duty imposes. Instead of faithful friendship, the other actually may come to inspire a feeling of chronic irritation which can build up into hatred and culminate in mutual aversion.35 Lacking the element of spontaneity, friendship cannot really be said to exist on a solid basis, to be a fidelity in concreto.

Marcel recognizes that spontaneity as an essential element of authentic fidelity raises a formidable difficulty; namely, how can an individual extract from himself in regard to the other, or from the other in regard to himself, an effective fidelity which involves a pure spontaneity which by definition cannot be coerced? To meet this difficulty Marcel is compelled to ask how it is possible to swear fidelity at all.36

Factually, Marcel says, fidelity is sworn on the basis of an inner disposition. Obviously one cannot promise that the inner disposition will not change: either oneself or the other may change. But can one promise to act as if this disposition would not change? To answer this question, we must know just what is

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35 See Ibid., p. 156.
36 See Ibid., pp. 158-164.
meant by "can?" According to Marcel's analysis, this can mean either (1) does one have the right to affirm that he can, feeling differently, act as if his feelings were unchanged? or (2) does one have the right to act as if one's feelings were unchanged even when this is not the case? Marcel concentrates his attention on the second question as the more significant, and there can be no doubt but that he believes it is possible to act as if one's feelings were unchanged. The important question, then, for Marcel is eliminating the apparent conflict between the characteristic of spontaneity involved in authentic fidelity and the requirement of sincerity. In other words, how can one promise what will turn out to be a lie? One's feelings are certain to change, and knowing this should not all commitment be conditional? Furthermore, does not sincerity require that this conditionality be made specific? This, however, would be the ruin of fidelity as Marcel conceives it, conditional fidelity being a little better than no fidelity at all. Marcel attacks the difficulty by exposing and rejecting the postulate upon which he alleges it is based. What is assumed is that any given moment one is identical with the state of oneself which one can apprehend at that precise moment. This postulate is closely related to a "cinematic representation" of the inner life which Marcel rejects as an erroneous conception. According to this view, the individual's future "states" will occur in the way an external event occurs. Marcel points out that these "snapshots,"
i.e., these disparate inner states, can only capture an immediacy which is part, and can only be evaluated in terms of, a larger whole "which is actually indeterminate." That is to say, the postulate implicitly denies that the individual's attitude toward his own feeling states can have any influence on the future, viz., it denies the individual's capacity to act on himself or, as Marcel puts it, somehow to create himself. But this denial must be rejected. When one commits oneself, one grants in principle that the commitment will not again be put into question, and this "volition" intervenes as an essential element in determining in fact what will happen. For instance, one may view one's changed feelings as "temptations" rather than a basis for switching allegiance. Significantly, it is in this connection that Marcel states that creative fidelity appears in a "rudimentary form."38

3. **The Object of Fidelity**

Marcel insists that fidelity can only be given to a person or to a supra-personal reality, never to an abstract principle, notion, or idea. In a sense this follows from his linking fidelity to presence, for presence pertains to the being of the other and not to abstractions. One neither lives nor dies for abstract trust,

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37Ibid., p. 161.
38Ibid., p. 162.
39See BH, pp. 42-43, 96; HV, p. 128.
beauty, goodness, justice, etc., but for one's concrete work,
family and friends, countrymen, etc. 40 However, more light will
be shed on what Marcel understands to be the true object of fidel-
ity by also briefly considering some which he rejects as spurious.

According to one view, social utility is the real object of
fidelity, and fear of the reaction of others is the underlying motive
for keeping one's word or engaging in outwardly correct behavior.
Marcel rejects this view rather summarily by refusing to admit
that the phenomenon as described is authentic fidelity. He points
out that there may be cases where a failure to keep one's word
would only be known to oneself, yet one still recognizes the
obligation. If fear of social sanctions were the actual basis of
fidelity, then one would only be faithful when compelled by circum-
stances. But here again, Marcel argues, the obligation of fidelity
is admitted even though there might be no way socially to compel
one to keep faith.41

The most plausible alternative to Marcel's own view, how-
ever, is the contention that fidelity pertains to oneself, that one
can only be faithful to oneself. Marcel devotes three separate and
increasingly complex arguments to refute three different versions
of this basic thesis.

40 See HV, p. 143; MB-I, pp. 72, 88-92; MB-II, pp. 146-147.
41 BH, pp. 44-45.
a. The first version argues that the very act of commitment creates the motive for fulfillment: "I must honor my word." Marcel counters by pointing out that one's desire to keep one's word changes and may be "infinitely" weaker the very next day. We must, therefore, distinguish between a feeling and the act of recognizing an obligation independent of one's feelings.\footnote{Ibid., p. 44.} It may be noted in passing that this argument, as well as Marcel's refutation of the social utility argument, tends to treat fidelity as some kind of formal obligation, a tendency he eliminates in later years when he introduced spontaneity and presence as essential elements of fidelity.\footnote{These arguments are very early--dating back to 1929.}

b. A more serious challenge to Marcel's own view is the second version; namely, that fidelity is a mode of self-affection, of pride and self-respect. Marcel asserts that this "devaluation" of fidelity is closely related to the subjective interpretation of knowledge according to which one can know nothing but one's own conscious states. Marcel argues that the expression "my states of consciousness" is meaningless except in reference to another kind of knowledge independent of the mind which is at least an ideal possibility. The question then is how we can conceive of such a knowledge
irreducible to the kind which *ex hypothesi* we are said to enjoy. It is hardly possible to understand how the ideal of real knowledge could emerge in a world composed of pure states of consciousness. If it be denied that we have such a conception, then the hypothesis itself would be destroyed. Marcel then draws an analogy between this argument and the proposed interpretation of fidelity. One is only able to deny that the other is the true object of fidelity because one first conceives fidelity in this latter way. But if one initially conceived of fidelity as pertaining to the other, it is because one has so experienced it.44

c. According to the third version of the argument, one can only be faithful to oneself because the other as such must always remain unknown. True fidelity consists in making it a point of honor to perform certain actions which are to the advantage of the other, but which are really rooted in an obligation to oneself.45

Marcel's response to this argument is complex and not altogether unambiguous. He proposes to meet it by analyzing this "self" to which one is supposed to be faithful. He begins by first examining the situation of the artist, concluding

44CF, pp. 164-166.
45HV, p. 129.
that the artist is "most true to himself" when he refuses to repeat his past successes, responding to a particular inner call to go on living and thus find renewal. Marcel, then, generalizing this conclusion, asserts that if to be faithful to oneself meant to be faithful to certain principles adopted once and for all, we would run the risk of introducing a foreign and possibly even destructive element in our life. One's personal reality can be stifled so that there would no longer be a self to be true to. Social life powerfully enhances this danger because society expects consistency of behavior rather than inner renewal, and thus society is a chief source for self-alienation, the intrusion into the person of an artificial self which is actually the reflection of the "outsiders." Fidelity to this "profane" self, as Marcel calls it, tends to reduce to an obstinately maintained agreement between this self and ideas, expressions, and ways of living that the individual labels as "his." It must therefore be recognized, Marcel argues, that fidelity to oneself is difficult to achieve and to discern. In order to be true to oneself one must remain "alive," and this is not easy to do. The child and the poet are the best examples of this quality of aliveness, which most of us tend to lose as we grow older. "Self-presence" is not something which can be taken for granted;
it is in constant danger of being eclipsed and must be constantly reconquered. 46

The import of this third argument is somewhat ambiguous. It is clear that fidelity to the "profane" or alienated self would not be fidelity in Marcel's sense. What is not so clear is whether Marcel would agree that fidelity to one's "true" self can be authentic. In the light of Marcel's characterization of the self, there is reason to think that he would agree, and this would by no means constitute the contradiction that prima facie it might appear to be. This "true" self, Marcel says, "is the particle of creation which is in me . . . of participating in the universal drama . . ." e.g., to humanize the world or to make it more uninhabitable. 47 But, as has been pointed out, the world of man as such, of the human being, is a world of love and love is intersubjective, a community of participation. 48 Fidelity to one's true self, therefore, would seem essentially to imply for Marcel a reference to the other to whom one is linked with love, concretely expressed as fidelity to this being whom one loves.

47Ibid., p. 132.  
Thus Marcel resolutely rejects both a purely social and a purely personal interpretation of fidelity. He also rejects any "deconcretizing" of fidelity by referring to an abstract idea or principle. There can only be fidelity to a person or to a supra-personal cause, the latter understood not abstractly but as concretely as possible. Marcel's understanding of "cause," he explicitly acknowledges, was strongly influenced by Royce's theory of loyalty which he appears to have accepted with only the modifications necessary to detach it from its idealist setting. 49 A cause is neither an individual nor a collection of individuals nor an abstract principle. A cause can never be impersonal; it is a particular type of unity which binds together a number of persons within a life they share together. This shared life presupposes a relationship of a special kind—loyalty or fidelity—between the individual and his cause. It involves a fully conscious attachment which presupposes the free subordination of the self to what is acknowledged as a superior, but not abstract, principle. Marcel quotes Royce with approval that loyalty means nothing either theoretically or practically unless one is a member of a community, and that no individual success is valid unless it is also the success of the community. 50

49 See HV, pp. 155-156.
50 Ibid., p. 155.
This partial listing of the various kinds of fidelities to be found in human life raises at once the very difficult practical problem of possible conflicts between them, conflicts all have experienced and which can be very painful, sometimes agonizing. 51 Royce thought this conflict the greatest of all evils and judged all causes by their tendency to promote or hinder the development of loyalty in the world. Marcel observes that this amounts to saying that there is a universal cause, that of loyalty in the world, and indicates his agreement. 52 One is reminded of Marcel's own dictum: "Being as the place of fidelity." 53 Being, that is, oneself and the other apprehended through and in love, participating in a common life which cannot exist apart from fidelity and which Marcel clearly believes can and ought to be as widely inclusive as possible.

Marcel's chief contribution to Royce's theory is to link it definitely with time. Value is related to being, to what lasts, and if its connection with being is severed, human communion—that is to say, love—is destroyed at its center. We are left with a world of scandal, a world of the absurd, a victim of the remorseless disintegration wrought by time. In this connection Marcel again raises the question of immortality as the ultimate

51See MB-II, p. 64.
52HV, p. 156.
53BH, p. 41.
requirement of both love and fidelity, a problem which has already been discussed in the preceding chapter in the section on hope. Summing up, it seems clear that for Marcel the experience of fullness is bound up with unconditional love, and since fidelity is the concrete manifestation of love, an unconditional love will manifest as an unconditional fidelity to love's object. The object of love and fidelity is either a person or a community of persons all of whom are thou to one another. This is, of course, the ideal limit, so to speak; since love admits of degree, so fidelity will admit of conditions. But to the extent man falls short of the ideal, to that extent he falls short of experiencing that fullness he craves.

Since fidelity refers to presence, to being, that which is affirmed as of permanent value, and manifests as constancy of behavior, it runs the risk of deteriorating into a routine conformity or a slavish adherence to what may no longer be truly and deeply felt. In other words, there may be a spurious as well as an authentic fidelity. It is the characteristic of spontaneity that must be stressed if this danger is to be avoided. Fidelity can and must be creative. Creativity, moreover, is intimately connected with freedom. These two aspects of fidelity--freedom and creativity--are the subjects of the next chapter.

54 See HV, pp. 152-153.
CHAPTER V

CREATIVE FIDELITY

In the preceding chapter the significance, characteristics, and object of fidelity have been discussed, but this account is still far from complete. Although, as has been seen, fidelity is not to be identified with simple obedience nor, a fortiori, with conformity, there remains to be shown how Marcel thinks there can be a creative fidelity as well as what he thinks it might be like.

The importance of the creative aspect of fidelity for Marcel cannot be overemphasized. Life is dynamic; it is growth and development. If authentic fidelity were something static, a fanatical adherence to the past, a person, or a cause, it could not possibly be that "place of being" that Marcel conceives it to be. The experience of fullness cannot be enjoyed by anyone whose inner life has become petrified, so to speak, and who could be said to have fallen victim to a spiritual rigor mortis. Indeed, Marcel says, fulfillment "can take on positive meaning only from the point of view of creation."¹ Nor is it difficult to say why Marcel says this, for how could there be any genuine sense of fulfillment if we only respond passively to others, if we contribute nothing of ourselves. A purely passive relationship is neither love nor consecration, but subordination to the domination of the other, and

¹MB-II, p. 50.
such a relationship can never lead to genuine fulfillment and happiness. Creativity, however, is the only genuine alternative to a purely passive response.

This last statement is a warning that Marcel does not conceive of creativity exclusively after the model of the artist. For Marcel, creation is not necessarily the production of something external to the person. He insists that there can be production without creation and creation without any identifiable object "remaining to bear witness to the creation."\(^2\) "The creative process . . . is none the less effective whenever there is personal development of any kind."\(^3\) This is because creativity is realized in a process of "inner transmutation," a view which is intimately related to Marcel's doctrines of receptivity and of freedom. Before creative fidelity can be profitably discussed, therefore, it will be necessary to seek the reader's patience for a prior consideration of Marcel's doctrines of transmutation and freedom. Hence this chapter is divided into three sections, (1) transmutation and receptivity, (2) freedom, and (3) creative fidelity.

