

THE PHENOMENA OF TRUSTING AND RELATIONAL ONTOLOGIES

My aim in this essay is to show connections between the phenomena of trusting and some types of ontology, specifically of relational ontologies. The commerce between trustings' phenomena and ontologies goes both ways. Insofar as the phenomena fit the ontologies, the phenomena serve to confirm the ontologies. Insofar as the ontologies suggest what to look for as phenomena, and how to interpret phenomena, the ontologies contribute to the understanding of trust, within the hermeneutic circle. With baseball pitches and the umpire's call, an accurately called strike depends not only on the trajectory of the ball but also on the double frame of the batter's stance and the plate's plane and outline--so baseball cognoscenti tell me; analogously, trust gets recognized accurately--a prelude to its being evaluated--not only on the basis of the intentional act, but also on the basis of the dimensions according to which it is charted. For trust, I use the term "dimensions" to suggest that greater or less trust is not to be charted along just one axis; the particular shape of a person's trusting requires more than one dimension.

Among relational ontologies I will take a look at some feminist thought, the thought of Martin Buber, and the thought of Gabriel Marcel.

I offer only a sketch of the phenomena of trust. While I myself recognize four dimensions of trusting (reliance-trusting; I-thou trusting, security-trusting, and openness-trusting), in this essay I will treat only two of the four: reliance trust and I-Thou trusting.

RELIANCE TRUST

To rely is first of all to expect: it is to count on something happening, and to take appropriate steps to deal with that future outcome. To trust is, in most usages, to expect what is also desired, or what is a good for me or for another. But to rely is not merely to have an expectation. It is also to act on an expectation, or at least to

be disposed to act on an expectation.¹

Because I think it more conceptually and experientially fruitful, I choose to begin analyzing trust in terms of acting on expectations, rather than to begin by taking trusting as a propositional attitude, or as a kind of believing, or as acting as if, especially acting as if I believed.²

Initially I set aside reliance on things, and focus on relying on persons. I also initially set aside two contexts that often figure prominently in reflection on trust, the involuntary reliance of the infant and the highly specific and usually sanctioned relationships of promising between adults that is known as a contract. I take as my paradigm of reliance-trusting a dealing between adults that is neither contractual nor involuntary.

With persons, a key feature of trusting is that of appealing to the good will of another. There is a difference between relying on natural processes and relying on persons. I can rely on salt to season and not to poison, but this is different from relying on my cook to season and not to poison. With nature I am expecting and counting on processes to continue as they have been. With persons I am sometimes counting on someone's good will, or at least lack of ill will,

¹Expectation, and acting on an expectation, is central to the way trust is defined by Annette Baier, "Trust and Anti-Trust" *Ethics* 96 (January 1986): 231-260, and by Bernard Barber, *The Logic and Limits of Trust* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1983). It is also central to understanding religious faith as trust, as Jaroslav Pelikan surveys the matter in "Faith," *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, and London: Collier Macmillan, 1987), 5:252.

²Trust understood as acting as if is the analysis favored by Richard Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981). See also John King-Farlow and William Christensen on faith and hypotheses in "Faith--and Faith in Hypotheses," *Religious Studies* 7 (June 1971): 113-124.

towards me.³

But trusting is not merely a matter of expecting and counting on what is desired from someone else, and acting with hope in light of that expectation.⁴ Something else is needed: letting help. To trust a person is to desire and expect and act so as to enable another freely to help me and thus so as to increase a kind of likelihood that the other will help me.⁵

To act trustingly is to act or refrain from acting so as to let someone help and thereby to increase the likelihood that the other will help obtain what I want or need. How do I let help and thereby increase this likelihood? How do I act so as to have another's helping

³Annette Baier contrasts trusting others and merely relying on them. Trusting involves another's good will or at least minimal ill will, whereas merely relying counts on only "their dependable habits or dependably exhibited fear, anger, or other motives compatible with ill will toward one, or on motives not directed on one at all. . . . We all depend on one another's psychology in countless ways, but this is not yet to trust them." Trusting can be betrayed; other reliances are disappointed. Baier, "Trust and Antitrust," *Ethics* 96 (January 1986): 234-235.

⁴On hope as a conjoining of desire and estimated possibility see my *A Philosophy of Human Hope* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 29-32.

⁵Suspicion is defined as parallel to reliance-trust. To be suspicious is to fear harm, that is, to think that harm is possible, and to desire that it not occur (or that it not have occurred)--harm due to ill will, indifference, or incompetence--and therefore is to be disposed to take preventive or protective or risk-minimizing measures, such as by removing a good from another's range of acting. To act with suspicion or to act warily is to resist vulnerability to someone's ill will, negligence, or incompetence. This primary sense of suspicion is based on a person's reliability; a thing's reliability is derivative: to be suspicious of something is to resist vulnerability to something's lack of reliable functioning.

me be an effect of my acting?⁶ I can affect this likelihood by entrusting or by not preventing or by not discouraging another's initiative. I afford an opportunity to help. I allow a good to be within the causal range of another's action. I commit or entrust; or at least I do not withdraw.

Furthermore, trust is often specific and delimited in the matter or good that is entrusted and in what outcomes are expected and desired. Such specificities can have a range, established by discretion extended or discretion withheld. A parent relies on a baby sitter to perform some specific services for his or her children, explicitly excluding others; yet even after instructions, much is left to the sitter's discretion.

So far, analyzing trust as reliance takes trusting to involve a set of four factors: there is the I who entrust, the other who is relied upon, the matter or good entrusted, and the outcome expected and desired, with varying degrees of discretion.⁷

There is a fifth factor, the basis of trust. The basis for my trusting a person may be what I know about the person: a person's competence, knowledge, and skill; or a person's character and general good will; or a person's pledge or promise given to me.

