



Gabriel Marcel and the Existence of God

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Gabriel Marcel and the Existence of God

Gabriel Marcel's distinctions between primary and secondary reflection are intended to allow for a type of knowledge which is valid but not objectifiable. By means of secondary reflection, the mind comes to an intuitive awareness of realities which are eminently personal, such as love, sin, guilt, death, intersubjectivity, and God. Knowledge of the last of these enumerated items is our concern here. What is Marcel's approach to the existence of a supreme entity? In particular, how will he surmount Kantian and positivist obstacles in the way of knowing something of the nature of a supreme being?

It is to these two questions that Marcel directs a considerable concentration of his phenomenological analysis. His attitude toward the question of God's existence is a function not only of his general view of knowledge, but more particularly of his application of that view to the knowledge of "mystery." The resulting formulation coincides quite closely with the subjectivist views of Kierkegaard on the faith-reason issue, yet touches several contemporary re-formulations of that issue as well.

I. INTRODUCTION

Marcel has been concerned with the question of how we know God from the time of his earliest writings. At the beginning of his *Metaphysical Journal*, he expresses Kantian thoughts which, with some modification, persist throughout his later works. At this point he is concerned to show that since God does not exist in space-time, he cannot be known as an object of the world is known. Consequently, he makes the typical existentialist statement that God "is" but does not "exist." "God does not exist," he asserts; "He is infinitely above existence."¹

Aware of the seeming atheism of that remark, Marcel more lately has explicitly argued that such assertions intend merely that the divine mode of being is not analogous to that of space-time entities. In his William James lectures at Harvard University in 1961, he states that the Kantian text, above, "is not to be construed in any way as atheism":

On the contrary, my concern was to find a possible way of safeguarding the reality of God, which appeared to me to be inevitably compromised

1. *Philosophical Fragments 1909-1914* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1965), p.80-81.

from the moment one speaks of his existence; I thought one might speak of the existence of only that which falls within the purview of experience. In this there was a Kantian echo, to be sure.¹

This later statement puts his earlier comments in their proper context. Marcel had argued in the *Journal* that one cannot validly think God as an existing object independent of ourselves, because this mode of thought would place him within the ambit of the world. When we think God as an object, we fail to distinguish him from the world or from ourselves. An objective God reflects a Kantian conception of existence as limited only to space-time relations. Marcel expresses this in the following terms:

When we suppose we are positing (in existence or still only objectively) the absolute independence of God, we are really on the contrary only binding up God with immediate consciousness.²

If God is an object, he is independently experienced as such. An antinomy then develops. When God descends into existence, he substitutes himself for existing causes, and when reflective thought comes back to him, it is obliged to operate in an inverse way and re-introduce the causes. God thus becomes a superfluous concept when he is not really distinguishable from the sorts of things from which he is supposed to be independent. Thus, concludes Marcel, he cannot be said to exist objectively because he is not involved in such space-time causal relationships.

II. THE TRADITIONAL CAUSAL ARGUMENTS

In his approach to the traditional proofs, Marcel's main question is not whether these proofs are logically valid. History reveals, he notes, that numerous able thinkers have both rejected and accepted these proofs. At a certain level of philosophical reflection, he concludes, it is equally possible to declare the traditional proofs both sufficient and insufficient. The more important question which permeates his discussion is whether the proofs provide the sufficient conditions for making meaningful the affirmation by the believer of a transcendent reality. In this analysis, Marcel is as such concerned with the metaphysical as well as with the psychological issues involved.

Early in his philosophical career, Marcel launches an onslaught against the traditional arguments for the existence of God. Speaking of these five classical ways, he notes that these arguments presuppose

1. *The Existential Background of Human Dignity* (Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press, 1963), p.27.