1. **Transmutation and Receptivity**

"Transmutation," in Marcel's vocabulary, is a technical

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 50.
\(^3\)HV, p. 25.
term. It does not refer to empirical change in general or to the theory of evolution, but to the acquisition of a new, non-empirical quality through the individual's active participation in a certain way in the larger reality to which he consecrates himself. The participation is "in a certain way" because it is to be distinguished from conformity, which neither invents nor discovers. In short, it is creative participation.4

Creative participation can occur in many areas. In the teaching process, for example, the instructor may acquire a new quality which we may call "being-for-his-students." This is certainly not an objective quality like the color of his hair or the tone of his voice, and depends for its existence, as Marcel emphasizes, on its being recognized both by the instructor and by his students. If a class member should fail or refuse to recognize this quality, the instructor may exist for that student primarily as a hated authority figure, rather than as a dynamic element in a creative process by which the student can himself be "transmuted" inwardly. If the instructor, on the other hand, should fail in some way to acknowledge the reality of this quality, his performance almost certainly will be adversely affected and he will have deprived himself of a permanently enriching experience which would not have left him unchanged. But it is a condition for the

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4See ibid., p. 25.
possibility of this experience that the instructor put himself at the
service of his students, and that the students recognize and accept
this gift. In this situation nothing is "made" in any physical sense
which would exist apart from teacher and students. Yet some­
thing new has come into existence which affects and enriches all
the participants.

Another example that might be given is the study of the
classics. It is not unusual for classical studies to be described
as "dry as dust." But there have been many illustrious examples
to testify that they need not be. One thinks at once of Goethe and
Shelley, Macaulay and Lord Melbourne, Donatello and
Michelangelo, Poussin and David. When these men studied the
literature, thought and art of the ancient Greeks and Romans, they
did not simply copy down literally what they read or slavishly
reproduce fragmentary monuments displayed in museums. For
them, the remains of antiquity vibrated with life, a life which they
endeavored to assimilate and then re-express in their own way in
a manner suitable for their own time. They could not have done
this if those musty texts and those broken fragments had not been
"transmuted" in their eyes into something more and something far
greater than mere "remains of antiquity." This transmutation
must have been accomplished by their own activity, but it was not
an activity operating in a void. The texts and marbles also were
necessary for this achievement, and their value had to be
recognized for any transmutation to occur.

Marcel himself gives an example from common daily life; namely, the giving of a gift, something we all do throughout our mature lives and which most of us learn to do at an early age. Marcel observes that giving a gift as such does not mean simply the transfer of an object from one place to another. The giver gives something of himself along with the object, and both the giver and the recipient must specifically recognize this for the gift, as such, to exist. The physical object, a book, let us say, thereby acquires a new quality, being-for-another, which lies in another dimension than the empirical. The book, perhaps only a cheap paperback, is "transmuted" by this quality into something more than a physical object. Both the giver and the recipient are enriched in the process. Indeed, because of the giver and the occasion the humble paperback may well be treasured by the recipient all of his life, more prized by him than an expensive first edition which he had purchased for himself. 5

It is worth pointing out that these three examples share a common feature. There is a sense in which, different though they be, the individual concerned—student, teacher, poet, writer—must give of himself in order to accomplish the transmutation. But what about those instances when one side or the other, or

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both, in a given situation refuse or fail to recognize the gift of
self? Can there be creativity in such cases? Clearly the gift as
such will not exist if it is not recognized or if it is rejected, al­
though the inner conditions of its possibility may exist on one side
or the other and to that extent a given individual is exercising his
creativity even though it does not actually result in the acquisition
of a new quality. But if the teacher is closed to his students or
his students "turn off" their teacher, the creative process cannot
take place. If the student of the classics is closed to their value,
then they will remain "dry as dust" for him. If the recipient
refuses to recognize the gift as a gift, then the creative inter­
change is disrupted. If the giver refuses his recognition, then the
gift is degraded simply to a transfer of an object, perhaps no
more than a representation of a social role being played out in a
given situation. The object would not have the meaning of a gift
and would be only one more addition to the recipient's stock of
possessions. 6

Creativity, in other words, for Marcel, presupposes recep­
tivity and the openness of the subject. There can be no giving
nor recognition of a gift without this. Since the gift involves the
gift of self as well, and this is the very source of the transmu­
tation, one must somehow make room for the other in oneself and
the other must make room for one in himself. But neither can

do this unless both are receptive, and in this order receptivity is not and cannot be sheer passivity.\textsuperscript{7} This is why "receptivity" connotes creative activity for Marcel. It refers to the mysterious power we have to welcome the other into our self, and this implies a certain readiness and preordination.\textsuperscript{8} This concept of open or creative receptivity is \textit{toto caelo} opposed to egocentricity and self-centeredness.\textsuperscript{9} The self, for Marcel, is not essentially a monad, although man enjoys the freedom, that mysterious power, to close himself off to others as well as to open himself to them.\textsuperscript{10}

Most students of philosophy, for example, have experienced a spontaneous attraction to one thinker, a spontaneous aversion to another. It is as if one thinker is immediately recognized and accepted while the second seems to generate an immediate defensive reaction. One readily welcomes the thought of the first; one feels a stranger to, perhaps even threatened by, the second. This experience of open or receptive, and closed, reactions to another's thought also has its parallel in other human relationships. Friendship, love, to say nothing of fidelity, could never develop unless one opened oneself to the other and the other was open to

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\textsuperscript{7}See \textit{Ibid.}, p. 99 and CF, p. 88. \\
\textsuperscript{8}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 98-99; CF, pp. 27-29, 89; MB-I, pp. 145-146. \\
\textsuperscript{9}MB-II, p. 156. \\
\textsuperscript{10}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 201-202.
oneself. Thus for Marcel receptivity is an activity of the self and a precondition for that gift of self in which, for Marcel, all authentic creativity ultimately consists. One cannot give himself unless he is open to the other and the other is open to him. When one gives oneself a new quality is created, whether one is involved with other people or even with things.

This last statement may raise a question in the reader's mind. If all creativity in the last analysis involves the gift of self, and if one can only give oneself to a person or a supra-personal cause, how is it possible to deal creatively with things? Marcel indicates how he would answer this question when he discusses this problem in connection with the artist. Prima facie, it would seem that the artist is so preoccupied with his own work he cannot be said to be open and sympathetic to others. Marcel replies that it is necessary to distinguish the work to be done from that already completed. If the artist should concentrate on the work he has successfully completed, he immediately transforms it into a possession, something dead which will only serve to constrict him and to limit both his receptivity and his creativity. But when the artist is concentrating on the work to be accomplished, when it is in a state of gestation, so to speak, he is embodying his vocation and "that vocation is related to others and to the world. It is his
way of giving himself."\textsuperscript{11} In the same passage Marcel observes that the artist's situation can be transposed to the plane of the self if the self is viewed as something which must be realized or created. Even when it is a question of things, the individual has the mysterious power "to impregnate its environment with its own quality, thereby recognizing itself in its surroundings and entering into an intimate relationship with it."\textsuperscript{12}

Nothing shows more clearly the individual's power of creativity. The tenant who rearranges the furniture and decorations of his new apartment puts something of himself into that arrangement even if the furnishings and decorations came with the apartment. This is creative, for he gives a different meaning to what was already there. To the external observer, the creativity may seem to consist solely in the rearrangement, but this would be deceptive. The rearrangement may be experienced by the householder as containing or embodying something of his very self. The furnishings have been "transmuted," acquiring a new character of being-for-and-with-me (to coin a somewhat barbarous neologism). The householder, however, can also take the

\textsuperscript{11} CF, p. 53.

\textsuperscript{12} See \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 27-28, 89-90; MB-I, pp. 145-146. Amusingly, Marcel seems to think Americans are less apt to understand this experience than the English or French. But one may sometimes hear even an American say: "I want my own things around me; otherwise I don't feel at home."
standpoint of the external observer, just as one can to a certain extent view oneself impersonally, and lose himself in self-satisfied contemplation of his handiwork. If he should succumb to this temptation, he would be trapping himself in the same situation as the artist who concentrates his interest on his finished work. But the householder may also, in creating to some extent his new environment, have in mind that he is making a home into which he will welcome others, not a cell in which he will dwell enclosed in a solitude. In this latter instance, surely very common, the material surroundings not only have acquired a new quality of being-for-and-with-me, but also a quality of being-for-others: "My place, where I will receive those I like and love."

It may be asked if this capacity for creative receptivity is something everyone possesses, i.e., is it universal? There is, of course, no question of denying that one's power of receptivity can be adversely affected at any given time for any number of reasons, such as moral deterioration, too much self-concentration, even fatigue.\(^{13}\) Rather the question is whether there might not be "indigent and ungrateful natures who are deprived of the gift of responding."\(^{14}\) The question is crucial for it relates directly to freedom. Marcel, as will be seen, claims that the enrichment of

\(^{13}\)CF', p. 51.  
\(^{14}\)PE, p. 102.
being which is a consequence of creativity, of self-giving, depends ultimately on freedom since it is a mode of participation; and he wants to argue that one is free either to participate—to recognize and respond—or to refuse one's recognition. Marcel concedes that in fact this is an "immense problem," "the most difficult part of my case."\

As mentioned above, the self, according to Marcel, has the mysterious power to impregnate its surroundings with something of itself and, indeed, unless it does so it cannot feel at home. But Marcel goes further and suggests that this feeling "at home," this feeling of harmony between the self and its surroundings, is a condition or a pre-condition if the creative process is to occur. Creativity presupposes "a world where the self can recognize itself, act, expand; a world intermediate between the closed and the open . . ."\

Now if the question be considered concretely, it must be admitted that a given individual may find some surroundings congenial, while other surroundings may have a constricting influence upon him. Similarly, we find some people immediately congenial, while others "put us off." In other words, people frequently experience what may be called a "personality problem," something about the other which tends to make them close up rather than to be "receptive." Many factors may

15 Ibid.
16 CF, p. 92.
contribute to this, including a different set of values and attitudes rooted in the other's home environment, education, previous experiences, or even his physical makeup. To use Marcel's terminology, all these factors may tend to "shut off" one's access to the being of the other. The influences of these various factors usually are beyond a given individual's immediate control, and frequently do not exert their influence at the conscious level.

Should it be said, then, that in such instances the individual is not really free to be receptive, to recognize and respond? While making no attempt to mitigate the seriousness of the difficulty, Marcel does not think this obstacle is insuperable in principle. It is possible, Marcel thinks, to overcome even a deeply felt distaste, although it cannot be done in an instant and seems to require a strongly felt and conscious intention. Further, Marcel appears to think it cannot be done apart from some tradition, whether of one's culture or family, or both, which can awaken and nourish the individual's capacity for recognition and for gratitude.17

To this point the discussion has been concerned with Marcel's view of creativity in the light of receptivity and openness which are its preconditions. The process of transmutation, and the personal enrichment which is the fruit of creativity, depends

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17 PE, p. 102.
upon the individual's own activity; namely, his recognition and response, an activity which he is free to refuse. Ultimately, then, it may be said that for Marcel the concrete realization of creativity depends upon the exercise of freedom. Marcel, however, is concerned with freedom in a global sense, as it pertains to the whole man. He does not discuss the nature of freedom directly, rather he is concerned with the way in which man is or can be free in a concrete situation. In order to better understand creative fidelity, therefore, Marcel's view on concrete freedom must be considered.

2. Freedom

Creativity, self-gift, love, and authentic fidelity are inconceivable without freedom. No one can be coerced or badgered into being loving or faithful or creative. But Marcel does not attempt to say what freedom is, viz., he does not try to define it in itself. In fact, Marcel would reject any effort to define freedom in abstraction from a concrete situation as either meaningless or futile because such an effort always generates insoluble epistemological puzzles as, e.g., just how it is possible to determine the nature of freedom and how, in case of disagreement, it is possible to verify such a determination. Moreover, it is virtually impossible to define freedom abstractly without making use of the category of causality, and consequently of representing freedom
after the model of things. The consequence of such a representation, however, Marcel asserts, is self-defeating for it ends in the destruction of the very thing one is trying to understand. Ultimately one is compelled "to take refuge in some determinist conception. . . ."\textsuperscript{18} The "effects" of freedom would be determined and limited by the very "nature" of freedom, and it would be this nature, rather than man himself, which would determine the course of human action.

An abstract and essentially causal conception of freedom, moreover, would have implications which Marcel definitely rejects. Thus, for instance, in his own example of the gift it would have to be concluded that the new quality, being-for-another, actually inheres in the gift in virtue of some kind of mysterious causal activity. Marcel, however, explicitly rejects an interpretation which surely everyone would reject as fantastic.\textsuperscript{19}

Furthermore, if freedom is conceived causally, it would mean that creativity would be automatic, which would be the precise opposite of the thesis Marcel actually maintains. Creativity would be automatic because the existence of a new quality would be completely determined by factors antecedent to the will, and consequently the new quality would not be an embodiment of the

\textsuperscript{18}MB-II, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{19}See PE, p. 101.
self in Marcel's sense. It may be objected that as far as creativity is concerned it makes no difference whether it is free or determined. If someone gives a gift, it has the new quality of being-for-another regardless of whether he gives it "freely" or may have been determined to give it by factors some of which may be unknown even to himself. To this Marcel would reply that the separation of creativity from freedom implies a grave misunderstanding both of man himself as well as creativity. This may not appear to meet the difficulty to a reader sympathetic to another type of philosophy, but for Marcel creativity must flow from the self, and he denies that this self can really be a function of anything outside of it. Marcel must therefore reject any form of determinism, not only to preserve freedom but also to preserve what he considers to be authentic creativity, love, and fidelity. A "determined" creativity would be as meaningless for Marcel as a forced love.