⁶I can of course connive, maneuver and manipulate, threaten or bribe. But if manipulative or fear-engendering reasons for trusting or accepting trust were to be disclosed to another, this would reduce the prospect of my being helped; Annette Baier makes this point. There are, however, borderline cases where this does not happen. In a relationship characterized by extremes of domination and submission, I could perhaps tell the submissive person why I expect him to help, and he would nonetheless help. I tell him he is my tool, and he agrees merely to be used.

⁷ There is another feature, to be explored elsewhere, but one that seems essential to analysis of trust: vulnerability. Someone will be hurt, deprived, wounded if the expectation is not fulfilled, if what is entrusted is neglected or damaged. The one who entrusts a good is not indifferent to a felicitous outcome. Annette Baier thinks that vulnerability is an essential feature of non-contractual trust. "Trust," she writes, "is reliance on others' competence and willingness to look after, rather than harm, things one cares about which are entrusted to their care." "Trust and Anti-Trust," 259. Whenever there is trusting, it is possible that harm may come.

These would be what it is about the person that count as a reason for me to entrust a matter to the person. There may also be non-personal factors that support my entrusting a matter to someone, such as biochemical features of myself or of that other person or of other persons, or the kind of social role I have, as when I delegate a matter to a subordinate.⁸ In trusting a thing, similar factors, except for character and good will, give a basis for reliance. With both persons and things, such personal and non-personal factors constitute the fifth element, the "because", involved in reliance trusting. The five elements are, therefore, the subject trusting, the one trusted, the matter or good entrusted or otherwise subject to being affected by the one trusted, the outcome desired and expected, and the basis for the trusting.

Acting on someone's recommendation illustrates these five elements. Someone new to a city trusts a dentist, that she will probably correctly diagnose the source of the pain and provide effective therapy, and the newcomer does so trust because an old friend of his has recommended this dentist and this old friend is shrewd and experienced in health matters, and has himself been skillfully treated by this dentist. The person new to the city is the one who trusts; the dentist is the person trusted; the good entrusted is the health of teeth; the future outcome expected is at least an arresting of pain and stabilizing of a deteriorating situation. The reason for the trusting is the recommendation of the friend. To generalize: in reliance-trust, one person expects and desires and makes it or lets it be possible that another take care of some good, with a delimited range of ends in view; I rely on you to take care of this, to this end, for these reasons. To put the five elements schematically: X trusts Y with Z, and has in view the outcome W, because of R. Thus, reliance-trust is, if I may coin the term, pentadic.

⁸Another factor can be even the person's likeness to someone whom I already do trust ("He reminds me of my uncle"), as Laurence Thomas has suggested. See "Trust, Affirmation, and Moral Character: A Critique of Kantian Morality," in his *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1991), 254 n. 8.

I-THOU TRUST

A second dimension of trust is what I call I-Thou trust.⁹ It might also be termed intersubjective trust, personal trust, relational trust, intimacy trust.

An approximate conception of I-Thou trust can be developed by extrapolation from several features of reliance-trusting. Reliance-trusting includes five elements, as we have seen. I-Thou trust, on the other hand, is approximated insofar as expectations become unspecific, insofar as the good entrusted is the very self of the person who does the entrusting, and insofar as the reason for the trusting is the very person of the other trusted. Instead of X trusting Y with Z for W because of R, we have X trusts Y with X, because of Y: I trust you with myself because of you. I-thou trust is not pentadic but dyadic.

The movement from specific outcomes expected to a lack of specific expectations underscores the way in which reliance-trusting is instrumental and I-thou trusting is not. In reliance-trusting I rely on another to do for me. I expect the other to act to further my interests, to serve my ends. Of course I may also, or alternately, expect that the one I trust will serve not me but others, will meet not my needs but the needs of those I care about. But whether what I care directly about is my interests or those of someone else, the one trusted is expected not to neglect those interests. The instrumental context is clear when I look for a substitute: if this person cannot take care of my car, I will find someone else who can. In reliance-trusting the other whom I trust is replaceable, fungible at least in principle, even though in my circumstances there may be no substitute actually at hand.¹⁰ In I-thou trust, however, the other is not replaceable.

Intimate trust between friends is one kind of I-thou dyadic trust. There may be relationships wherein I essentially judge it good that this friend be who she is; I am glad that this person lives, but not just for my

⁹ Martin Buber's *I and Thou* is a principal inspiration for this proposal; the intersubjective philosophy of Gabriel Marcel is also influential here.

¹⁰ Replaceability does not imply that the usefulness of the one I trust is just episodic; his or her utility may be continuous, embedded in professional skills or personal character.

sake. In such a non-instrumental context, to trust a person can be to bring to that person more of myself, where "self" says more than features about me or interests I have. Indeed, my friend may not have certain skills, or may even lack certain character-traits, and in dealing her I do not expect help for certain of my interests; I may and should actually refrain from relying on my friend in some matters.

But I do bring myself--as contrasted with my interests--to this person. I open up to her, and take a chance on what may come of this. While to my doctor I entrust my health, to my friend I entrust my self. I do not withhold my self. I bring to my friend all that I consider close to my very self--mind, heart, body, history, weaknesses, strengths, fears and hopes. In this trust of friendship I do not have a specific outcome in mind. What may result may go beyond each person's (at least conscious) ends. At its highest, this form of trust is truth--an etymological cousin of trust.¹¹ The plausibility of this kind of trusting is closely linked to the plausibility of a loving that is neither altruistic nor egoistic but appreciative.¹²

Another way of making clear the contrast between reliance-trusting and I-Thou trusting is to contrast congeniality with intimacy.¹³ If a relationship is one of congeniality, it is the effect on me that I am interested in,¹⁴ perhaps as part of the reciprocally enhancing effects on both of us. We stimulate each other in ways psychological, sexual,

¹¹Trust, truth, and truth go back to the Old English treowe, trustworthy. The reconstructed Indo-European root is DERU, firm, solid, steadfast; hence, "tree". *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, edited by William Morris (New York: American Heritage Publishing Company, and Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), 1512.