2. *Metaphysical Journal*, trans. Bernard Wall (Chicago: Henry Regnery Com., 1960), p.31.

that we have "already grounded ourselves on God." They attempt to bring to the level of discursive objectivity "an act of a wholly different kind." Accordingly, he states his conviction that these arguments "are not ways, but blind ways, as one can have blind windows."¹

One notes in such statements an echo of Kierkegaard's assertion that what is known by faith cannot be explained by reason. Yet Marcel's argument goes further than Kierkegaard's: proofs are not only ineffectual, they are scandalous word-games about what cannot be voiced:

The proofs are ineffectual precisely when they would be most necessary, when, that is, it is a question of convincing an unbeliever; conversely, when belief is already present and when, accordingly, there is a minimum of agreement, then they seem to serve no useful purpose. If man has experienced the presence of God, not only has he no need of proofs, he may even go so far as to consider the idea of a demonstration as a slur on what is for him a sacred evidence.²

When Marcel once clarifies his meaning of the term "existence" as referring to "space-time realities," much of his motivation for attacking these traditional approaches becomes apparent. As he advances on his philosophical career, his viewpoint manifests a Sartrean-like antipathy toward causality which undergirds his Kantian notion of existence. The objection against causal explanations comes from the perspective of man, who is experienced as a free subject. God might indeed exist, but he is not a prime-moving cause of a finalistically-directed effect known as man. If God is both efficient and final cause of man, then man is determined to run a pre-determined orbit from Alpha to Omega, in which he thereby loses his freedom. For this reason, Marcel states his conviction that

we must finish with the idea of a God-cause, of a God concentrating in himself all causality, or even, in a more precise language, with every teleological usage of the notice of causality.³

Ascribing all causality to God deprives man of his own causality. The notion of God as efficient and final mover also robs man of his free vocation to reject or deviate from his end. Thus Marcel affirms that "the God whose death Nietzsche has announced is the god of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, the first mover." God must not be

1. *Being and Having*, trans. Katherine Farrer (New York: Harper Torchback-Harper and Row, 1965), p.98.

2. *The Mystery of Being*, vol. II (*Faith and Reality*), trans. René Hague (Chicago: Henry Regnery Com., 1960), p.197-198.

3. *L'homme problématique* (Aubier: Éditions Montaigne), p.63.

thought of as a "power." Such language suggests that the divinity is an existing agency susceptible of functioning as a cause among other causes. Marcel questions if there can be any true relation between such a transcendent power and the existential order so effected. The obvious conclusion is that "an objective doctrine of creationism must be rejected out of hand." The legitimacy of the affirmation of God depends on the rejection of the notion of creation.¹

At the root of the difficulty with the traditional arguments for God's existence is the notion of creative causality. Marcel makes no effort to hide his discontent with the application to the transcendent and personal orders of a concept which, he feels, has its place only in the area of determined, material relations. Marcel thus reflects, once again, the mentality of the general existentialist-phenomenological distrust of the compatibility of man's freedom with a divine causal production. Nietzsche and Sartre both reject God because his causality seems to deny the subjective freedom which both locate in man. Similarly, Jaspers and Heidegger feel that divine causality would put man in a mold wherein he would be objectified as a mere thing among worldly things. Marcel shares this concern over the reductive tendency of causal analyses of creation. He writes that in the domain of human intersubjectivity "all causal interpretations are a mistake."² Causality, he adds, casts no intelligible light on God, the family, illness, grace, artistic creativity, generosity, spiritual life, or being in a situation.³

At bottom, Marcel's attack on causal explanations stems from his feeling that "the idea of causality is inseparable from the notion of an entity endowed with instrumental powers." Causality establishes a "bio-teleological" relationship between a principal agent and some instrumental agent serving as a means to ultimate goals, such as a pen serves the writing interests of an author. If God is both efficient and final cause of man, then man becomes an objective instrument used by God for the attainment of divine, not human goals. Like his continental contemporaries, Marcel finds such a conclusion repugnant to the freedom he finds in man. Accordingly, he seeks to limit the notion of causality to the world of objects in their space-time relationships. God, in turn, may be a creator, but that act of creation must be viewed not in terms of cause-effect but rather in terms of a loving giver who freely endows a receiver with an "exigence" or an "invitation" but not with a determined course to a pre-determined goal.

1. *Ibid.*, Cf. also *Metaphysical Journal*, *op. cit.*, p.35.