Finally, Marcel rejects the conception of freedom as a predicate pertaining to man's essence. Here, he thinks, we may be to a certain extent deceived by the structure of language. After all, we commonly say such things as "He is free" or "I am free," and it may seem that a quality is being predicated of a subject. But, as has already been pointed out, freedom for

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20See MB-II, p. 126.
Marcel pertains to the whole man. Ultimately, he says, to say "I am free" is to say "I am I." Now the latter statement is either a simple equation which gets us no farther along the road of understanding or else it is in some respects false. Indeed Marcel goes so far as to brand it as "radically false" because there are innumerable circumstances in which it must be admitted we are not "ourselves," when we know we are behaving automatically or yielding to social imitation. A person may even become confused or unsure as to who he is, a not unfamiliar phenomenon Marcel terms "alienation." In many directions, then, what is commonly thought of as "liberty of choice" is severely restricted.

To this point, the discussion has been limited to a consideration of these conceptions of freedom which Marcel rejects as inadequate. Freedom is not a determinate nature of some kind. It is not a mysterious causal efficacy. It is not an objective attribute intrinsic to man's essence. To this list should be added the so-called "liberty of indifference." While Marcel does not explicitly deny that there may be times when man enjoys such a freedom, it is clear that he does not think much of it. He observes that according to this conception choice seems to be most absolute when the reasons for choosing are the least important.

21See Ibid., pp. 127-128.
Furthermore, the conception of freedom as indeterminism only makes sense in opposition to determinism, which is once again to locate freedom on the plane of the objective, in which domain causality reigns supreme. According to the indeterminist, free will is conceived as something that finally tips the scale of a balance which but for this intervention would swing indefinitely.\(^{22}\)

Besides the very serious problem of rendering such a conception intelligible, it is, for Marcel, bound up with that causal and materialist model of freedom which he rejects. In brief, the rejection of determinism, for Marcel, also entails the rejection of freedom conceived as indeterminism.\(^{23}\)

The fact is if attention is focused on individual acts or actions, or on choice as directly related to the possibility of such acts or actions, it is extremely difficult to speak meaningfully, sincerely, and realistically about human freedom. In this connection Marcel would most likely wholeheartedly subscribe to Butler’s dictum: "Things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be: why then should we desire to be deceived?"\(^{24}\) Marcel has written:

If the freedom of a people or a country be defined as absolute independence, is it not obvious that in a world like ours freedom cannot exist, not only because of inevitable

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\(^{22}\)Ibid., p. 130.

\(^{23}\)See Ibid., pp. 129-130.

\(^{24}\)Bishop Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, Sermon No. 7, Par. 16.
economic interdependences, but because of the part played by pressure, or, less politely, by blackmail, at all levels of international intercourse?25 And:

... we should ... acknowledge that the individual himself, in any country whatsoever, not only finds himself dependent but finds himself, in a great many cases, obliged to carry out actions which his conscience disapproves.26

In the long run, Marcel says, considerations of organization and output must prevail if a nation is to survive, and this means increasingly a curtailment of personal liberty conceived as freedom of action or of specific choice.27 Thus Marcel views the problem of personal freedom very differently from a thinker such as Sartre for whom man is so radically free that even heredity can scarcely be said to exercise a determining influence on his behavior.

But in the light of his recognition and specific acknowledgment of the limited scope for individual choice and action, in what sense does Marcel think it possible to speak positively and meaningfully of human freedom?

Before attempting to explicate the details of Marcel's own theory, it will be helpful if his basic approach to freedom is first characterized in a general way. The notion of "situation,"

25MS, p. 16.
26Ibid.
27See Ibid., p. 27; EB, p. 16.
previously analyzed in Chapter Two, is the key for understanding Marcel's positive approach to freedom. As we have just seen, Marcel thinks it futile to seek the meaning of freedom "in itself." What must be discovered is how man can be free in his given, concrete historical situation. Man's situation today is that he possesses the means to destroy himself, not only with nuclear weapons but with highly sophisticated psychological and chemical techniques of human degradation which can reduce the individual to the level of a brute or a mere thing. In the concrete, historical situation of today, the only meaningful freedom man can have is bound up with creativity and with being open to others. But this freedom, which, Marcel insists, man does have, contains the possibility, not the certainty--still less the necessity--but the possibility of a renewal which could ultimately lead to a recreation of man's world; that is to say, lead to a world in which there would be increased scope for individual choice and act, a liberty now subject to increasingly cruel restriction. 28

This interpretation of Marcel's basic position in regard to freedom gains authority from his repeated assertion in the William James Lectures--which are very late Marcel (1963)--that it makes no sense to say that man (as such) is free, still less that

he is born free, as Rousseau claimed. \textsuperscript{29} Instead, Marcel appears to hold a view similar to Goethe's as expressed in the \textit{Second Part of Faust}, viz., only that man is worthy to be called free who daily conquers himself anew. But such a conquest is always partial, precarious, and challenged. \textsuperscript{30} Formulas are deceptive and always to be mistrusted, Marcel warns us. Freedom involves a whole complex of conditions which verge on the contradictory, but this cannot be helped for it concerns a region that is terribly difficult to speak of at all, especially as the only meaningful freedom, as pointed out above, concerns the individual in his concrete situation. \textsuperscript{31}

It must be emphasized, too, that the exposition of freedom according to Marcel is not to be construed as exhaustive. Marcel himself does not pretend to have written an exhaustive treatise on freedom. Therefore the following attempt to elucidate Marcel's theory concentrates on those aspects most relevant for an understanding of creative fidelity. \textsuperscript{32}

The fullest positive account of freedom that Marcel has given is to be found in the seventh chapter of the second volume of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{29}See EB, pp. 146, 151.
\item \textsuperscript{30}Ibid., p. 146.
\item \textsuperscript{31}See EB, p. 151 and MB-II, pp. 120, 123.
\item \textsuperscript{32}See EB, p. 148.
\end{itemize}
Gifford Lectures. 33 A first reading of this chapter may leave the reader with the impression that Marcel holds two distinct and possibly inconsistent theories of freedom. Alternatively, one may conclude that Marcel's account is incoherent. But it can be argued that both these impressions are mistaken and that attentive study of the chapter in the light of certain observations on freedom to be found in other of his works can resolve the apparent conflict. An effort will be made, in the course of the exposition, to clear up these difficulties.

Marcel begins his discussion by distinguishing between will and desire. Can it be said, he asks, that to be free means to do what one wants to do? Posing the question in these terms means to focus on the link between willing and action. But, Marcel points out, will seems to be essentially opposed to desire. One is most conscious of his freedom when he is able to resist the seduction of his desires. Anyone who has ever been a heavy smoker and who has tried, unsuccessfully, to weaken or entirely eliminate the habit will understand just what Marcel means. Non-smokers may easily provide other examples of their own. 34

Now let us put the question in reverse, so to speak. If one yields to a desire when one thinks one should not have done so,

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33 See MB-II, pp. 121-132.
would it be correct to say one did not act freely? The individual, let us say, knows perfectly well that every cigarette he smokes hastens the prospect of cancer. He by no means deliberately seeks an early grave. Nevertheless he lights another cigarette. He may despise himself, but still he lights up and puffs away. Should he say, "I couldn't help myself; the temptation to smoke was too strong?" But if he says this, he may still feel uneasy. This uneasiness, according to Marcel, functions as a kind of signal that the excuse will not do, that in fact it is unacceptable. But why is it unacceptable? Because, Marcel says, if the person accepts it he is bound over to his passions with little or no hope of escape. The uneasiness is linked to a recognition, however obscure, that personal irresponsibility entails consequences fatal not to what he is now, but to what he wants to be. 35 In other words, personal irresponsibility entails fatalism. If a person cannot stop smoking, then he cannot avoid the very high probability of a shortened life; and this is a depressing prospect to have to face.

Clearly, however, prospects however depressing prove nothing in themselves. It does not follow from the fact that one dislikes fatalism that therefore he is free. It does not follow as a matter of logic. But the uneasiness remains and it is a very common experience. That is why Marcel says that freedom is

not a fact which can be observed. Freedom is something the individual decides. By his decision he asserts his freedom, and this assertion is bound up with the consciousness he has of himself. There can be no appeal from his decision and no one else is in a position to reject it. In this connection Marcel approvingly quotes Jaspers that one is conscious of his freedom when he recognizes what others expect from him and has to decide whether he will fulfill or shirk these obligations. On this account, then, freedom is something of which one can be conscious and which entails personal responsibility, but it is also something which can no more be observed by the person concerned than by an outsider. It is something real but essentially mysterious.

Marcel next proceeds to consider the free act. At first sight his discussion seems to be at variance with the preceding account of freedom. The free act is the significant act, the contrary of the act which is alleged to issue from our so-called liberty of indifference. It will be recalled that Marcel characterized that freedom as existing when the reasons for choice were the least important. The significant act, on the other hand, obtains only when something of significance is at stake. The value of this stake, according to Marcel, does not exist outside of consciousness, but it is not created by consciousness. It is

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36Ibid., pp. 125-126.
realized in concreto that to fail to set this value on the stake would be to deny or betray oneself. Since the free act is the significant act, and since most actions are in fact insignificant and contingent, Marcel maintains that the free act is that act which contributes to making oneself become what one is, whereas the insignificant act does not contribute to this creation of oneself by oneself. The insignificant act could just as well be performed by anybody; but only I can perform the significant act.  

Unfortunately, there is a complication. The value which constitutes the free act as such, according to Marcel, is hardly ever acknowledged except a posteriori. It is recognized by reflection, i.e., on looking back retrospectively. There is no immediate evidence of its significance accompanying the act when one performs it. Marcel is compelled to maintain this position since it is a truism that we do not know how the future will turn out; our actions generate effects far into the future and we can never know them all. The significant act, by definition, is that act which contributes to making a person what he is. What he is is an essential part of his identity, and, as was seen in Chapter Two, there can be no objective answer to the question, "Who am I?" Marcel says specifically: "I cannot rightly know who I am

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37 Ibid., pp. 130-131.
38 Ibid., p. 131.
or who I shall be." Just as the artist may be surprised by the outcome of his own work, so, too, with the free act. 39 In the first series of Gifford Lectures, Marcel says: "... in the last analysis I do not know what I live by nor why I live ... my life infinitely transcends any possible conscious grasp of my life at any given moment ..." 40 Certainly, then, one will only recognize the significance of the free act in retrospect and through reflection.

Now the complication is this. According to the preceding account of freedom, the individual is personally responsible for what he does. Rejection of freedom entails rejection of personal responsibility, and rejection of personal responsibility entails fatalism. But it is very difficult to see how anyone could be held responsible for the significant act if he can only recognize its significance in retrospect. Yet the significant act is also, by definition, the free act. So it appears that one freely contributes to making himself what he is today, yet he cannot know how or even that he is doing so at the time he is doing it. But if he cannot know, then he cannot be held responsible if he turns out badly, except perhaps insofar as he considers himself as a cause--but this would throw the entire discussion back into the realm of the

39 Ibid., p. 131.
40 MB-I, p. 206.
objective, which Marcel has said does not pertain to freedom. An
immortal line spoken by Nero in a Hollywood historical extravaga-
ganza puts it very neatly: "I didn't want to be a monster!" In
short, Marcel's account of freedom as personal responsibility
seems to be inconsistent with his account of the free act as the
significant act.

But there is no need to be mesmerized by terminology. It
can be argued that the inconsistency is more apparent than real.
Marcel is not talking about two conceptions of freedom but rather
of two aspects or dimensions of a single act. Qua free, man is
responsible for the free act; qua significant he is responsible only
insofar as he acknowledges its significance through reflection, and
this acknowledgment depends upon a further exercise of his free-
dom since he may refuse to reflect or he may refuse to recognize
the significance even if he does reflect. In this sense, man is
responsible both for the act itself and for recognizing its signifi-
cance, but he is not responsible in the same way. A concrete
example at this point may best serve to clarify this interpretation.
Of course when dealing with such a difficult and mysterious matter
as freedom any example is bound to be somewhat contrived;
nevertheless such an example, if itself plausible, may illuminate
Marcel's meaning.

41 Spoken by Peter Ustinov in the MGM production of Quo Vadis.
The reader will recall from Chapter Two Marcel's own example of Augustus, used to illustrate the inseparability of the individual and his concrete situation, what Marcel called the "non-contingency of the empirically-given." Augustus has foiled an attempt on his life by his own creatures and friends, and is now faced with the decision whether to execute them or to show clemency. It is clear that how Augustus will ultimately decide depends upon the kind of man he is. What kind of man is he? Well, he is a blood-thirsty tyrant and his first reaction to the discovery of the plot is one of rage and a desire for revenge. But although Augustus is a tyrant, there is something more in him than sheer lust for power. Reflection intervenes and he comes to see that he himself is responsible for the situation in which he finds himself. He has lived by the sword; it is only just that he should perish by the sword. This insight produces a change in Augustus: he is not quite the same man after as he was before the process of reflection. The upshot is that the changed Augustus decides to be merciful rather than to seek vengeance. In short, Augustus has acquired a new quality through his own free activity, and Marcel explicitly refers to this activity as "an act of inner creativity or transmutation..." It is to be noted that apart from reflection this inner transmutation could not

\[42\text{MB-I, p. 162.}\]
have taken place, and that reflection was inseparable from the exercise of freedom. No one can be compelled to reflect. 43 This confirms the statement above that the recognition of the significant act qua significant also depends upon an exercise of freedom.