¹²I explore these two kinds of trust, and the contrast between relationships of utility and those of appreciation, in my *A Philosophy of Human Hope*.

¹³Here I employ a contrast between impersonal congeniality and personal intimacy developed by J. F. M. Hunter in *Thinking About Sex and Love* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1980), 85-93. It is like Aristotle's contrast between friendships based on what is useful or agreeable and friendships wherein each values the other for the other's own sake.

¹⁴Hunter speaks of these as the output, the performance.

intellectual, and aesthetic, through conversation, laughter, and silences. Yet I lose interest if such effects wane. The relationship "alters when it alteration finds."

Intimacy is something else. In an intimate I-Thou relationship, I remain concerned even if the exchanges between us change. Indeed, I pay attention to even her foibles and imperfections, not because I judge them excellent, but because they are hers. I am interested in her, I care for her, and this kind of interest and care is not the same as my interest in her qualities.

Trust based on useful congeniality declines as people become less useful or less agreeable. I-Thou trust is of a different dimension. I am open in my whole person to the whole person of this other, and I am not wary lest some hope or fear of mine come within another's ken. I trust the other, not for contributing to any or to every outcome I am interested in having happen; rather, I trust the other with all that I am. If there is a facet of my life that she is not in touch with, it is not because I withhold it; it just has not come up. The total acceptance of intimacy trust is different from an ability to rely on the totality of every trait of a person for effecting what I want or need.

I am claiming, therefore, that I-thou trusting is neither a form of reliance-trusting nor is it reducible to reliance-trusting, although reliance-trusting usually accompanies I-thou trusting. Nor am I claiming that I-thou trust is common; it may indeed be rare, episodic, at least in its fullest forms. And of course context is needed to enable anyone to distinguish in the concrete between these two dimensions of trust.

While a fuller exposition of the phenomena of trusting would

include security-trust¹⁵ and openness-trust, I limit myself to these sketches of reliance trust and I-Thou trust, and now turn to relational ontologies.

RELATIONAL ONTOLOGIES

Ontology, in its root sense, is an account of what is real.¹⁶ Some ontologies propose to be regional--of the human person, for example, or of the subject-matter of the physical sciences. Other ontologies propose to be global, of the entire so-called "furniture of the universe." Some ontological questions are questions of categorizing or typing: is the human mind the same type of reality as the human body? Other ontological questions are about the status of something alleged to be real but not patently so--self or soul, for example, or other minds, or God. Often the method of ontology is to take some type of entity as the benchmark case of what is real, and compare other phenomena to that benchmark in a process of analogical thinking.

¹⁵Security trust differs from reliance trust. It is a sense of being basically secure, at-home, upheld in my basic self. It is not a confidence that my particular projects will prosper. It is rather a sense that I belong, am accepted, am OK. I sense ground beneath my feet. Security trust contrasts with Heideggerian Angst. It also contrasts with those strictly limited particular forms of being secure where I am secure from or secure against: "I'm safe as long as I don't go outside." Security-trust is not cosmic, but has a particular here to it.

I find Marcel's description of fundamental existential assurance a helpful formula for security trust. Fundamental existential assurance, he writes, is "the affirmation of an original link, one could even say an umbilical link, which unites the human being, not to the world in general, which would mean nothing, but to a certain determinate ambiance which is as concrete as a cocoon or a nest" (Joan Nowotny's more detailed and literal translation of a passage from *Pour une sagesse tragique et son au-delà*, 67). The published translation is in *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 38.

¹⁶Ontology is in some contexts also used as a synonym for metaphysics.

Some ontologies are explicitly relational.¹⁷ My core meaning of "relational ontology" is one in which the linkage of one with another, especially of self with another, is the benchmark from which what counts as real is measured. The Aristotelian gospel says "In the beginning was substance, *ousia*." The Cartesian gospel says "In the beginning was self, *ego*." The gospel of the ontologies I consider now says "In the beginning was the between, *d a s Zwischenmenschliche*". More basic than *Dasein* is *Dazwischen*.¹⁸

A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE, THREE TYPES OF RELATION, AND BUBER'S I-THOU.

I begin my treatment of the relational with feminist philosopher Caroline Whitbeck's argument for a relational ontology. She argues against an ontology that sees self and other as presumed to be different in features and then presumed to be opposed. While her obvious target is the sexual differentiation of male and female as, in the logical sense, complements, for my purposes her most important target is the philosophical convention held by some that self and other are in opposition and cannot fail to have interests that compete. She herself recommends an ontology "based on an understanding of the relation of self and other as a relation between analogous beings. . . . Therefore, the distinction between the self and an other does not turn on construing the other as opposite; another distinct being may, and usually does, possess some of the same characteristics as the

¹⁷The terms "relational"--and "relation" and "relationship"--have become as helpful or unhelpful as the terms "being" and "Being".