2. *Mystery of Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

3. *Ibid.*, p.140. Cf. also *Man against Mass Society* (Chicago: Gateway Press, 1962), p.63.

III. THE NOTION OF PROOF

In this context, Marcel describes the characteristics of proof. He notes its logical aspects:

What in the final analysis does it mean to *prove* something? It means to make another person, who may be myself moreover, acknowledge that whenever he accepts a certain proposition, he is also required to accept some other proposition which only seemed to be independent of the former and the truth of which he doubted when it was considered by itself.¹

Related to these logical requirements, this interpersonal notion of communication between questing minds requires that there be not only some ground for certainty, but also that this certainty be shared. Whereas Marcel expresses the procedure of the proof in logical terms, as though it proceeded from one proposition to another, his own personal attitude appears when he refers to it more properly in terms of a transition from one awareness to another. The "proving" person seeks "to focus an intense enough light" on the experiential field of the other person so that he will be enabled "to reach that adjoining region in near proximity which was already illuminated to me but is still in the shadows for him."² From this perspective, a critical analysis of the logical form of a proof seems superfluous, unless the person addressed is concerned with logic. Proof is a subjective persuasion from common subjective beliefs.

The common ground for any possibility of a proof, Marcel alleges, is an agreement on some ultimate values.

Both reflection and history seem to point to the same fact, that the notion of a proof is inseparable from a prior affirmation, the truth of which one is later led to doubt, or rather, led to put in parentheses; we have to remove the parentheses. Proof is a phase of an inner eristic, and is always subordinate to an unvarying condition, or more precisely, to a system of values which cannot be questioned.³

On some occasions he is led to proclaim that a belief in God is necessary as a foundation for a successful proof.⁴ In any case, the agreement on some common ultimate values is the minimum requirement.⁵ Thus the arguments Marcel forwards as approaches to God do not rely completely on prior belief, but also upon a recognition of a common "ontological exigence" in men. An effective proof for the existence of God

1. *Mystery of Being*, *op. cit.*, p.195.

2. *De Refus à l'invocation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1940), p.177.

3. *Creative Fidelity*, trans. Robert Rosthal (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1964), p.179.

4. *Being and Having*, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

5. *Mystery of Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

would require not only that God be affirmed for the subject, but also that there be a common basis for proof and a readiness in the receiver to commit himself to acting on what is revealed in the proof. The fact that the affirmation of God aims at a transcendental reality entails the recognition, on the part of the human mind, that no purely objective structure could conclusively affirm or deny such a transcendent. A strictly logical proof of the divine existence is thus impossible. Positively, then, Marcel is suggesting that there is some metaphysical and psychological value involved in the attempted proofs for the divine existence. These proofs, logical or not, represent moments in a certain interior dialectic which points to an invariant system of values whose value-character is uncontested.

Yet, in view of his early conception of existence as implying reference to space and time, it is not surprising to find that Marcel expresses some sympathy toward the notion of an ontological proof for God. In fact, his own eventual approaches can be viewed as partial developments from the ontological proof. The major strengths of the argument, as he identifies them, are the facts that it does not purport to find evidence for God in the problematic realm and that it takes into account his view that God cannot be denied on empirical grounds.¹ Further, the ontological argument, as developed by Leibnitz, considers it to be impossible to deny God on grounds of his essence.² The irrelevance of this last claim on a consideration of God is apparent, however, once one considers Marcel's view of God, for that proof assumes there can be an idea of God and hence an objectification of God. There is no "idea" of God in Marcel's view, and hence no idea that could be used in a proof.³

Some idea of how God exists for us in the act of faith appears in reflection upon how others exist for us. Marcel relies on this sort of datum in formulating what he takes to be meaningful assurances that that act of faith is not arbitrary. These reflections lead Marcel to affirm that the cognitive relationship between God and man must be subjective. Consequently, instead of focusing on the objective datum of cause-effect, Marcel's "proof" intends to work initially from the subjective notion of faith.