The example of Augustus, however, as Marcel gives it in the Gifford Lectures, is incomplete insofar as our purpose here is concerned because it does not throw any direct light on the free act as significant, as contributing to making Augustus what he had become at the time when he had to decide the fate of the conspirators. In order to clarify this aspect of Marcel's theory, Suetonius may be drawn upon, filled out by our own imagination.

Suetonius says that when Augustus was a young man not yet twenty, he had another decision to make. The occasion was the forming of the triple alliance between himself, Antony and Lepidus known to history as the Second Triumvirate. Part of the price Antony demanded for his collaboration was the head of Cicero, for whom he had conceived a mortal hatred. Suetonius relates that Octavian held out for five days before he yielded up Cicero to Antony's thugs. The triumvirs then unleashed the proscription. According to Suetonius, Octavian was initially adverse to bloodshed, but once the decision had been taken he was the most

43 Cf. CF, pp. 54-55, 75, 96; BH, pp. 92-93, 113; cf. also MJ, p. 71.
cold-blooded and ruthless of the three. And that behavior and that decision originated in Octavian's initial acceptance, against the advice of his family and many of his friends, of Caesar's heritage and his commitment to seek the leading position in the state at any cost. During his time of recollection, we are free to imagine, Augustus came to see the indefeasible, concrete, existential link between his initial commitment and his decision to deliver Cicero over to his murderers, to proscribe his opponents, and to seize the Roman State even, if necessary, by wading through a sea of blood. He alone was finally responsible both for what he did and what he became. And what he did contributed to what he became. To deny this would be to deny his very self. The recognition and ascription of this value to his act can only exist in Augustus' consciousness, yet he does not "create" it. That is to say, it is not "imaginary." The achievement of this insight, however, also makes it possible for Augustus to effect an inner transmutation, not to alter the past, but to alter himself, acquire a "new quality," and thus influence the future. He ceases to be Octavian the Bloody and becomes Augustus, the organizer of the Pax Romana.

This conception of freedom is global. In keeping with Marcel's view of the self, it pertains to the whole man. One's

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44 Cf. the life of Augustus in any reliable edition of Suetonius.
freedom cannot fully affirm itself, Marcel has said, unless it embraces one's personal destiny—as we have just seen in the example of Augustus. It is not a matter of some hypothetical faculty of choosing one of several alternatives, but of the whole man committing himself to a certain path, a certain way and style of life. The freest person, according to Marcel, is the one who can give the richest significance to his life, who plays for the highest stakes he can conceive. One's personal destiny, however, cannot be deepened or enriched unless one is open to others. The freest man has, therefore, overcome himself—not only his material interests and passions, but more especially his predisposition to be self-centered. He is free from self-obsession, accomplished through the presence of the other whom he welcomes rather than treats as an intruder. This, of course, is that openness which is creative receptivity, the inner response to an appeal which is also an exercise of global freedom, and upon which all creativity ultimately depends.

3. Creative Fidelity

Earlier in this chapter it was pointed out that Marcel is interested in freedom insofar as it can exist in a given, concrete historical situation. This is also true of his interest in creativity

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45 See CF, p. 30.
and a meaningful life. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that Marcel's philosophy is one of "recognition and response" to the situation of contemporary man as well as to his own situation. Creative fidelity is the key to a response which unifies man's life, transcends time and the flux of things, and confers meaning and a sense of fullness. Creative fidelity is not slavish adherence to the letter of the law or servile obedience to any person or cause. These latter are negative responses which diminish man, undermine his integrity and subvert his dignity. Creative fidelity, on the other hand, requires the creative maintenance of presence within the individual and thus constitutes an enrichment of his life. The "sense" or meaning of life demands concentration of all one's energies on the achievement of something which depends at least in part upon oneself. But the meaning of one's life cannot be separated from the kind of interest one takes in one's life. The more one is self-obsessed—selfish, in other words—the more poverty-stricken and empty, flat and stale, one's life will be; the less intensely, i.e., meaningfully, one will live.47 What must now, in conclusion, be shown is how creative fidelity can lead to a meaningful life under the concrete conditions of our own day.

It must be admitted at the outset that the conditions are hard. We need only recall the condemnation and gloomy diagnoses cited

47See MB-I, pp. 199-201.
in Chapter One by Tawney, Mayo, Mumford, et al.; the "broken world" of Marcel, a prey to emptiness and despair: over-centralized, over-bureaucratized, over-organized. It is a world dominated by technology; a world in which human relationships are increasingly depersonalized; in which envy and resentment are prevalent. It is a time of a massive "identity crisis," of a crisis in values, subject to a cycle of increasingly destructive wars as well as an escalation of violence in daily life. Miracles cannot be demanded, nor can Marcel be expected to supply some ingenious "theoretical" solution to what is essentially a problem of life, a problem of human existence. It must never be forgotten that Marcel is not engaged in playing the usual philosophical "game" in the approved "academic" manner.

In the last analysis, for Marcel, the appalling state of the world today is to be traced back to man's own alienation both from himself—the roots of his own life—and from others. Man's most fundamental exigencies are thwarted and he is largely denied, or denies to himself, access to those sources from which he could renew his life and re-create his world. In this world he is, for the most part compelled to produce, to "make" things, to have something to "show." He must do this for others whether he likes it or not. It is not only factory or white collar workers who are caught in this miserable situation. Nearly all of us are subject to the same pressures. Administrators must produce
reports, college presidents have to show increased enrollment, deans show an augmented curriculum. Scholars must produce "works;" artists, paintings; writers, books. Of course some part of this frenetic activity is genuinely creative, but who would deny that a large part of it is not? Little of that vast quantity constituting what is "produced" is the fruit of creation for the sake of a thou, out of love or from commitment and a sense of dedication.

Man, existential man, has a need, an imperious demand, to love and to be loved. As has been seen, Marcel thinks of participation as one of the metaphysical fundamentals of human existence. Man's own desire to participate, which is universal although it may be thwarted or perverted, is rooted in the human condition as a being existing, i.e., participating in and therefore open and receptive to the world. To participate in the human sense is to belong, to be accepted, understood, and loved. It is also to contribute something of oneself. It is the common, shared life Marcel has called intersubjectivity. Authentic participation, therefore, requires that the individual create, that he contribute freely, give of himself freely, and thereby enrich himself as well as others. If he does not contribute freely, creatively, then what he does, any new quality he may inadvertently bring into existence, will not represent himself. He will continue in his state of alienation.
Furthermore, existential man wishes his creative efforts to have lasting results. He wishes somehow to transcend space and time, to overcome space and time in a more lasting way than his technology enables him to do. The real value of the past must be preserved and transmuted; the present must somehow be linked with efforts of those who have gone before and with those yet to come. Finally, the being of those he loves must somehow be "rescued" from the jaws of death and the depths of time.

To the extent that these exigencies can be satisfied in such a world as ours, creative fidelity is the condition for their satisfaction. Creative fidelity is the service of a free man freely given to a person or to a supra-personal cause. It springs from an initial commitment which is a consequence of an exercise of freedom, and is the concrete manifestation of a conscious recognition and response to an appeal which embodies value and evokes love. It depends for its existence upon the active and creative maintenance of presence in absence, even in the face of threatened catastrophe and what may seem to be certain, bitter, and final defeat. It presupposes the thou or a community of thous. Not "I" or "him" or "her," but us. By virtue of the commitment, freely given, the individual decides to put all his energies at the service of some possibility which exerts an appeal, a call, on him, and, Marcel adds, only on him, so that it may be transformed into a reality, into an established work. Marcel compares this experience to that
of the artist who may feel possessed by some reality which he scarcely discerns, independent of and yet subject to his will in order to be actualized. 48

Creative fidelity is creative service. One serves with "nobility and honor," concepts admittedly difficult to clarify but which Marcel employs to rule out considerations of utility and social function. 49 Genuine service is linked to personality and individual integrity, respect for the individual's freedom and capacity to create. These very characteristics make it unlikely that service, in Marcel's sense, could be successfully institutionalized for any length of time. 50

The commitment and the dedication result in a unified, consecrated life. The dedicated, creatively faithful person becomes a living witness or testimony who radiates the sense of the truth and value of that to which, or the person to whom, he is faithful. In the final analysis, the commitment, as we saw in Chapters Three and Four, involves an act of belief or trust in the value and mutual fidelity of the other. The very possibility of betrayal is ruled out of court. 51 This trust or belief is essentially an act of love, as was seen in Chapter Three, which is why one cannot

48 HV, p. 118.
49 See MS, pp. 193-194.
50 Cf. MS, pp. 302-304.
51 See PE, pp. 97, 100.
be faithful to or die for an abstraction. This is also the reason why the individual can experience that sense of fullness which is the source for a meaningful life. The indefinable quality radiated by the authentic witness who embodies his commitment in his life is not subject to technics. It can neither be taught nor learned. It is the qualitative, concrete expression of a life. But this quality may be contagious, as it were, and it is undeniable that it can have an influence on others which can only be fittingly described as a force or impact capable of bringing about a decisive change in their lives. It can be supremely creative in its effect for, unlike the artist, the medium of creative fidelity is neither plaster nor marble, canvas nor paint, but those mysterious realities—whatever their real nature may be—which we vaguely refer to as "personality" and the human "spirit."

Just as love and the **thou** relationship admit of degree, so, too, the life of creative fidelity can be lived at various levels. In our own day the most practical examples which come immediately to mind are personal relationships, i.e., marriage and family life, and friendship. If anyone should doubt whether these two kinds of love are in any way related to a meaningful life and the "taste" of fullness, one may, with Cicero, ask such a person to consider what his life would be like wholly deprived of love. What kind of

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52 MB- II, pp. 136-137.
man would agree to dispense with all human love in exchange for wealth, power, and success? Cicero thought that the tyrant would be the only man who would agree to such an exchange. Would not our answer today amount to much the same thing?

It is more difficult to give convincing examples of the life of creative fidelity at the level of the supra-personal, the level of cause in Marcel's sense. The life consecrated to a cause cannot be identified with those frenzied mass movements which have wreaked such havoc in our violent and bloody times. While there can be little doubt that these movements have deeply influenced great numbers of people and effected, at critical moments, great changes in the world, their creativity, from Marcel's standpoint, is spurious and their surface glitter only conceals their essential vacuity and negation. For Marcel the mass can never be creative. Only the person, or an association of persons, can create. 53

53 Cf. BH, pp. 96-97; MS, pp. 9-10; DW, p. 27. It is interesting to observe that the very leaders of some of these movements would have agreed with Marcel's judgment, whatever they may have said in their public speeches. Hitler, Mussolini, and Lenin agreed that the mass was essentially uncreative, although Lenin's real view is not so much stated explicitly as it is implicit in what he had to say about the organization of the Communist Party and the theory of the vanguard. Those thinkers influenced by Nietzsche or Burckhardt would also tend to agree with Marcel. For some references regarding the leaders of mass movements, see Hitler, Mein Kampf (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1939), pp. 102-103, 116-117, 488, 660-661, 669. Ivone Kirkpatrick, Mussolini (New York: Avon Books, 1968), pp. 156-157. Stefan T. Possony (ed.), The Lenin Reader (Chicago:
Nevertheless it is possible to give some examples of creative fidelity to a cause even in our own day, although these particular causes may not, outwardly, seem as dramatic or make such a noise in the world as a mass movement. Teaching considered not as an academic profession but as a personal vocation is an example that might be cited. The devoted teacher is faithful—or at least he tries his best to be faithful—at once to past, present, and the needs, insofar as he can foresee them, of the future. His fidelity is personal, at once to his students and to those values of the past which he prizes and many of which are associated in his mind with definite individuals, some dead many centuries and who are yet in some well-nigh indescribable manner present to him. But teaching is nothing at all if it is not creative, and both teacher and student can witness to the possibility of this creativity. 54

There is also the cause of truth or, more modestly, the quest for truth in all areas and at all levels. It has been a

54 The opinion may be ventured that there must be few students of western philosophy for whom Socrates is only a historical personnage. As for fidelity to the Socratic "spirit," what genuine teacher of philosophy does not constantly strive to express it in his teaching life? Marcel is himself a living example of the effort to be creative in that striving.
common opinion of mankind that those who have dedicated their lives to this quest are among the most admirable of those worthy of admiration, despite their inevitable personal shortcomings and failings. It seems evident that these seekers themselves considered the quest for truth as the most meaningful kind of life they could lead, for they very frequently paid a heavy price in privation, suffering, ridicule, self-sacrifice, and even persecution. A man does not suffer such things, as Marcel has said, for the sake of what is a mere abstraction. The seekers of truth form a community among themselves reaching far into the past (remember Socrates) and, hopefully, extending into a distant future. They often can recognize one another and sustain one another in ways difficult to understand and still more difficult to explain. But of course this community of truth seekers is the least institutionalized of concrete unities and is predicated on genuine dedication and not on career considerations.

A more complex example of creative fidelity may be expressed in the phrase "love of the past." But there is a dual aspect to be considered when it is a question of fidelity to the past, viz., there is a fidelity to those whom one has loved and who have died; and there is a fidelity to what are somewhat misleadingly referred to as "past values." The reader will note the use of the past perfect "have loved" in regard to fidelity to the dead. Marcel would never accept this way of referring to those
whom one loved while they were still living. It is easy to see why he would reject it. For love, forgetfulness is the supreme infidelity, more heinous than any carnal sin. If one loves, one does not forget. The presence of the beloved is maintained within throughout one's life and, literally hopefully, beyond the grave (See Chapter 3, Section 2, C). But fidelity to those who have preceded us in death need not take the macabre form so finely depicted in Henry James' celebrated novella "The Altar of the Dead." One can maintain presence without lapsing into the rigidity of Byzantine ceremonial.