¹⁸Were I presenting a more extended study, I would begin with, for example, the explicitly relational metaphysics of Harold Oliver in *A Relational Metaphysic* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981) and in *Relatedness: Essays in Metaphysics and Theology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984). Finding Oliver's understanding of relation limited to what John Macmurray calls the mechanical and the organic, I am led to what Macmurray called the specific form of the personal. The relational Thomistic metaphysics of W. Norris Clarke is very suggestive at this point, but what he means by personal substance in relation encompasses both the I-It and the I-Thou relations of Martin Buber; I want to emphasize the distinction between these two manners of interpersonal acting. See W. Norris Clarke, "To Be Is To Be Substance-in-Relation," *Metaphysics as Foundation: Essays in Honor of Ivor Leclerc* (Albany: SUNY, 1993), 164-181.

self." She resists the framing of ontological issues in ways that would "deny the existence of others, reduce all others to the self--'one soul in two bodies,'--or . . . interpret the other as mere material for the self's designs."¹⁹

Whitbeck's thesis supports a point which I have argued elsewhere, that interactional relations can be understood in three ways: as adversarial, as neutral, or as supportive.²⁰ Thus, the other can be opposed, resistant to my aims; the other can be neutral and "mere material for the self's designs"; or the other can be supportive, an ally with parallel or converging purposes.²¹

But I further propose that the trifold distinguishing of self-other relations into the adversarial, the neutral, and the allied obtains within what Martin Buber termed the I-It relationship. The I-It relationship is characterized by, to use Buber's terminology, experiencing and using. An other opposes my purposes, or is perhaps malleable to my aims and powers, or has energies and aims allied to mine--all this for the sake of some goal-seeking activity. Relationships of utility, sometimes called subject-object relationships and regardless of whether they obtain in the sphere of knowing or in the sphere of choosing, are types of I-It relationship.

The I-Thou relationship is of a different sort. Where the I-It relationship is selective and goal-directed, the I-Thou relationship is not so restricted. Where in the I-It relation controlling or being controlled is an issue, the I-Thou relationship arises by both grace and will. The I-Thou relationship is a way of relating to human beings, nature, and human "creations," in a word-deed involving the whole

¹⁹Whitbeck, Caroline, "A Different Reality: Feminist Ontology," in *Beyond Domination: New Perspectives on Women and Philosophy*, edited by Carol Gould, New Feminist Perspectives (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld, 1984), 81, 82.

²⁰*A Philosophy of Human Hope*, 157.

²¹I wonder whether perhaps there has been some segue from logical opposition and logical complementarity to interpersonal opposition and antagonism, supported by some social commonplaces--the war between the sexes, for example--or by Hegelian philosophy.

being, a dealing beyond using and experiencing, i.e., beyond goal-directed activities, and "before" separating out (abstracting) qualities or features of the other. It is a word-deed where there is choosing and being chosen, where there is activity approaching passivity. It is a word-deed in which I become a whole being, while a person engages in I-It relationships only partially. Thus even the self of the I-It relationship is different from the self of the I-Thou relationship.

NEGATIVE ONTOLOGY: BUBER

Martin Buber's understanding of I-Thou relation may indeed point towards an ontology, but a pointer is not a description, let alone an ontology formulated in a conventional way. When one tries to elaborate Buber's I-Thou relationship as an account of what is real, one comes up with negative results: Buber's ontology is a negative ontology. What I mean by this is that the customary and stable language of ontology is the language of I-It, of disjunctions and classifications and complement classes; mind is--or is not---body, for example. The I-Thou relationship has a conceptual instability. One reason for this is that I-Thou relationship is more episodic than continuous when compared to I-It dealings.

Because I-It is less episodic, understanding favors the I-It. As Michael Theunissen put it, quoting Buber: "'You can make yourself understood with others only over it', for it alone--this is how one has to flesh out the rationale--guarantees an identity for the different individual consciousnesses, thanks to that identity that persists through time. . . . Now, the impermanent Thou-world is the negation of all this. It is 'unreliable', 'without density', 'without duration', 'incapable of being surveyed', not a possible object of intersubjective understanding."²²

The negative result of trying to extrude a conventional ontology out of I-Thou relationships suggests that ontologies may be, to use the scholastic terminology concerning speech about God, not

²²Theunissen, Michael, *The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber*, translated by Christopher Macann (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 328; in the Kaufmann translation of *I and Thou*, 83-84.

only of a positive but also of a negative and of a supereminent sort. Buber's I-Thou intimates a *via negativa* ontology.

MARCEL'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Marcel's contributions to relational ontologies and the understanding of the phenomena of trusting fall under three headings: intersubjective ontology; the concrete approach to ontology; and the way this is embodied in his analysis of fidelity.

Marcel identifies his ontology as intersubjective, if we can take his answer to the question whether being is intersubjectivity as sufficient warrant.²³ Self is tied to other in an underlying unity which is not a totality. The meta-problematical, or the realm of mystery as Marcel calls it, is akin to *via negativa* and *via supereminentiae* in ontology. Yet we should not over-inventory the product of such an ontology, mindful that Marcel has told us, "It has become increasingly evident to me that the claim to 'encapsule the universe' in a set of formulas which are more or less rigorously related, is absurd."²⁴

There are vivid similarities between Marcel's concrete approach to ontology and a feminist approach to ontology. Consider this passage from feminist metaphysician Catherine Witt: "The feminine voice is distinguished by two features: the tendency to view interpersonal relations as a basic feature of reality and a high degree of concern for the details of a situation or problem. Feminine reasoning is concrete rather than abstract; it does not operate by smoothing away the details of a problem but tries to accommodate them in their variety and richness. Feminine reasoning assumes

²³"I concern myself with being only in so far as I have a more or less distinct consciousness of the underlying unity which ties me to other beings of whose reality I already have a preliminary notion." *Mystery of Being*, I, 223.

²⁴*Creative Fidelity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1964), 60, in "An Outline of a Concrete Philosophy."

relatedness rather than individuality in its descriptions of situations."²⁵ One could substitute "Marcellian" for "feminine": the Marcellian voice is characterized by concern for interpersonal relations and concrete details of a situation. Separated selves conceived according to universal patterns is the style neither of much feminist philosophy nor of Marcel.