The only thinkable link between God and the world is established in faith and by faith, that is to say, it resides in the perpetual mediation of the believer . . . But this faith in God involves the affirmation that it is itself

1. *Metaphysical Journal*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

2. *Ibid.*

3. "There is no logical transition by which we can mount to God from a starting point which is not God. If the ontological proof still stands it is because it is established in God at the outset — and in that measure it is suppressed as a proof." *Metaphysical Journal*, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

conditioned by God, that is to say, the affirmation of the divine fatherhood. Which means that *the mind posits God as positer*.¹

God, then, will be thought by the free spirit of man in a subjective way, i.e., in a way in which there is no confrontation of an object. This means that we must "think God as transcending every determination whatsoever."

We must realize, I think, the truth of Plotinus' idea that God is veritably for us only in so far as we participate in him. But it is important that we should transpose the surviving elements of objective emanationism in Plotinus into the order of the mind, the subjective order.²

Thus Marcel's positive approach to God begins with participation on the subjective order which cannot be objectified. Thinking God is being with God. Such a thinking of him on the interpersonal level transcends the objective determinants of space and time.³

It is for this reason that Marcel makes the oft-repeated statement that "the concrete approaches to the ontological mystery are not to be sought in the scale of logical thought."⁴ The absolute being who is God is not able to be objectively conceptualized in the traditional logic of primary reflection. Absolute truth is not subject to the annexations of physical or mental things. To force God into traditional categories of logic would falsify him as a finite, containable thing. One must do the opposite of this scandal: assert a humble posture before the transcendence of divine being. The theist's recourse, then, is not to primary but to secondary reflection. The latter constitutes "a response of the creature to the infinite being to whom it is conscious of owing everything that it has and upon whom it cannot impose any condition at all without scandal."⁵

If the concrete approaches to the ontological mystery are not to be sought in primary reflection, then a "hyperphenomenology" will seek instead to elucidate in ordinary experience certain data which are "spiritual" in their own right. "Spiritual" means "intersubjective." Marcel feels that it is possible to find experiential traces of the existence of God in interpersonal contacts and therein alone.

1. *Ibid.*, p.35.

2. *Ibid.*, p.36.

3. *Being and Having*, *op. cit.*, p.32. "It is essential that all this be considered as linking up with what I said elsewhere about the unverifiable. All that is of the order of the *he* or *it* is verifiable; that which only allows for a dyadic relation is unverifiable — that is, it transcends all verification. (It must be added that verification supposes the possibility of indefinite numbers of substitutions, which are not conceivable when I am in presence of a thou. This is an essential point.) *Ibid.*, p.154, note 2.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

5. *Homo viator*, *op. cit.*, p.60.

In order to emphasize the necessary recourse to a phenomenology of intersubjectivity, this concentration on subjectivity is called a "conversion." The sacral will appear only when there is a "conversion" of the self to an element of otherness within the self. "All these considerations," Marcel asserts, "lead to a single conclusion: in the technical era, the sacral can only reveal itself on condition that we are converted":

Conversion is first of all the movement by which the consciousness turns away from the oppressive and distressing spectacle that the technocratic view of the world offers or — and this amounts to the same thing — by which consciousness transcends the obsession with numbers through the numberless.¹

The subjectivity of person becomes the promised land for metaphysical thinking. Its role for Marcel's approach to God is parallel to its similar role in the philosophies of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas.²

The keynote of intersubjectivity is the notion of sharing or being "with" another. The relationship expressed by the preposition "with" is eminently intersubjective, Marcel observes, not because it implies juxtaposition of objects but because it connotes a breaking out of oneself to contact an irreducible otherness. The self becomes a person only by the acceptance of responsibility before himself and before others. We affirm the other as a person before we can be responsible before him. We do this guided by love, coming to think the other person beyond any objective determinations he might have or which we might ascribe to him.³ Marcel's phenomenology describes such a thinking as "participation."

The relationship of an individual to God is parallel, in fact and in thought, to the relationship between one person and another. In both cases, the object of the personal relationship is a free subject who cannot be made into an object.