Fidelity to past values is, according to Marcel, essentially fidelity to a choice and commitment one has made to a complex call and appeal. Our cultural heritage is not a possession handed to us as if it were a table or a chair, but something one must actively acquire. It is a very rich, complex, and many-voiced appeal. Marcel calls it a "reiterated series of calls" among which we must choose. Some of these voices are inconsistent with others: one does not choose both Socrates and Thrasy-macus, or Rome and Carthage. Yet without this kind of faithfulness there could be little meaningful continuity in the life of the human community and consequently in the lives of its individual members. In its absence each generation would be faced with the appalling

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55DW, p. 33.
prospect of committing the errors of the past all over again as well as with the stupendous task of re-creating these values virtually ex nihilo. Rome did go down once, bringing down with her into ruin a relatively "universal" order. But what would it have been like if not only most of the material culture, but all of the non-material as well, had perished with Rome? What if there had been no Benedictines faithful to the best of the past as they re-created it? Civilization is a fragile construction and our grasp of cultural values rather precarious at best. Suppose not only the greater part of our vaunted technology was lost, but also even the memory of those values which it actualizes. How long would it take to re-create the "scientific spirit?" How long, after such a re-creation, would it take to reformulate Newtonian or Einsteinian physics?

These examples of different kinds of creative fidelity not only exhibit the meaningfulness of fidelity, but also the necessity for creativity. Love and friendship are incompatible with rigidity of mind and inflexibility of response. The search for truth and the creation of art in its many forms cannot be carried on without the persistence rooted in fidelity or the creativity of the seeker and artist. One cannot be a real teacher nor can one learn effectively without fidelity of purpose and aim combined with that mutual self-gift which transforms what would otherwise be only dead material into a source of insight and, it may be, of inspiration.
Creative fidelity, however, is dependent upon an exercise of freedom and of reflection. This latter qualification does not necessarily refer to the capacious intellect or to the unaccountable imagination and insight of the man of genius. It does not of itself exclude the humble. But it does exclude the mass, and it might seem that the majority of the human race is comprehended by the category of the mass rather than by a capacity for creative fidelity. If this be admitted, then it would seem that the majority may be condemned to a life largely empty of meaning, especially in a technological age. The history of Europe and the West since the inception of the industrial revolution, and the several diagnoses of modern life cited in the first chapter, suggest that the more our civilization progresses materially, the greater is the number of people alienated both from the roots of their own life and from their own culture, past and present.

Marcel is well aware of the dimensions of this problem and the immense difficulty it poses. He observes that the problem is of "extreme" difficulty because it seems that our present world assumes a system which presupposes a world of the alienated and disinherited. For Marcel, however, this is because of the inhumanity of this system; and this inhumanity is due ultimately to a lack of the thou relationship between the few who benefit and the

56 Ibid., p. 34.
many who suffer. Marcel insists that an order must be created which will "withdraw" as many as possible from the mass state of "abasement and alienation." That is to say, the few and the many must be brought together in such a relationship that men will no longer simply accept as inevitable a world of their own making which is increasingly inhuman.

For Marcel there is no technique which will arrest this sinister trend toward the inhuman which he sees at the heart of man's life and world today. He sees the problem as fundamentally one of renewing man's ties of love and life. "... love is substantial," he says, "... rooted in being," i.e., in the thou relationship which transcends all objectivity and therefore all technics. The renewal of the ties of love and life cannot be achieved through mass movements amidst the uproar of conflicting ideologies. Only in very small groups can freedom be exercised in the service of a creative fidelity. But all genuine creativity, like every authentic fidelity, is apt to run a deep and hidden course until, in a burst of glory, the radiance of its achievement bursts upon an astonished and resisting world.

57 *MS*, p. 10.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

The critical observations and suggestions offered for the reader's consideration in this concluding chapter are restricted for the most part to the basic theme of this thesis; namely, the place and significance of creative fidelity in Marcel's philosophy. Just as the preceding pages were not intended to be an exhaustive account of Marcel's philosophy as a whole, so it is not suggested that the critical evaluation is either comprehensive or final. This chapter has been conceived and the attempt has been made to write it in the spirit of Marcel, viz., as a kind of exploratory, critical probe of certain aspects of Marcel's thought which are most relevant to his theory of creative fidelity. This means, in the first place, that certain problems of considerable philosophical interest not bearing directly on the theme are passed over. Thus, for example, Marcel has suggested in several places that the doctrine of incarnation contains the elements of a solution to the classical problem of the existence of the external world, but an examination and critical analysis of this problem in the light of Marcel's philosophy would, to be satisfactory, require the kind of treatment usually reserved to a specialized monograph.

In the second place, both the criticism and the suggestions

\[1\text{See MB-I, p. 106; EB, pp. 46-47; cf. MJ, pp. 268-269.}\]
are intended to be constructive, and this means criticism chiefly, although not exclusively, from within Marcel's own scheme of thought, accepting for the main part both his basic outlook and his method. This approach to critical evaluation is especially appropriate with respect to Marcel because his philosophy is by its very nature unsystematic and has been recorded over the course of many years, under the influence of various moods, and as a consequence of diverse insights. It would not be difficult to apply a reductive analysis that would exclude the results of Marcel's type of thinking from the domain of philosophy (understood differently, of course, than by Marcel) or resolve them into personal opinions in the perjorative sense. But such a procedure would serve no constructive purpose and it would miss the point of Marcel's entire philosophical enterprise.

The criticism offered in this chapter proceeds from the particular to the general, i.e., from somewhat detailed consideration of the salient features of Marcel's theory of the thou and his doctrine of creative fidelity to more general observations concerning his basic philosophical outlook, method, and orientation. In order that the reader may not have continually to refer back to previous chapters, criticism is preceded by a resumé of the conclusions reached regarding creative fidelity. This final chapter is, accordingly, divided into three sections, (1) summary review of Marcel's doctrine of creative fidelity, (2) particular difficulties and
suggestions, and (3) general observations.

1. Summary Review

The doctrine of creative fidelity is to be seen in the light of the basic problem to which Marcel's philosophy is addressed. This is the problem of the contemporary situation of existential man. Man's world today is characterized by Marcel as empty, and this emptiness is felt as despair. The only genuine remedy for this situation is the experience of fullness associated with love. It is through love that the being of the other is revealed, the *I-thou* relationship becomes possible, and authentic community can exist. In such a relationship each is *with* the other, each maintains the presence of the other within himself. The *I-thou* relationship is itself a mode of participation the possibility of which is rooted in the structure of human existence. The human condition is such that the individual can, if he so chooses, open himself to the other, receive the other into himself. The possibility of openness arises from the fact that man is an incarnate being who participates in many modes and at many levels in the global reality in which he is immersed. But just as the individual may choose to open himself to the other, so also he is free to refuse or reject the other, to break the bond of love and to treat the *I-thou* experience either as less "real" than, or as impermanent as, anything else to be met with in human experience. Death is
certain and despair is always possible.

Creative fidelity is the concrete manifestation of love's recognition of the permanent value of the other and its refusal to despair, to accept death as final. It is the creative maintenance of presence despite the barriers of time, space, and death. It is the service of a free man, and this freely chosen service confers unity and meaning on man's life. The creatively faithful is a consecrated person whose life witnesses to his truth, his freedom, and his love. It is the free man's sustained gift of self to that which he recognizes as being of the highest value, a process which can produce an inner transmutation, a process by which man acquires a new quality and transforms his own existence, transfigures it, as it were, by finding in the service to a person or to a cause an opportunity to create a new self as well as creatively participate in a common life. This is the most meaningful life existential man can have, the ultimate answer to the felt emptiness of the contemporary world.

2. **Particular Difficulties and Suggestions**

Since, according to Marcel, creative fidelity is so intimately bound up with love and the I-thou relationship, certain difficulties with that theory as Marcel presents it will be considered before examining a difficulty with fidelity itself.
The theory of the thou

Four main difficulties will be considered here; namely, (1) the relationship of love to being, (2) the quality of authentic love, (3) the problem of hate, and (4) love as a source of conflict and unhappiness.

(1) It will be recalled (see Chapter Three) that, according to Marcel, the being of the other is revealed in and through love and, further, that love is the affirmation of the value of that being. Love, then, for Marcel, has both a cognitive and conative aspect although neither aspect can be objectified and the whole relationship is--in Marcel's sense of the term--profoundly mysterious.

Mysterious it certainly is on Marcel's account, for if his analysis is correct, it is difficult to understand how anyone could ever begin to love and consequently how the I-thou relationship could ever arise in the first place. What one loves, it is claimed, is the being of the other. But one does not have access to the other's being until one loves. The circle appears to be unbreakable, although this is certainly contrary to fact, i.e., people do love one another. While Marcel never states this difficulty in so many words, that he recognizes it is implicit in his statement that an initial sympathy, which is not love and which is "excessively
obscure," is required if the I-thou relationship is to develop.² The difficulty is indicative that Marcel's account of the nature and operation of love is inadequate even within his own scheme of thought, but discussion will be deferred until the second difficulty is posed, and both will then be discussed together.

(2) The second difficulty has to do with Marcel's characterization of the qualities of love. These qualities are fullness, fundamental unintelligibility, unselfishness, responsibility, respect for the liberty and uniqueness of the other, trust, and longing for an indefinite duration.

Now if these qualities are not understood as expressing in some sense an ideal limit and admitting both of degree and the possibility that one or more may be lacking, on the plane of concrete existence, then Marcel's use of the term "love" would have a very restricted range of application in actual human life. It may be questioned, for example, that all parents who love their children also respect their liberty and uniqueness even after their children have reached maturity. A similar observation concerning respect for liberty and uniqueness could be made regarding married couples.

²See MJ, pp. 171-172.
It seems evident that responsibility is not necessarily a characteristic of all love, not necessarily characteristic, e.g., of the love of many children for their parents, of many lovers for one another. If trust, i.e., a kind of faith which expresses itself concretely as unlimited confidence and fidelity, is an invariable characteristic of all love, then jealousy—also a rather common phenomenon frequently associated with some kinds of love—becomes inexplicable.

Indeed, it is possible to conceive of situations in which all or all but one of these qualities would be lacking, e.g., unrequited erotic love. The lover experiences no sense of fulfillment since, ex hypothesi, he is frustrated. He cannot be said to be unselfish in his love for he hounds the unfortunate girl like a demon. His love is not truly responsible for if the girl were to marry him she would deeply hurt both her family and her friends, whom she loves, as well as experience a life of hardship and difficulty. The lover does not respect his beloved's liberty and uniqueness since he wants her to return his love regardless of the fact that she loathes the sight of him. Finally, the lover feels so miserable and wretched that so far from desiring his love to persist indefinitely, he daily feels like casting
himself into the sea. In fine, in this hypothetical but by no means farfetched situation the man's love exhibits only one of Marcel's characteristics: it is fundamentally unintelligible.

To this criticism Marcel might, and almost certainly would, reply that what our hypothetical lover felt was anything but love. He was in a frenzy, perhaps "outside of himself"--even temporarily insane. But love was not what he felt. But apart from the fact, by no means negligible, as will be seen presently, that this denial seems to go contrary to the common linguistic usage of a large part of mankind, Marcel could only sustain this _reposte_ by introducing a norm by means of which love can be judged to be authentic or inauthentic. Without such a norm it is a matter of every man for himself in an area of feeling which is fundamentally unintelligible. Such an outcome would pose a dilemma for Marcel: either anarchy of feeling or else accept the fact that the common experience and practice of a considerable portion of mankind seems to confute his characterization of the quality of authentic love. The well-nigh unbelievable alternative to this dilemma would appear to be the conclusion that a considerable portion of mankind never experience love at all. Not only is this alternative
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incredible, it contravenes Marcel's explicit assertion that his concrete philosophy take as its point of departure certain humble experiences enjoyed by nearly everybody, as well as contradicts his explicit statement that there is hardly anyone "who has all his life been so unlucky as to have found it impossible" to love. 3

It would be futile to become involved in a logomachy with Marcel. What is needed is a closer scrutiny of the qualities of love as Marcel states them, and even a cursory examination very strongly suggests that there may be differences as well as similarities between the various phenomena it is usual to subsume under the common name of "love." Thus, for example, fullness and unintelligibility very frequently seem to qualify erotic love, but would seldom be used to characterize friendship, although there might be instances in which it would be appropriate to apply these terms. Again, unselfishness and responsibility are very common characteristics of parental love; trust and responsibility, on the other hand, seem more appropriate to filial love. Trust and respect for the liberty and uniqueness of the other seem to be a sine qua non for any true friendship, but it may

3See MB-I, pp. 251-252 and MB-II, p. 120.
be doubted if erotic love can always be so qualified. It may perhaps be granted that one characteristic common to all these relationships is, other things being equal, the desire for their indefinite continuance.

In summary, without a norm it is not possible to specify the qualities of authentic love. On the other hand, to compile a consolidated list of characteristics abstracted from situations in which each of these love-relationships is concretely manifested is to incur a serious risk of merging relationships which may be in some essential respects distinct from one another. Such a procedure actually is not in the spirit of a concrete philosophy and needlessly generates difficulties.