In a passage Marcel himself viewed as an epiphany, he wrote that the formula "Being as the place of fidelity" "has for me the inexhaustible inspiration of a musical theme." It suggests "access to ontology."²⁶ I take the access he suggests to be twofold. One is that analysis of fidelity may yield the conviction that to consider fidelity in terms of problem, that is, as an issue or question towards which one can take the view of a dispassionate outside evaluator, is to miss what is central to fidelity, the realm of the meta-problematic. The other is that the meta-problematic realm--I dare to intrude the term "realm" here---includes both the self that is assessing the matter and the veiled presence of a Thou that is not empirical in the usual sense. For Marcel, reflection on fidelity is the path beyond the problematic and beyond the objective, into a territory not mappable by the techniques of conventional ontology.

Marcel's analysis of fidelity is a case par excellence of a concrete approach to ontology, and his analysis suggests a major contribution to reflection on trust. Fidelity is Marcel's word for what I would call intersubjective or I-Thou trustworthiness. To be a person of fidelity is to be a person who is present to another. Words waver in the attempt to say what fidelity is, and the temptation to nail it down in the terminology of I-It is strong. Fidelity is better approached negatively, *via remotionis*; fidelity is not at its core the reliability of a person who has committed himself or herself to "perseverance in a certain goal," especially out of regard for duty. Marcel calls such

²⁵Witt, Charlotte, "Feminist Metaphysics," in *A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, edited by Louise M. Antony and Charlotte Witt (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 281.

²⁶Marcel, Gabriel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965, originally 1949), 41.

resolute readiness to work and to serve "constancy".²⁷ While the person of fidelity is indeed appropriately constant, he or she is also present. The faithful friend is present for the other, as for thou; the faithful friend is there for me because of me. The friend is not fulfilling some duty, and is not motivated by either a sense of self or a sense of honor or a sense of duty or a desire to be blameless. He or she is not intent upon passing some test. On the contrary, the notion that the behavior of a faithful friend is subject to assessment by some neutral observer is absurd.

Fidelity has a spontaneity that can be neither coerced nor self-determinedly willed. As I read Marcel, fidelity arises between myself and another, and continues as a reasonable and good relationship only insofar as it has a necessary link to a Thou not subject to the vicissitudes that would otherwise call fidelity into question.

A person of fidelity creates a self. As Marcel put the matter:

The fact is that when I commit myself, I grant in principle that the commitment will not again be put in question. And it is clear that this active volition not to question something again, intervenes as an essential element in the determination of what in fact will be the case. It at once bars a certain number of possibilities, it bids me invent a certain *modus vivendi* which I would otherwise be precluded from envisaging. Here there appears in a rudimentary form what I call *creative fidelity*. My behavior will be completely colored by this act embodying the decision that the commitment will not again be questioned. The possibility which has been barred or denied will thus be demoted to the rank of a temptation.²⁸

In relegating some possibility to the status of a temptation and in setting myself to contribute to what will be the case, in a certain way I create my self. I see Marcel implying here that in the self-creation of fidelity, I trust God that I will not make junk.

²⁷Yet constancy is not opposed to fidelity; indeed "constancy may be viewed as the rational skeleton of fidelity." *Creative Fidelity*, 153.

²⁸*Creative Fidelity*, 162.

I suspect that the possibility of self-creation in I-Thou terms would appeal to the concern in feminist philosophy for self-creation in some terms other than those of I-It, of experiencing and using. To make myself present is different from making myself reliable.

The contrast between fidelity and constancy turns not just on the spontaneity of fidelity and the self-centered resoluteness of constancy, but also on the person of fidelity being judged by another to be a faithful friend. The faithful friend is not the person who has his own dutiful reasons for being constant, but is the person, Marcel writes, "who does not fail me, someone who stands up to whatever the circumstances may bring; he [or she] does not slip away, but we find him [or her] there when we are in difficulty."²⁹ In terms of my dimensions of trust, I judge this friend to be I-Thou trustworthy.

The distinction I make between I-Thou trust and reliance-trust permits us to recognize that this faithful friend will nevertheless decline to accept the entrusting of some goods, even if maximal discretion is afforded. A truly faithful friend can say: You'll have to learn to do that yourself; or: You'll have to get someone else, because taking care of something like that is beyond me.

Thus the good-will-towards-me of reliance-trust is made more sophisticated by Marcel's yoking and contrast of fidelity and constancy. The reliable person can have self-consistency, a sense of duty, a "constancy", as motive; the Marcellian I-Thou trustworthy person has presence to the other, irreducible to reliance.

CONCLUSION

Since reliance-trust is not the whole story of trusting, it is unhelpful always to imagine trusting as better to the extent that a person entrusts greater goods with ever greater discretion, even to the point of the greatest good with maximal discretion. The truly faithful friend may decline the entrusting of some of the greatest

²⁹*Creative Fidelity*, 154. I find in a line of Simone Weil the spirit of such fidelity: "The love of our neighbor in all its fullness simply means being able to say to him: 'What are you going through?'" Quoted in *Notre Dame Magazine*, May 1980.

goods, and gently but firmly turn them back. Sometimes the best friend is one who enables another to do for self. Thus the most intelligent way to trust is not solely to ambition better and more accurate reliance. It is also to be open to I-Thou trust, the latter being more a matter of presence to a friend than a matter of instrumental caring for goods a friend lets me take care of. Indeed, sometimes I do well to be suspicious of the well-intentioned assistance offered even by a faithful friend.

The I-Thou ontology suggested by Buber and Marcel is a corrective against considering that human interpersonal relations are accurately understood when they have been analyzed solely in terms of using and being used, even when the using is reciprocal, fair, and knowingly consensual. As some feminist philosophers have argued, one is not better as a person if he or she enters more-carefully-formulated contracts. Nor is better trusting a matter of more discretion, because to leave much to another's discretion is to trust that other still for what that person can do and has chosen to do: that person is simply more widely reliably useful. There is, however, more to genuine human relationships than usefulness. And so there seem to be some phenomena for which the I-Thou relational model is better suited--better suited for expressing some dimensions of trust and better suited for keeping a person on the lookout for some non-reliance cases of trust. An I-Thou relational ontology, despite or perhaps because of its character as a negative ontology, offers a better fit with a trusting that is not just instrumental reliance.