I would be prepared to say dogmatically that every relation of being to being is personal and that the relation between God and me is nothing if it is not a relation of being with being, or, strictly, of being with itself. The bizarre expression that comes to mind for stating this is that, while an empirical 'thou' can be converted into a 'him,' God is the absolute 'thou' who can never become a 'him.'⁴

But if God is an affirmation for which no objective witness nor evidence can be provided, then it would appear that Marcel heads into fideism.

1. *Searchings* (Westminster: Newman Press, 1967), p.52-53.

2. "... it is a relationship of one individual to another, of an "I" to a "thou," as both Martin Buber and I have tried to show in our writings." *Ibid.*, p.53.

3. *Homo viator*, *op. cit.*, p.21.

4. *Metaphysical Journal*, *op. cit.*, p.138.

There must be something experiential for faith to affirm, independently of itself. Accordingly, Marcel proceeds to argue that the experience of intersubjectivity mirrors (but does not conclusively prove) the existence of an absolute divine personality.

His first attempt to argue for an absolute begins with the recognition that the individual ego is also structured as an alter-ego. Otherness is part of selfness. Intersubjectivity, then, exists right within the self. One's own alter-ego is revealed when he asks the question, "Who am I?" To this traditional question about an "essence," the only true answer must lie in a source apart from the self. The question itself implies that the self is not a transparent understanding of itself, nor a creative origin of all that it is. Marcel hastens to aid that

The question is then eliminated insofar as it is a question and turns into an appeal. But perhaps in proportion as I take cognizance of this appeal as an appeal, I am led to recognize that the appeal is possible only because deep down in me there is something other than me, something further within me than I am myself, and at once the appeal changes its index.¹

This approach emphasizes an awareness of the otherness given to man by some other agent, apart from his own activity. The person finds himself partly achieved independently of his own self-creation. This "facticity" cannot be ascribed to another human person, for intersubjectivity reveals that the other person also is constituted by a facticity from some superhuman source. This source can be nothing other than a "supreme creative entity" who transcends experience and thought but is factually present in the innermost depths of the self. The mind cannot adequately contain this entity in thought, for man would thereby be God or be within the divine nature. The very inadequacy of rational thought to explain away this otherness attests the transcendence of God and the dependence of man. "The transcendence of the One to whom I appeal," writes Marcel, "is a transcendence of all possible experience and all rational conception." The God who is now re-introduced as a free creator can never become an absolute object for experience or thought.²

Marcel's second mode of investigation consists in an analysis of an intersubjective relation with another distinct person. Here again there is otherness, but this time it is a given factor in the relationship itself. Marcel begins by making a distinction between ego and person. The ego is in the objective order, the order of having; hence, it can be objectively categorized. A person creates and finds himself as a vocation or a call to something other than himself. His motto is not *sum* but *sursum*, not "I am," but "I will become."³ His experience is not

1. *Being and Having*, op. cit., p.124-125.

2. *Metaphysical Journal*, op. cit., p.146-147.

3. *Homo viator*, op. cit., p.26.

only of himself and his own thought; rather, his self-enclosed subjectivity is exploded and destroyed by the experience of the other person.

This sort of interpersonal "communion" occurs in many ways. Marcel speaks of language, welcoming, availability, common enterprises, fidelity, love. All such activities show a participation of one person in the life of another. The result of this participation is a certain "web" of real relations which receives a variety of names: a magnetic field, an existential orbit, a vital milieu, a mystery, a city, an orchestra, a choir, a community of fraternity, togetherness. The point seems to be that one person fulfills himself in another, who, in turn, fulfills himself in the first person. This mutual dependence attests a foundation of personal fulfillment which is not itself dependent on either. Marcel admits that this argument is not conclusive; it only "confirms what has really been given to us in another way," i.e., by faith.¹

Finally, one can distinguish a third approach to the existence and nature of a supreme personality in terms not of an analogy of being but of personality. The other person is a being; hence, he participates in the ontological process. But the other is a person, not an impersonal thing; he cares, loves, suffers, and responds to me. His personal traits reveal that the entire structure of reality, seemingly so impersonal, is permeated with consciousness and personality. The other person reflects that personality of the totality of being. In sum, Marcel here is claiming that

it is impossible to think of personality or the personal order without at the same time thinking of that which reaches beyond them both, a super-personal reality, presiding over all their initiative, which is both their beginning and their end.²

Marcel thus agrees with E. M. Forester against Kant: if the other is a person, then the ground of reality is an Absolute Thou rather than a *Ding-an-sich*. Personal being holds up the mirror to the nature of the absolute. If being were truly impersonal, neither myself nor the other person could be characterized as persons. Our personal responsiveness reflects the personality of an "Absolute Thou" at the source of worldly personalities.