There is some reason to believe that Marcel did, perhaps as a consequence of his method, inadvertently treat the various I-thou relationships as if they could be subsumed under a common genus obtained by abstraction from concrete situations. To illustrate this point the difficulty of the "excessive obscurity" of the initiation of the I-thou relationship, mentioned above, may be considered. The specification that love both reveals and affirms the value of the being of the other would seem more appropriate to erotic love, more especially to what is called "love at first sight," than to some other kinds
of love. This kind of love often is fundamentally unintelligible. It occurs with the suddenness of a flash of lightning which illuminates an entire landscape. It is beyond predication. The beloved does cast a "spell" upon the lover.⁴

But Marcel himself later came to view erotic love with mistrust, nor is he the first to do so. Moreover, who would ordinarily use such a term as "spell," for example, to describe what one feels for a friend, a parent, or a teacher whom one loves? It is interesting to note that Marcel wrote most about the spell-binding quality and fundamental unintelligibility of love during the years 1919-1920, that is, about the time of his marriage. The qualities of concern and responsibility, on the other hand, become more prominent in his thought during the years of family and professional life, culminating in the emphasis on unselfishness, trust, and respect to be found in the Gifford Lectures of 1949-1950. Nearly thirty years and a religious conversion intervened between these two periods although the later Marcel never repudiated the youthful Marcel.

These two difficulties with the theory of the thou

⁴See MJ, p. 232.
exhibit one of the shortcomings of Marcel's method; namely, the danger of overgeneralization on the basis of phenomenological description of one's own feelings at a given time. This shortcoming is all the more likely to be a source of trouble if the philosopher refuses in principle to attempt to bring analyses produced at different times into some kind of systematic relationship with one another. Marcel's reluctance to objectify his deepest and most delicate feelings, as well as the inherent difficulty of doing so, is very understandable. But if one does verbalize one's feelings and publishes the results as philosophical research, it is hardly fair to invoke the term "mystery" to evade difficulties which may, after all, originate chiefly from overgeneralization.

The danger of overgeneralization on the basis of phenomenological description of concrete feelings at a given time could be avoided, in regard to this particular problem, if agreement could be reached on a norm to distinguish authentic from inauthentic love. After all, Marcel cannot demand that his descriptions of the nature and quality of love and the I-thou relationship be accepted in toto simply on his ipse dixit. That may be the way of the artist, but not of the philosopher. Nor does Marcel ever address his reader in such an arrogant or
peremptory tone. In fact there is reason to believe that at least after the early thirties, if not before, Marcel did have a norm in mind. The question of a norm, however, should be discussed in the light of Marcel's basic philosophical orientation, and will therefore be taken up again in the following section of this chapter.

But even apart from the question of a norm of authentic love, there is no need to reject as authentic any of the characteristics of love which Marcel has given in his various analyses. What is needed is to recognize that the I-thou relationship may manifest in various ways, and that its concrete characteristics are decisively influenced by individual differences and the personal situation of the individuals involved. Furthermore, it should be conceded that erotic love is not the model for all love. To be sure, in the Gifford Lectures Marcel does say this, but there seems to be an almost irresistible tendency, perhaps due to its very intensity, on the part of nearly everyone, Marcel included, to regard it as a model and even to assimilate other kinds of love to erotic love. Feeling alone, in such an instance, is insufficient to prevent misinterpretation. While it may be true that intelligibility is at a minimum in erotic love, it certainly does not follow that this is equally true of all kinds of
love. In other words, just because erotic love is so often blind, it does not follow that all love is blind.

In his later work Marcel does indeed affirm that love admits of degree and states that there are different kinds, indeed a whole hierarchy, of I-thou relationships. Moreover, as early as 1918 he recognized that commonly most I-thou relationships increase gradually in the degree of intimacy achieved. This gradualness, it is clear from the context, is directly related to the individual's gradually increasing knowledge of the other. 5 This suggests that love may not be quite so unintelligible, so beyond all predication, as Marcel at times declares it to be, and that the being to which love gives access is not necessarily something attained in an instant without any relation to one's knowledge and judgment of the character of the other. In brief, love and knowledge may go and grow together. While it may indeed be futile to ask which comes first, which is logically or temporally prior, there seems to be no reason to completely disjoin them.

(3) That there is a problem of hate for Marcel is a consequence of his characterization of the subject as a

living center with an interiority and life of his own capable of invoking in another reactions of love and respect or fear and even horror (see Chapter 3, Section 1, a). It is this living center, the subject \textit{qua} being, Marcel says, which can only be apprehended through love. It is only by and through love that an individual can penetrate to the personal dimension of the other.

There appears to be a contradiction between this characterization of the subject and the claim that love is the medium by which the subject as such is known. Marcel himself observes that there seems to be "some sort of contradiction" from the ontological point of view. 6

The apparent contradiction is this: if the only way one can attain to the being of another is through the act of love, how could the other \textit{qua} being inspire a reaction of "fear or even horror?" To the extent that one fears, hates or loathes someone, how can it be said that he also loves him? If one does not love the other person, then he does not recognize and acknowledge him as being. But if the other is not recognized and acknowledged as being, then for that person the other is not a "living center" capable of invoking a response of

\footnote{MB-II, pp. 63-64.}
fear or horror. In other words, how can anyone both love and hate at one and the same time in one and the same act?

There are several ways this difficulty might be resolved. Marcel states that everyone has both the need and the capacity to attain to the being of others through love. However, Marcel does not claim that being per se compels love. In fact man remains free either to acknowledge or refuse to acknowledge the being of another. Since the individual is not compelled to love, then he is free to fear, loathe, or hate. Still it seems this solution suffers from several serious defects. For one thing, it seems to deny implicitly that being per se is lovable, and it is very doubtful that Marcel would want to concede that point. Moreover, although this solution safeguards man's freedom and concrete individuality, it throws doubt on the universality of his capacity to love and this is contrary to Marcel's own statement affirming this universality. Finally, the difficulty of simultaneously hating and loving is not really resolved. Another

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7See S, p. 82, and the discussion in the preceding chapters regarding emptiness and alienation. Cf. also MB-II, pp. 45-52.
8Cf. PE, pp. 12, 43; CF, pp. 33-34, 51-52, 75-76; MB-II, pp. 119, 122, 123-124, 126-127, 130-132.
solution, therefore, must be sought.

As was noted above, Marcel affirms that love admits of degree, and that another person can become "more and more" of a thou for one. Moreover, love is "situational," for existential man can never be divorced from his actual concrete situation. Now factors may be present in a given situation which make it impossible for the individual to love or to continue to love. This may be true, for example, of many marriages. A situation develops in which the person can only respond with hate or fear toward the being which he formerly loved. But to this solution it may be objected that it still does not explain how it is possible to love and to hate at one and the same time in one and the same act. Moreover, it leaves unanswered the question whether the other person is still apprehended as being if in fact he is hated or feared in the given, concrete situation.

It appears, therefore, that the problem is extremely serious for Marcel. In order to resolve it, it seems that he would have to admit the truth of two propositions; namely, (a) that while existential man actually lives in the present, he is in fact not free of the past with

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9See MJ, p. 146 and MB-I, pp. 219-220.
respect to his former attitudes and memories, and (b) although the existential order appears to exclude the abstract and the conceptual as determinant realities, they are nonetheless somehow included in the actual situation in which the individual finds himself. As a matter of fact, there are indications that Marcel would admit the truth of these propositions for he alludes to an intersubjectivity within the very self, to an inner plurality which can give rise to a kind of struggle between "the man I was yesterday, the man I have been until recently, and the man I have a tendency to be, a yearning to be, today." 10

If the above two propositions be admitted, then it may be that once an individual recognizes and acknowledges another person as a being the other in some way remains a being for him even if in a subsequent situation the individual should for some reason come to fear or even to hate him. That is to say, the initial love one felt for the other qua being is never entirely lost or, what comes to the same thing, one never entirely loses one's grasp of the other qua being even if, in a given situation, one should fall back upon the attitude of treating

10 See MB-I, pp. 225-228; also MB-II, pp. 124-125.
the other as an object or thing. Clearly this latter attitude could come to dominate a situation at any time if it is granted that man is an incarnate being who can view both himself and others as object or as being. Men then would commonly assume an ambivalent or potentially ambivalent attitude towards others, and this does not seem to conform to the observed facts.

Unfortunately, this last suggestion does not explain how it is possible to hate someone without first having loved him. It is not open to Marcel to maintain that when one hates it is not the other \textit{qua} being who is hated, but rather the other \textit{qua} object. Nor is it credible to maintain that a person cannot hate another without first having loved him. One may hate for very little reason or because the other is felt to be an obstacle or threat. This may happen even if both parties are only slightly acquainted with one another. Marcel might reply that in these instances it is not the \textit{person} who is hated, but rather the relationship or quality of being-a-threat. The other is not hated because of his \textit{being}, but as a source of insecurity or frustration. But some natural phenomenon or material object, a storm or a stone, can also constitute an obstacle or a threat and, according to Marcel, these are not things which are capable of
evoking fear or hate. One does not truly fear or hate things.\textsuperscript{11}

It seems that if this difficulty is to be resolved within the scheme of Marcel's thought, a distinction will have to be made between the \textit{being} of another revealed by and through love and his reality as a subject, as a living center capable of evoking a reaction of love or hate. There does not seem to be any decisive reason against drawing this distinction. It was noted in Chapter Three (note 28) that Marcel's observations concerning the apprehension of the other as a living center could be seen as a restatement of the problem of "other minds." Now it must be possible in principle to recognize others \textit{qua} subjects without implying that such simple recognition also entails apprehending that personal dimension which Marcel refers to as the \textit{thou}. Indeed, surely this is what we all do from a very early age. \textit{How} we do it is another and separate question.

It seems therefore feasible without contradiction for Marcel to retain the requirement that being, the personal dimension in his sense, is only revealed in and through love, and at the same time maintain that subjects as such can be either hated or loved. But this possibility would require the distinction between the individual \textit{qua}

\textsuperscript{11} Cf. MB-II, p. 29.
subject and the individual *qua* being. There seems no good reason, however, why this distinction cannot be accommodated within the general scheme of Marcel's thought.

It may be that Marcel did not draw this distinction explicitly because he was unduly influenced by his experience as an artist. Knowledge and value are intimately related in both the creation and the appreciation of art. It is scarcely possible to understand or recognize the value of a poem or painting unless one has first to some degree loved it. Without this initial feeling for the work of art information about it, whether by book, lecture, or word of mouth, is practically useless. All the world may pay homage to Dante, but unless one has "felt" for himself the vigor, beauty, and depth of the *Purgatorio* such praise is apt only to provoke the comment: "I don't understand what they see in it." In certain matters the recognition of truth depends on the depth and intensity of one's feeling, and the feeling must not be one of hostility.

It is also virtually impossible to appreciate the value of a person if one does not to some extent *like* him. Of course it is possible to appreciate his intelligence, his ability, his talent; but not *him*. It by no means follows
from this, however, that one cannot recognize the other as a living center capable of evoking hate or love. But if one should be especially sensitive to the creative process, particularly as it is expressed in the arts, it is understandable that one should focus attention on the positive aspect, the evident correlation between felt attraction and apprehension of value. If one should then transfer this experience to the domain of human relationships it might be difficult to avoid emphasizing the apprehension of personal value through love at the expense of other aspects of the total situation.

(4) The three difficulties thus far considered have been viewed entirely within the general scheme of Marcel's thought, and it has been argued that there exists the possibility of resolving them within the terms of that scheme. The fourth difficulty is of a somewhat different kind and in certain respects much more serious. It is not so much a difficulty within the scheme of Marcel's philosophy as it is a difficulty with that philosophy in relation to Marcel's diagnosis of the contemporary situation.

Fundamentally, Marcel prescribes the life of intersubjectivity as the answer to the felt emptiness of the contemporary world. This life manifests concretely as
a creative fidelity to a person or a cause. Both fidelity and intersubjectivity, however, depend upon the mutual response to an appeal or invocation. In other words, a necessary condition for a life of creative fidelity is reciprocal love, the matrix from which fidelity takes its origin. Herein lies the difficulty. It is a notorious fact of common experience that people love and that their love is not returned. The non-requital of love is a source of bitter frustration and suffering. Whatever the reasons for this experience it is common enough, and it would seem that those who find themselves in such an unfortunate situation are ipso facto excluded from a meaningful life if by a meaningful life is meant an experience of fullness and of joy.

Furthermore, it seems that Marcel himself doubted that the majority are capable of the kind of love which would confer meaning on their lives for he excludes the masses from this "level of consciousness" which he identifies with the truly human. It was seen at the end of Chapter Five that Marcel recognized that this problem posed an immense difficulty to which he had no ready answer. It will also be recalled that Marcel

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12MS, p. 10.
concedes that the capacity for creative receptiveness, upon the capacity for which the possibility of love and creative fidelity ultimately depend, cannot be assumed to be universal, although he tends to speak of it as if it were. In regard to this point also Marcel is unable to produce a convincing answer. Finally, it will be remembered that Marcel is quite explicit in denying that there could be any technique which could remedy an individual's incapacity for love.

In the light of these considerations it would seem to follow that only a relatively few people would ever have the opportunity to enjoy a meaningful life. There can be no question but that Marcel takes an aristocratic, rather than a democratic, viewpoint generally in regard both to life and culture, and possibly, to some extent, even in regard to politics. His observations on what he calls "statistical thinking" are enough to establish his attitude in this respect even if he had not made it explicit in a number of passages in several of his books. But even so, it may be doubted that Marcel intends to offer a remedy for the ills of the contemporary situation which,

13 See PE, p. 102.
14 See MB-I, pp. 12-14; cf. also MS, pp. 10, 141, 206-208, and especially 267-268; cf. also S, p. 6.
because of their very nature, would not be available to a majority of the human race.