I return to Marcel's dictum, and ask: How does fidelity give access to ontology? One access I see is that fidelity, as more inclusive than constancy, suggests that an ontology of the person which has categories open only to useful or resolute constancy is an ontology that too thinly describes the powers and realizations of which people are capable and of which they are, indeed, in need. Another access is suggested by Marcel. He suggests that fidelity, at least that of the highest sort, cannot be understood without some appeal to, glimpse of, and backing from, a One who enables fidelity to make sense. As I read Marcel, fidelity crosses into absurdity or at least in some cases into wrongness not only when it is understood as mere constancy but also insofar as the faithful person does not "extend an

infinite credit to" God.³⁰ Now this is a line of exploration typically ontological, even if it would proceed *via negativa*.

I myself think that the phenomena of trust can be a starting point for consideration of some traditional ontological questions, and that the more promising routes for doing so are not Cartesian but relational. But identifying the ontological conditions of possibility for the fidelity of which Marcel speaks is a much larger topic, in Marcel scholarship and in philosophy generally.³¹

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³⁰*Creative Fidelity*, 167.

³¹I am indebted to Julie McDonald for bibliographical help on feminist ontology, and to Elizabeth Linehan for clarifications of some of my ideas.

GABRIEL MARCEL AND POSTMODERNISM: PERSPECTIVES ON A BROKEN WORLD

Drawing principally from Marcel's work, *The Broken World* and a philosophic essay that accompanied the first publication of this play, plus a lecture "Humanity before the Alleged Death of God," that Marcel gave at numerous universities in the United States and Canada in the early 1960's, we aim to bring into clear focus perspectives that Gabriel Marcel's work has in common with postmodernism. We also hope to highlight aspects of Marcel's thought that go beyond where postmodernism is today, thus opening up ways to imagine a future for thought beyond postmodernism.¹

Speaking of his own work, Marcel likened it to three coenentric rings. This metaphor refers to levels of experience and communication. For Marcel these coenentric layers were : (1) music - the innermost and deepest layer, (2) drama - the second level, where enflashed conflicts develop in the relationships real people are living, and (3) the third and outermost layer, philosophy - a critically reflective analysis of the questions raised by a growing consciousness of one's

¹Le Monde Cassé suivi de Position et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique, (Les Iles), Paris, Desclée De Brouwer, 1933. A translation of this version of the *The Broken World*, by Sr. Colla, appeared in a volume edited by F.J. Lescoe, *The Existentialist Drama of Gabriel Marcel*, West Hartford, Conn., McAuley Press, 1974. This edition is out of print. A new translation by K. R. Hanley, based on a 1950 version revised by Gabriel Marcel in view of a hoped for staging is projected for 1996 with a University Press. "On the Ontological Mystery" is available in a translation by Manya Harari, in *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, Secaucus, NJ, Citadel Press, 1955.

human condition.²

Marcel noted that music let him work through conflict and turmoil at a level beyond words and *eris* allowing the inner tension to resolve, although often on a note of dissonance.³

Marcel sought to deal spontaneously with some of the dilemmas in his own life situation through dramatic imagination. He envisaged characters in situations wherein they would deal concretely with some of the fundamental conflicts that plagued their lives.

Marcel's characters seemed so realistic that he claimed he could not dictate to them nor could he force their actions. Rather he had to await and respect a discovery of what this or that character would do given who s/he is and how s/he reacts to the sequence of events and circumstances in his or her life. It is a *forté* of Marcel's dramatic art that he creates characters who are so individual they seem real. His characters live as autonomous individuals, they speak as I's, and most importantly reveal what they are living inwardly. As Gaston Fessard, S.J. wrote in "Théâtre et Mystère" Marcel's characters communicate what they are living inwardly and thus allow audiences to participate in their emerging consciousness of the mystery that had penetrated their lives.⁴

Marcel wrote that henceforward people will have to approach his philosophy through his theater and those having sensitivity to

²An allocution for the Alliance Française, "Le Paradoxe du Philosophe-Dramaturge," Collection Française de Notre Temps Nous Confie, sous le patronage de l'Alliance Française, No date. Cf. K. R. Hanley, *Dramatic Approaches to Creative Fidelity: A study in the Theater and Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973)*, Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 1987, Ch. I, pp. 3-26.

³G. Marcel's Introduction to *The Broken World, The Existentialist Drama of Gabriel Marcel*, West Hartford, Conn., McAuley Press, 1974, p. 15.

⁴Gaston Fessard, S.J., "Théâtre et Mystère," published as an introductory essay to Marcel's play, "La Soif," Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1938, pp. 5-116.

music, will have a privileged affinity for his work.⁵

With Nietzsche as well as Coleridge and others, Marcel saw that questions of meaning and value would have to be approached through aesthetics and creative imagination. This discovery had peculiar meaning in the life of Gabriel Marcel. Marcel observed that his sensitive listening as musician and his creative imagination as dramaturge enabled him to grapple with the tensions that gripped his life and begin to forge a path for his freedom by bringing deep conflict and obscure dilemmas to the light of the stage. Then philosophic inquiry let him reflect critically on concrete situations and bring these issues to light. Finally philosophy's reasoned analysis, which stays close to the sinuosities of life, can offer in general terms alternative interpretations to the existential questions life raises.