This final argument has non-intended pantheistic and idealistic overtones, but Marcel feels that there is a basic analogy between the personality of the other and the general character of being. Basically, this argument is an appeal to an induction which accepts either the prior premise that "every effect is in some way like its cause" or the prior notion that the "whole is of the same nature as its parts." However, so strong is the emphasis on participation that Marcel's argument here fails to make a clear distinction between God and the world.

1. *Being and Having*, op. cit., p.121.

2. *Homo viator*, op. cit., p.26.

Marcel's own comments reinforce this point. "More than a guarantee which secures or confirms from outside a union which already exists," he writes, "it [the Absolute Thou] is the very cement which binds the whole into one."¹

THE NATURE OF GOD

Marcel insists that "when we talk about God, it is not God about whom we talk." The entity who is God cannot be conceptualized.

How, then, may we describe this God who answers our appeal and invocation? The divine attributes favored by a traditional rational theology must be replaced by the qualities one can ascribe to a Thou, in fact, to an Absolute Thou. Accordingly, God is

the unconditional;

a "transcendence of all possible experience as well as of all rational conception, which is but experience anticipated and schematized";

the Divine Transcendence, in relation to which we can conceive individuality:

He who alone really knows me and judges me, Him whom we adore;

He whom I invoke in his real being and not in some idol or degraded image and to whom I appeal from the depths of my own insufficiency as my absolute resort;

the goal of my appeal, which is supra-empirical because "sent out *beyond* the limits of experience, towards one who can only be described as Absolute Thou, a last and supreme resource for the troubled human spirit";

He who knows someone as he truly is;

He who infinitely transcends me and yet with whom prayer humbly, fervently unites me;

the non-identifiable, which is experienced and apprehended as the Absolute Thou and which is seen in a light that is acknowledged as a presence;

the living God, who has become incarnate so that "every approach to justice . . . or to charity, in the person of my neighbor is at the same time an approach to this God Himself; and this entails an entirely concrete but quite mysterious relation between this living God and this creature who is my neighbor";

the living God, who is the God of faith, who can only be a spirit, who offers Himself to our Love;

the unrepresentable and uncharacterizable Being who constitutes us as existents;

1. *Ibid.*, p.77.

Uncreated Light, without which I am left in the dark, which would mean that I have no being at all;

the Eternal Light "of which a reflection has continually shone on us all the time we have been in this world — that Light without whose guidance we may be sure that we should never have started our journey";

Someone who is other than me and yet is further within me than I am myself.¹

In all such descriptions, and they are legion, the critical mind discovers two things: first, that Marcel's attack on creationism does not prevent him from describing God in terms of creator or father, provided such descriptions leave both man and God the freedom to enter into what Kierkegaard would call their "possibility relationship"; secondly, that Marcel's positive approach to establishing the nature of the divinity is closely akin not to Aristotle but to the Platonic-Augustinian tradition which views the way of love as the privileged way to ultimate being.

In this perspective, one can raise a question about Marcel's bias against causal explanations. As has been noted, and as his own texts bear out, Marcel criticizes the notions of God-cause, divine causality, and creationism only to employ language and relationships which reflect his underlying acceptance of God as creator of man. The issue, then, appears not so much as his concern with causality as such but rather with the determinism which is often uncritically associated with it. His writings evidence an inability to allow the co-existence of the notions of personality and causality, the latter of which he pictures only in terms of mechanical push-pull operations.