Even if this particular aspect of the difficulty could be resolved, there remains the difficult question whether, in order to enjoy a meaningful life, man should love many persons or only a few. This issue is distinct from the question whether he has a capacity to love many. In view of Marcel's exclusion of the masses from the life of authentic intersubjectivity, it would seem that if Marcel were to be realistic he should answer that a given individual should not expect to love more than a few people. But, for one thing, this is not actually the tendency of Marcel's thought nor would it in any sense constitute a remedy for the contemporary situation which is common to all. For another, small groups of "insiders" who look on the rest of the world as "outsiders" have been a perennial mark of human social life and a source of the bitterest sorrow and suffering, one of the primary sources, to use Gibbon's phrase, for the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind. Just how, on this view, an individual could experience fullness in a situation in which he conceived himself to be surrounded by people hostile or potentially hostile to himself and those whom he loves is not at all easy to see.
Furthermore, even if one should restrict one's love to a few, there is a difficulty of reconciling the conflicting requirements of simultaneous loves, e.g., the conflicts which may arise between the love for one's parents, spouse, children, friends, cause, etc. This painful situation, like unreciprocated love, is also all too familiar. Of course one might always say that this is the human condition, that we cannot do anything about it, and that we have to make the best of a bad job. But this kind of stoical acceptance does not harmonize very well with Marcel's doctrine of hope.

Finally, the various aspects of this difficulty inevitably reflects upon the doctrine of creative fidelity. Fidelity is the concrete manifestation of love and the rejection of nihilism and despair. Conflicting loves mean conflicting fidelities, and this is another source of frustration and unhappiness. Stoical acceptance, on the other hand, cannot be identified with fullness and could be interpreted as the de facto acknowledgment that fullness is unattainable. Either alternative is a strange prescription for the ills of contemporary man whose life is already sufficiently torn between conflicting fidelities.

15 See MB-II, p. 64, where Marcel acknowledges the difficulty without elaborating on it.
and the felt emptiness due to unfulfilled love.

To this difficulty Marcel has no answer, nor will the introduction of distinctions and more sophisticated qualifications really mend matters. But this does not mean that Marcel's philosophy leads to a cul-de-sac, although the possibility of such an outcome cannot be excluded in principle. What is meant by this last statement, however, will, along with the question of the norm of authentic love, be deferred to the following section.

As pointed out above, difficulties with the theory of the thou entail difficulties for the theory of creative fidelity since fidelity is rooted in love. But there is a further problem about fidelity as such to which attention also must be given.

b. Fidelity

The reader will recall from Chapter Four that Marcel insists that authentic fidelity is unconditional. This then created a problem for Marcel because of an apparent conflict between his requirement that authentic fidelity always include an element of spontaneity and the requirement of sincerity, i.e., that one refrain from an unconditional commitment since it is certain that one's feelings will change. Marcel argued that this objection to an unconditional fidelity is based on a
mistaken assumption; namely, that the subject is at any given moment identical with that state of himself which he can, at that moment, consciously apprehend. In reality, according to Marcel, one's "inner states" are part of a larger and indeterminate whole, and the individual's own attitude towards them has its part to play in influencing the future. When one commits oneself, one grants in principle that the commitment will not again be put into question.

Marcel's solution, however, even if accepted, does not touch another difficulty which is so formidable that for all practical purposes he is forced to admit he cannot solve it.

The difficulty is this: even if an individual is justified, i.e., has the right, to commit himself despite the fact that his inner disposition will change, what are the grounds for the initial commitment? Can there ever be adequate grounds for refusing ever to put the commitment into question at some time in the future?

Marcel attempts to bypass this difficulty by contending that while unconditional commitment appears to be unwarranted to the external observer, in reality fidelity is experienced from within as growth, as "a deepening or ascending." But Marcel makes a very damaging admission in this connection; namely, that when viewed from without, "all fidelity seems
incomprehensible, impracticable, a wager, and scandalous too . . . "16 This is tantamount, however, to saying that at bottom all unconditional fidelity is irrational. Marcel tries to save the situation by resorting to his distinction between object and mystery, that is to say, he maintains that fidelity cannot be objectified. If one views one's own fidelity reflectively, it is apt to seem just as incomprehensible and scandalous as the fidelity exhibited by another person. "This possibility of subversion and even destruction is embodied in the very essence of the free act . . . and this is the truly tragic element in our condition."17

The distinction between object and mystery, however, does not really help in this case because a blind commitment cannot be required of a rational being, especially when it is a question of the grounds of assurance for an unconditional fidelity. This is evident when it is recalled that our experience is all too often such that we learn the hard way that our original trust in either person or cause was mistaken. Disillusionment is the name given to this sad experience. Marcel himself admits that in this domain disappointment is always possible in principle.18 He tries to evade the

16 CF, p. 163. The writer's emphasis.
17 Ibid., p. 164.
18 Ibid., p. 167.
seemingly inevitable conclusion by suggesting that faith in God *can* be absolute, and that other fidelities become possible and find their guarantee in such faith. But this will not do either, and for two reasons. First, religious faith passes beyond the limits proper to philosophy; and, secondly, even if no objection be raised to the introduction at this point of religious faith, how does this help convert a fidelity which in principle may always be misplaced into an absolute fidelity? How can God, even if his existence could be demonstrated, justify and guarantee X's faith in Y? Surely the reference to God here is useless. If freedom is to mean anything, then it must be admitted that Y might betray both X and God; X might betray God and Y. Indeed, unless Marcel were to maintain not only that the existence of God can be proved, but also that it can be demonstrated that God possesses those attributes traditional theology ascribed to Him, there is no guarantee that God Himself might not betray both X and Y. But Marcel does not believe that the existence of God can be convincingly demonstrated to a non-believer, nor will he have anything to do with the God of traditional theology.

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19Ibid.

20Marcel writes in one place as if he explicitly recognized this point: "... there is a kind of facile optimism which I cannot compel myself to adopt; God's purposes are inscrutable, there is no guarantee that everything I love will not be destroyed." CF, p. 121. See also pp. 135, 175-183; MB-II, p. 154.
The consequence, however, is that unconditional fidelity cannot be justified, and if unconditional fidelity cannot be justified, why does Marcel insist that it can be? Some years later (in 1942) Marcel wrote that the only unconditional fidelity is faith in God, but that all other fidelities aspire to unconditionality. But aspiration is one thing, justification another. Further, if unconditional fidelity cannot be justified, why should anyone agree with Marcel that authentic fidelity must be unconditional? Finally, if fidelity is conditional, does not the original difficulty reappear, i.e., sincerity's requirement that the individual specify that his commitment is conditional? But if this is so, then Marcel's argument to the contrary has proved futile.

To this argument Marcel might reply that it is simply a fact that there is such a thing as an absolute fidelity even on the natural level, e.g., widows who refuse to marry. But this does not really meet the objection. The fact, which may be granted, that people do love unconditionally and do commit themselves unconditionally does not in any sense constitute a justification of their right to do either.

The overall conclusion, then, to this critical examination of Marcel's theory of the thou and his doctrine of fidelity is

21 See HV, p. 133.
that there are at least four difficulties which apparently cannot be resolved within the general scheme of his thought, viz., the question of a norm of authentic love, intersubjectivity as itself a source of unhappiness, the apparent denial to the masses of an opportunity for a meaningful life, and the requirement that fidelity be unconditional. If these difficulties can be disposed of, it will only be possible by approaching them from a different standpoint. In order to do this, it is necessary to attempt a wider view of Marcel's philosophy.

3. General Observations on Marcel's Philosophical Outlook, Method, and Orientation

Marcel's philosophy has been viewed in this thesis as an essential part of his total response to the contemporary situation as he diagnoses it. It is part of his total response because Marcel is not a philosopher only, but also an artist; not only a thinker and artist, but also a man. Furthermore, existentially Marcel has his own personal situation from which he views that larger situation which includes his own. It is this larger situation that is meant when Marcel speaks of the situation of contemporary man. The most important fact about this larger situation is the scientific and technological civilization predominant in the West and which, it appears, is in process of extending its influence over the entire planet.
Marcel has characterized the life of contemporary man as empty and meaningless, increasingly subject to despair. It is clear that this diagnosis is in a large part an evaluation. That is to say, Marcel does not like the developments and trends which he finds in the contemporary world and opposes the attitudes he believes they foster, the values he sees predominant in the world, and the overall trend he projects for the future. This is not to suggest that Marcel's evaluation is unjustified, but it is to suggest that other evaluations are possible. One might agree with Marcel about the basic facts and yet evaluate them differently. Thus, for example, it could be argued that never before today, despite obvious perils, has mankind found itself in a more hopeful situation. Man now possesses, or shortly will possess, the technical means to eliminate poverty and disease, prolong human life, discover and eliminate the factors responsible for basic human conflicts, etc. So a Marxist might argue, or a scientific positivist.

A similar observation could be made concerning Marcel's attitude towards certain other features of the contemporary situation, in particular mass culture as expressed in the communication media, the arts, in such political phenomena as the clamor for equality or the claims of the masses for their just rights. Marcel's own attitude regarding these phenomena is quite definitely
aristocratic; he has no love for the mass.\footnote{A reading of a single book, \textit{Les hommes contre l'humaine} (1951) should suffice to convince anyone of Marcel's basically aristocratic outlook.} Marcel's attitude, of course, is not mere fastidiousness or reaction, anymore than his protest against the extension of objective thinking into the domain of personal existence is mere obscurantism. But just as others could and have disagreed with Marcel's evaluation of the contemporary situation as a whole, so they could disagree with his evaluation of the basic content and trend of development of mass culture or feel that the lowering of cultural standards in some areas is not too high a price to pay for undoubted advantages, e.g., widespread literacy or a higher standard of living, gained in others.

Now Marcel knows perfectly well that it is possible to evaluate the contemporary situation differently from the way he has evaluated it, and he knows that others have in fact evaluated it differently. Nevertheless he is convinced that his own evaluation is essentially correct. For Marcel the objective attitude fostered by the predominance of science and technology in present day culture constitutes a threat to those values which he most loves. Man's self-image is functionalized; the dignity of the individual imperiled in fact, if not by ideology; honor, service, dedication, fidelity seem in danger of permanent banishment from social life to be replaced by considerations of utility, institutional pressures,
and the threat of naked force.

There is, additionally, a particular consequence of a world-outlook founded on the objective attitude of empirical science to which Marcel is especially sensitive. A characteristic of this world-outlook is its total acceptance of what may be called immanent naturalism, which may be defined here as the view that the universe studied and known—to the degree it can be known—by scientific method is exhaustive of reality. This is a metaphysical thesis, but not all who hold it realize this; and the very prestige of science has contributed to its widespread acceptance by the popular mind and perhaps has overawed even some philosophers.23 One particular consequence of immanent naturalism of great importance for understanding Marcel is that death not only appears to be final, but is accepted as final. If the heart rebels, as it often does, this rebellion must be seen for what it is, the emotional rejection of an undeniable fact. Only on the basis of an "unyielding despair" can man wring meaning for his life from an hostile or indifferent universe.

Marcel wholly rejects this outlook and this consequence. His whole nature—intellect, will, and feelings—is revolted by the prospect that those he has loved and who have died have slipped

23 At least Marcel thinks this is true; see CF, p. 4, where he observes that philosophers have in the past fifty years developed an inferiority complex vis-à-vis the empirical sciences.
forever from his grasp. He maintains their presence within himself and he refuses to believe that their presence is "only" a product of intense feeling and vivid memory. What he loved in them is too precious to be snuffed out—just like that. Radical, universal contingency, like skepticism or solipsism, is unacceptable to Marcel.

Love is evaluation par excellence; that is why it cannot be reduced to biology. Evaluation, however, eludes the categories of objective thought and is intentionally excluded by the canons of scientific method. If Marcel is to defend the values he loves from the threats he apprehends as inherent in the contemporary situation, he must devise a method that will at once exhibit their possibility and defend their integrity, that is to say, their reality.

This interpretation of the dynamic underlying Marcel's thought is neither conjecture nor fancy. It is sound inference from what Marcel has told us about himself and his conception of the philosophical vocation. Thus he has said that a materialistic, immanent conception of the universe is radically incompatible with a free man; that man is largely dependent in his concrete life on his self-image—if that self-image is degraded, man is degraded; that the contemporary materialistic mode of thought reduces man to a thing which seems to fall wholly within the domain of a materialistic psychology; that contemporary materialists increasingly tend to draw the logical and inhuman ethical consequences which materialists of an earlier age refrained from drawing because of
various cultural restraints. When he was seven or eight, Marcel tells us, while on a walk his aunt, who had married his father and who reared him, said to Marcel that no one could know if the dead were annihilated or in some way lived on. "I exclaimed: 'When I'm older I'm going to find out!'" The true philosopher, he has written (1962), rejects the attitude of "what's the use" attempting to elucidate what no one has succeeded in making intelligible. The philosopher rejects this attitude because of his own inner exigency comprising specifications corresponding to the philosopher's own personality.

Valuation implies the desire for satisfaction, the thirst for fulfillment. But satisfaction of intellectual curiosity alone is not enough, not nearly enough, for Marcel. Life is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be experienced. The approach must involve the whole man and this means it must be concrete. The appreciating consciousness is necessary for fulfillment even to be recognized, and "fulfillment as such is meaningless if it is considered from the angle of an objective or descriptive knowledge." A method must therefore be elaborated by which man can be approached globally so that the appreciating consciousness and the

25 EB, p. 25.
27 MB-II, p. 52.
realm of feeling will not be abstracted from and then ignored, left to one side. Values, after all, are more felt than understood. Hence secondary reflection.