Portrayal of A "Broken World"

Marcel brought to the postmodern scene the image of "a broken world". The author states that the whole of his theatrical corpus could be called a theater of a broken world. And the play that bears the title *The Broken World* portrays the situation of Christiane, the play's main character, who without love or any hope for real love has married a distinguished but lack-luster personality Lawrence Chesnay.

Act I, Scene IV, Christiane, in conversation with Denise Furstlin a girlhood friend who later commits suicide, voices her awareness of her life situation.

Christiane: Don't you have the sense that we are living . . . if you can call that living . . . in a broken world. Yes, broken like a watch that has stopped. It's mainspring no longer works. To all appearances nothing has changed. Everything is in place. But if you put the watch to your ear. . . you hear nothing. Remember, the world, or what we used to call the world, the human world . . . before, it must have had a heart. But it seems that heart has stopped beating. Lawrence codifies regulations, Daddy has season tickets at

⁵Kenneth T. Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, NY, Fordham University Press, 1962, 1975, p. viii.

the Symphony and keeps a mistress cheaply. Henry is preparing a trip around the world. . . Antonov conducts rehearsals of his symphonic poem. Everyone has their own little niche, their own little thing, their own little interests. People meet, or more accurately bump into each other. That makes quite a racket. . . But there's no center, no life, nowhere.

Denise: And where are you in all this?

Christiane: Me . . . let's say, I listen.

Denise: In a vacuum?

Christiane: You said it, in a vacuum.

Denise: And with the rest of your time?

Christiane: I suppose . . . I exist. I am what one calls a "busy woman." (*The Broken World*, Act I, Scene 4)⁶

Here we see that Marcel has conveyed not only the image but moreover the sense of living in a postmodern "broken world." Christiane gives voice to her consciousness of a fragmented world. Her family and friends view life from different very limited perspectives. Christiane is catalyst for the activities of her circle of "friends." Highly intelligent, she travels from one place to another, jumps from one project to the next finding diversion and distraction but never seeking a resting place or satisfaction.

Christiane is flattered by the admiration she attracts. Still all her relations are marked by a certain shallowness and a studied distance. The lives of Christiane and her circle of friends are marked by shallow, temporary relationships. Most live on a very superficial level. She even protests to Henry, a confidant, "I am not like the others." At times Christiane suffers a profound uneasiness. She even states that some part of herself finds this kind of life vacuous. Still she and her group pride themselves on their liberalism. They seem to enjoy pushing back the frontiers of liberal thought and action including gay and lesbian relations, live-in arrangements, serial marriages and the reduction of morality to a question of individual preferences in life style.

Out of boredom, Christiane invents a "fiction" drawn from the

⁶References to the play *The Broken World* will appear in parentheses in the text. Hereafter noted in the following format: (BW, I, 4)

shadow side of her character which without explicitly intending to gives cryptic expression to her true plight. Longing for genuine friendship and communication with her husband, she "invents" a story that she has been rejected by someone to whom she is attracted.

This "apparent" humiliation of Christiane is just what is called for to draw Lawrence from his pout over her being the object of so much adulation while he is continually overlooked and ignored.

However, Christiane's scheme succeeds all too well. Lawrence reacts exactly as Christiane foresaw. His sense of wounded pride causes him to delight in his wife's apparent humiliation and this meanspirited pleasure colors his expressions of "compassion". Christiane disdains Lawrence for his meanness of spirit. She is likewise disgusted with herself for her deceptiveness.

As the play progresses, Act III, Christiane's discomfort with her situation worsens. Her mood deteriorates to the point that when she learns of the early death of a friend from her youth, the one friend she really loved, she is despondent. She falls into the arms of a young admirer, "not out of love but out of longing for love," crying, "Gilbert, don't abandon me..." (BW, III,)

Toward the end of the play, Act IV, everything suggests that Christiane, like so many of her "friends", will split from her household and go off with a new found "lover." But a startling break through of an event from the past occurs unexpectedly, in an Ibsenesque fashion, creating a reversal of direction and giving rise to a surprise ending. (BW, IV, 6 & 7)⁷

A long forgotten acquaintance from the past brings Christiane news which assures her that she is loved. Jacques Delorme in his later years as a monk learned of her love, cherished it and on another level reciprocated it. This message which his sister Genevieve communicates frees Christiane to be in touch with the true depth and

⁷"Drama of the Soul in Exile," Preface, *Three Plays*, NY, Hill and Wang, 1958, p. 32; "My Dramatic Works as Viewed by the Philosopher," in *Searchings*, NY, Newman Press, 1967, pp. 103-04.

center of herself from which she had become alienated by a traumatizing experience that left her feeling rejected and hopeless of experiencing true love ever again.

Freed from her trauma, Christiane experiences a spirit of truth and love that enables her to approach her husband sincerely, confessing her weakness which had played off his, and now in this new light humbly offering to share her love with him. Lawrence stunned, comments, "It's as if you've come back to me from the dead." To which, Christiane responds, "I shall try to be worthy of those words." (BW, IV, 7)

This sudden ending and stunning reversal in the last scene takes audiences by surprise. But Marcel has observed in his writings as drama critic that it is the last act and especially the last scene that gives a play its power and meaning.⁸

The last scene is a surprise, yet when audiences reconstruct the play in light of it, they can see how the ending was in fact prepared throughout the entire play.

Marcel notes that without a certain development in his life that opened him to a whole other level of his own being, he would not have been able to create such an ending. The ending is prepared. It is plausible. Marcel even received testimony of a similar instance that occurred in real life to a benedictine monk in Hungary.⁹ What Marcel is doing is sharing with his audience, communicating through the self revelation of the play's main characters - the witness of something that touched and became part of his own life.

In presenting the drama of people who in their own lives become open to and enriched by the spiritual, Marcel opens up a path that may enable audiences to discover the presence of the spiritual operating within their own lives.