Perhaps a closer look at examples of personal causality would enable Marcel to salvage a notion of divine creativity which would render him more sympathetic to the reinforcing character of the traditional causal arguments. It is not without significance that Aristotle's example of efficient causality in *Physics* II, 3 is that of a man who gives advice to another. In this light, personal causality might be conceived in terms of a person's free invitation to another, who in turn remains free to choose to respond as he sees fit. Such an interpretation seems closer to Marcel's idea of the God-man relationship; it also seems to serve as a means of salvaging a view of strict causality which the entire Existentialist tradition has uncritically assumed is incompatible with both divine and human freedom. Causality does not necessitate that cause be external to the effect, for final causes can act within a being by urging it toward a goal of self-fulfillment. Nor is there need to restrict causality to "a being endowed with instrumental powers"; for in

1. For these and other such discussions of the nature of God, cf. *Mystery of Being*, op. cit., p.170-190.

cases of personal causality, the causality need not subjugate effect to cause, as the examples of love, invitation, and advice testify.

CONCLUSION

Some critics to the contrary, Marcel's approach to God does not appear to be a fideistic acceptance of God independently of any rational evidence. The God of Faith, asserts Marcel, is testified anew in the ordinary experience of subjectivity of oneself or of another. This experience is not mystical nor analytic but existential, and its cognitive implications involve what has elsewhere been described as secondary reflection's non-objectifying judgment of personal participation. Agreeing with Maritain's insistence that the approach to God must proceed from an intuition of what it means to exist, Marcel argues that such an existential awareness cannot be retained when discussion is carried out at the abstract level of logical demonstration.¹ Rather than dealing with God at such a scientific level that the divine nature is deprived of its personal qualities, the philosopher, Marcel suggests, would do better to reflect on the conditions which make possible the richness of such typically human experiences as love, fidelity, and service.

Marcel's approach suggests an affinity not only with Plato, Augustine, and Kierkegaard, but also with English philosopher G. S. Lewis, who suggests a two-fold meaning for the word "faith":

This may mean (a) a settled intellectual assent. In that sense, faith or "belief" in God hardly differs from the faith in the uniformity of nature or in the consciousness of other people. This is what, I think, has sometimes been called "notional" or "intellectual" or "carnal" faith. It may also mean (b) a trust or confidence in the God whose existence is thus assented to.²

The setting for this distinction is the criticism of the empiricists that one cannot argue from a statement of fact to a modal conclusion, i. e., that one cannot go from a "this is the case" statement to a "therefore, I ought" statement. Lewis agrees that it is illicit to draw a religious conclusion from non-religious premises, but he proceeds, as does Marcel, to argue that the philosophers who constructed the proofs were attempting to lead themselves or others only to faith (a), which is not religious, in order to render possible an eventual acceptance of the non-intellectual, religious trust which is faith (b). Lewis argues, and Marcel would agree, that philosophical arguments of themselves never lead to religious faith but always need to be supplemented by an

1. *Approaches to God* (New York, 1962), p.18.

2. "Is Theism Important? — A Reply," *The Socratic*, 1952, No. 5, p.48.

experience which is at least "quasi-religious." For Marcel, such experience is pre-eminently the interpersonal relationship vivified by love, devotion, and fidelity. With Lewis, he would agree that "perhaps the best way of putting it would be to say that faith (b) converts into religious experience what was hitherto only potentially or implicitly religious."¹

Not only does Marcel's approach suggest an affinity with that of Lewis, but his emphasis on the subjectivity of other persons puts him into the context represented by Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, and, most recently, by American philosopher Alvin Plantinga.² All three argue that our knowledge of God depends on and stands in a direct parallel to our knowledge of other human minds. Making real to the mind the distinction between objects and persons paves the way for making a similar, more important distinction between finite and infinite subjectivities. Marcel would join these theistic counterparts in arguing that knowledge of other persons as persons cannot be achieved with the objectivity of logical inductions ruling our grasp of mere objects. The knower's response must instead be of his total personality, and hence love, service, and emotions prepare and shape the ensuing intuition of the Infinite Otherness which makes possible the finite otherness which mirrors its fullness in but a partial way.

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1. *Ibid.*, p.49.

2. *God and Other Minds* (Cornell U. Press, Ithaca, 1967).