The price to be paid is high: the method will not yield valid conclusions, i.e., conclusions compelling universal recognition. Marcel pays this price, albeit reluctantly. His attempt to construe another kind of universality, one patterned after the universality of a work of art, is indicative of his reluctance. This attempt is not very convincing and is exceedingly obscure. Marcel is not at all clear even about the nature of "artistic" universality; the matter is all the darker when this notion is transferred to the realm of philosophy. Quite apart from the ever-present risk, mentioned in section two above, of overgeneralization from a particular instance, and apart from the difficulty of distinguishing which features of a concrete situation or experience may properly be attributed to the human condition and which are peculiar to a given individual formed and influenced by a given culture at a given time and place, the method leads not to answers or solutions, but to the distinction between mystery and problem. The recognition of the reality and significance of mystery is vital for Marcel's philosophy, yet, paradoxically, it is a dead end for his philosophy. Reason is the life of philosophy, and reason lives by those very definitions and categories which do not apply to the realm of mystery. These definitions and categories are misapplied, according to
Marcel, if they are employed to "resolve" a mystery, and their misapplication leads to the generation of pseudo-problems which admit of no solution. This means that Marcel's own analyses and elucidations are not solutions either.

Recognition of mystery may help us to avoid a futile attempt to solve certain perennial philosophical questions, and it may point beyond itself, so to speak, but that is all. This is not to say that the thinker cannot usefully explore the phenomenology of love, hope, fidelity, despair, etc.; nor that accurate description and analysis of these phenomena cannot contribute to our understanding of ourselves. But their ultimate value will depend on whether mystery is recognized for what it is, and in the last analysis this recognition, according to Marcel, depends upon the exercise of freedom. Nothing can force a person to exercise his freedom; the very expression is a contradiction in terms.28 If, however, the ultimate value of Marcel's analyses depends upon the recognition of mystery, and the recognition of mystery depends on an exercise of freedom, then of course it follows that one may refuse his recognition and dismiss analyses which propose neither demonstrable nor verifiable conclusions as irrelevant or futile. It is not for nothing that Marcel emphasized in the first of his Gifford Lectures that his philosophy was also an appeal, and not

28 CF, pp. 22-23.
addressed to everyone but to men of good will who seek peace.  

Whoever rejects Marcel's method, then, rejects Marcel's philosophy. Marcel will have little or nothing of significance to say to him. But this method should be acceptable to those who find themselves in a situation similar to Marcel's or who are tormented by similar problems and who understand, or will make the effort to understand, what it is that Marcel is trying to do. That is to say, such a person will recognize or soon come to recognize that man's existence has a dual aspect, the tangible which can be observed and described, and the intangible which cannot be observed and described in the same way as the tangible.

Concrete man, who is always in a situation, acts as much, if not more, from his feeling as in the light of his objective thinking. Marcel's method is intended to reach those dimensions which experimental methods cannot reach, to deal with realities that cannot be manipulated in the way empirical data can be manipulated. For example, the individual is not only placed physically in a situation; he also participates in it, and this is perhaps the most vital and fundamental aspect about both the man and his situation. But participation cannot be observed or described, perhaps not even by the participant himself.  

The limitations of the method

29 See MB-I, pp. 16-17, 21.

30 A friend once remarked to the writer, "When I say to my wife 'I love you,' I am not telling her how I feel. But somehow she knows!"
can be freely acknowledged; after all, every method has its limitations. Marcel's method is limited to phenomenological description, and even that description is largely indirect; and to drawing existential implications which cannot impose their validity universally. If, as a consequence of these limitations, it should be objected that the results yielded by the method cannot be verified, a twofold pragmatic answer could be given by Marcel: verification of a certain kind can be obtained positively if one enjoys the experience of fullness by living in accordance with this philosophy; negatively, if one lives according to a contrary philosophy and experiences emptiness. Such a "verification" is proper to a concrete philosophy such as Marcel's for, it will be recalled, Marcel has maintained from the beginning that he is not engaged upon a speculative, but an existential, enterprise.

It was remarked above that in a sense the recognition of mystery was a dead end for philosophy or, alternatively, that it pointed beyond itself. It was necessary to speak of Marcel's method and the distinction between problem and mystery in order to guard against misunderstanding when returning to the four unresolved difficulties discussed in the preceding section. These difficulties were the question of a norm of authentic love, the incapacity of the masses for authentic love, love as itself a source of unhappiness, and the problem of an unconditional fidelity. If Marcel were trying to construct a system, these difficulties would
perhaps constitute a fatal defect subversive of the whole. Nor would much be gained, even within Marcel's own scheme of thought, by facilely labeling them "mysteries" without understanding the ultimate significance mystery has for Marcel.

The immediate significance of mystery was discussed in Chapter Three in connection with love. But fidelity cannot be separated from love, and neither fidelity nor love can be fully understood in isolation from hope and from value. But hope, love, fidelity seemingly are destined to shipwreck on the reefs of contingency, to perish everlastingly. Death is inexorable, despair is always possible.

The only final answer to this possibility of despair, according to Marcel, is recourse to the Absolute Thou. This recourse is what Marcel calls the Absolute Resort. The Absolute Thou is God, but not the God of the philosophers or the theologians. The person who can avail himself of this Resort is the man of faith, the man who finds no insuperable obstacle on his path to transcendence. The Absolute Thou to Whom he resorts is not the ens realissimum or Infinite Substance. He is personal and the relationship between Him and the man of faith is a personal relationship. The Absolute Thou can never be an object and

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31See MJ, pp. 262-264, 281, 298.
consequently can never be the object of demonstration. There can be, therefore, no guarantee that the unconditional trust which constitutes religious faith is not misplaced.\textsuperscript{33}

The \textbf{Absolute Thou} is the ultimate focus of all unconditional fidelities, of all unconditional loves. Nothing less can respond to love's urgent appeal for perennialness and ensure the ultimate fulfillment of the intersubjective commitment.\textsuperscript{34} Since this \textit{Thou} is absolute, pure Thou, He cannot ever be degraded into an object nor does He ever degrade the man of faith into an object. The \textbf{Absolute Thou}, in other words, never betrays. His link with the believer is pure love, the essence of which is unselfishness and concern. The \textbf{Absolute Thou} is thus the source of the norm for authentic love, for communion with the \textbf{Absolute Thou} is intersubjectivity taken to its ideal limit, is pure charity.\textsuperscript{35} The hopes generated by man's separate loves finds their fulfillment in the \textbf{Absolute Thou}, without faith in Whom there is no possibility to finally overcome the unavoidable conflicts between those separate loves on the level of concrete existence.

The question of the capacity for authentic love, for a truly meaningful life, on the part of the masses, however, is not to be

\textsuperscript{34}MB-II, pp. 173-175.
\textsuperscript{35}Cf. MB-II, p. 191.
resolved simply by an easy reference to the *Absolute Thou*. The capacity to resort to the *Absolute Thou* is an individual matter and an occasion for grace. "We are in no position to know," Marcel says, "whether all human beings who now exist or who have existed are called or not to what we designate by a vague term, for which, however, there is no substitute--salvation." Indeed, Marcel suggests that such a question is ultimately meaningless as far as existential man is concerned.  

A meaningful life, then, can be achieved in this world, the plane of existence, but the ultimate source of the meaning, for Marcel, transcends this world. Total fulfillment is not possible, but it can be "foretasted" if man is oriented toward transcendence. Should he refuse to make this turn, however, he will not consistently be able to avoid despair. Since man is free, he can and must decide for himself. He may choose the absurd, either because he convinces himself it is not absurd or because he prefers the absurd. Nothing can compel him to assign a meaning to his suffering or to his life, and it is always open to him to effectively increase the "share of meaninglessness" in the world.  

Must it be concluded, then, that religion is the ultimate basis of Marcel's philosophy? Is it a religious philosophy? How this

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36 MB-ll, p. 192.
37 CF, pp. 23 and 75.
question is to be answered depends largely on how one defines "religious philosophy." It would not be true to characterize Marcel's philosophy as a philosophy of religion. Rather it seems more correct to say that its orientation is religious. Its base is existential. Marcel has himself told us that his philosophy neither presupposes nor can be logically derived from any particular religion. He has also said that it was his philosophy that led to his conversion, and not vice versa.38 This means that Marcel's analyses of fidelity, love, hope, freedom, and creativity should retain their own value, subject to the limitations of his method, whether or not one can rise to the heights, or perhaps one should say, sink to the depths, from which it is possible to have recourse to the Absolute Thou. That is to say, while it is true that Marcel's philosophy has ultimately a religious orientation and that his philosophy is therefore susceptible to a religious interpretation, such an interpretation is by no means a necessity.

When it is considered that Marcel's notion of the Absolute Thou is not a concept but an appeal of the concrete individual, it is clear enough that there are many who might experience difficulty in making such an appeal. To appeal to God as Absolute Thou is, if it is to be meaningful, to feel or recognize God as presence, for that is the only notion of the thou that Marcel has

38See PE, pp. 45-46; cf. pp. 109-110; CF, p. 79.
ever given his reader. As previously mentioned, the Absolute Thou is the living God, not the God of the philosophers and theologians. To put one's faith and trust in an imaginary being, Marcel says, such as a God who can be reduced to a collection of abstract theological statements, is to trust what almost certainly cannot resist "the assault of concrete facts." But it is not open to man to experience the presence of God in the same way or under conditions at all similar to those under which he experiences the presence of another person. Moreover, Marcel also concedes that the data of Christianity may be necessary in order to understand just what he has in mind regarding some of the fundamental notions of his philosophy, such as presence, witness, and, a fortiori, the Absolute Thou. Marcel does not mean these notions presuppose Christianity or are deducible from it, but only that without some knowledge of Christianity it may be difficult for a reader to know what he is trying to say. But this means that the notion of the Absolute Thou is a culturally relative notion, and therefore anyone unfamiliar with Christianity, e.g., many people in the Far East, might be quite unable to recognize or experience the presence of God in the way Marcel has in mind. If such a person cannot recognize or experience God as presence, as Thou, then he cannot recognize the real, concrete possibility of

\footnote{MB-II, p. 154; cf. pp. 4-5.}
\footnote{PE, pp. 45-46.}
invoking the Absolute Thou. Marcel concedes this when he states that a particular individual's recognition that the meaning of his life transcends his life depends upon that individual's conversion. Conversion, however, is an effect of the mysterious operation of grace in combination with the individual's exercise of his freedom. 41

Finally, Marcel emphasizes that the contemporary world is "more and more" so organized that conditions are increasingly inimical to conversion. 42

If, then, religion were said to be the base of Marcel's philosophy, or if it were maintained that the phenomena Marcel has analyzed were in themselves essentially religious, then the consequence would be that a given individual's inability or refusal to invoke the Absolute Thou would, for him, invalidate Marcel's analyses of incarnation, participation, situation, the I-thou relationship, love as felt presence and mutual sharing, fidelity, freedom, etc. But this consequence could not be accepted by Marcel because these are just those "humble experiences" from which his philosophy takes its point of departure and which he believes nearly everyone has enjoyed. These phenomena, for Marcel, retain their own validity but are susceptible of being further interpreted as pointing beyond themselves toward "an end . . . not of

41MB-II, pp. 206-207.
42Ibid., p. 207.
this world, but without which this world would become engulfed in pure nonsense."

But what if a given individual cannot give these phenomena a religious interpretation, i.e., cannot invoke the Absolute Thou? Several alternatives are open to such a person. He may shrug his shoulders and turn his attention elsewhere, to realms other than the metaproblematic. Or he may remain in the uncomfortable position of accepting the essential correctness of Marcel's fundamental analyses without being able to overcome the difficulties pointed out in the preceding section. He may concede, for example, that love does tend toward unconditional commitment or that authentic fidelity is both creative and unconditional, without being able to explain or justify to himself why this should be so. He may agree with Marcel that man longs for an experience of fullness, but reluctantly and regretfully conclude that such an experience is, in the complete sense, unattainable. Lastly, such a person may conclude that the analyses themselves are basically incorrect and set himself to describe the same phenomena in a fundamentally different way. If, however, the fundamental accuracy of Marcel's analyses of love, hope, and fidelity be denied, then it would seem difficult to avoid the conclusion that man's life

43EB, p. 15.
44As, for example, Sartre has.
is ultimately meaningless, his existence absurd, or even that he cannot truly share his love with his fellow creatures. It is not only that these conclusions are unpalatable, but also, and more importantly, at least some of them seem contrary to fact. Intersubjectivity can be experienced and, if degrees of love be admitted, does not seem to be either rare or exotic. Indeed, nothing seems more human than such phenomena as love, care, concern, fidelity, responsibility, creativity and freedom, or man's participation in a larger reality, however it be explained, than that set by the limits of either his body or his ego.

Thus while it may be true that Marcel is unable to resolve certain basic difficulties, discussed above in section two, within the general scheme of his thought; and while it is certainly true that he has not achieved or even tried to effect a successful integration of the two orders of objective and existential truth; nevertheless it is also true that his philosophy is an impressive example of a concrete philosophy not based on "unyielding despair," chronic and irresolvable anxiety, or an individualism so exaggerated as to virtually deny the possibility and fact of both social community and enduring personal communion. This hopeful aspect of Marcel's philosophy remains even if one should feel unable to rise with

45 As Sartre, e.g., concludes that all love takes the form either of masochism or sadism.
Marcel to the plane of the religious, and this is, in our time, no small achievement in itself.
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