⁸"Drama of the Soul in Exile," p. 30; Preface to *Le Secret est dans les Isles*, Paris, Plon, 1967, pp. 20-21.

⁹Introduction to *the Broken World*, p. 16.

Affinities of Approach

Not only does Marcel artfully portray the sense of the "broken world" that postmodernism acknowledges, we shall also see that his approach toward focusing on important issues has much in common with postmodernism.

In the essay "On the Ontological Mystery" Marcel considers the question, brought to light through Christiane's heightening consciousness of living in a broken world. The question is, "Who am I? - Is life empty or full?" Marcel describes the sense of the question and then ponders what might be the basis for anyone having the credentials and the confidence to deal with such a question. (OM, pp. 16-17)¹⁰

As Marcel reflects critically on these matters, we note his approach has multiple affinities with postmodernism but also that Marcel's approach while not being alien to postmodern perspectives nevertheless goes beyond postmodernism opening up a further line of inquiry that need not be inimical to postmodernism's perspectives of thought. Marcel critiques the oversimplifications of rationalism, idealism, and empiricism. And he moreover seeks correctives that would allow him to deal meaningfully with some of the crucial issues life involves.

Marcel rejects the rationalism and dualism of René Descartes, and criticizes Descartes' excessive ambition to found truth in an indubitable idea from which all else follows logically. Although Marcel was schooled in the German and Anglo-Saxon idealism of his day, he found its approach inadequate for dealing with real life issues. And even though he continued to admire American philosophers like Josiah Royce, W. E. Hocking, Bradley and others for their efforts to deal with values affecting human community, he felt the need for a meatier approach in philosophic investigation.¹¹ Marcel likewise found untenable the limits empiricism placed on the notion of

¹⁰Hereafter "On the Ontological Mystery" reference are noted: (OM, 16-17).

¹¹Intro. to *The Broken World*, p. 12.

"experience" confining its application exclusively to the kind of experience appropriate to investigations in empiric physical sciences.

In opposition to the rationalism of Descartes, Marcel proposed a radical revolution. Reversing the (in)famous "*cogito . . .*", Marcel declared, "Being is an affirmation I *am* rather than an affirmation I *utter*." (OM,18) This statement shifts the epistemological focus and reestablishes the priority of being. It is being that first presents itself evidencing its reality and progressively revealing itself to a welcoming attentive consciousness. Being in its richness is present, revealing itself so that consciousness can become cognizant of it. Marcel offers another metaphor, "My inquiry into being presupposes an affirmation in regard to which I am, in a sense, passive, and of which I am the stage rather than a spectator." (OM,18) One is not a disengaged distant spectator of life. One is touched and affected by life's realities. So it is that being plays itself out on the stage of one's consciousness. Indeed one experiences being's presence as revealed through the interaction of en fleshed persons in a concrete life situation.

In sum Marcel rooted thought in the direct presence of the reality under investigation to the incarnate, affective, cognitive subject experiencing it, not in a cogito, transcendental ego, or absolute idea. For the pretentious claims of idealism, Marcel substituted a more modest and concrete approach. Rather than founding knowledge in any transcendental ego and its abstract and absolute perspective, Marcel pursued his more modest experience of perspectival approaches of an incarnate being.¹² Rather than in a series of eidetic reductions Marcel found knowledge through critically reflective clarification of the sensitive, cognitive, affective exploration of realities given within one's experience.

Eschewing any pretension to create a "system" of philosophy, something Marcel neither could nor would produce, he preferred to explore human life from many different incarnate points of view. He was willing to forego some of idealism's claims of universality

¹²*Creative Fidelity*, N.Y, Crossroad, 1982; copyright by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1964, Ch. I: Incarnate being as the central datum of metaphysics, pp. 11-57. (It is noteworthy that the 1982 and 1964 editions have identical pagination.)

preferring to stay close to the richness of concrete approaches to issues and questions affecting human life. In gatherings for conversation at his home, 21 rue de Tournon, Paris VI, there was one ground rule for presentations. No abstract conceptual analyses presented solely on the theoretic level were allowed. Any issue raised had to be explored in terms of concrete human individuals involved in a real life situation. It is along this vein that we can begin to understand Marcel's choice to place a quote from E.M. Forster in *Creative Fidelity*, suggesting that it is in the individual that we find the infinite.¹³ In the above ways Marcel enriched and deepened the notion of subjectivity.

Marcel also extended the notion of what may be gathered in the more realistic scope of human experience. Marcel saw as arbitrary and prejudicial the attempt to limit experience to sense perception or scientific observation of physical phenomena. With other existential thinkers Marcel extends the notion of experience to include the awareness of whatever impacts the senses, emotions, feelings, heart, consciousness or spirit of a person.

Marcel also transcended the limits of modern thought when he introduced the revolutionary notion of embodied subjectivity. Marcel's starting point for the phenomenological analyses of *Creative Fidelity* was Ch. I: Incarnate Being.¹⁴ This Marcelian approach, experiencing and thinking human being incarnately as embodied subjectivity, enabled the overcoming of Cartesian dualism. Marcel's thought on incarnate being as embodied subjectivity is a significant moment in the whole history of human thought on this topic. His analyses and insights are certainly as rich and revolutionary as those found in the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Marcel's description of the phenomenon of incarnate being and his critical reflections overturning Cartesian dualism is not merely a chapter in his book

¹³*Creative Fidelity*, p. 147. "It is private life that holds out the mirror to infinity; person intercourse, and that alone, that ever hints at a personality beyond our daily vision.", E.M. Forster, *Howard's End*, London, Edward Arnold & Co., 1910, p. 78.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 32-57. It is noteworthy that the original title of this book in French was *Du Refus à L'Invocation*. (*From Refusal to Invocation*.)

Creative Fidelity; they remain central to his entire approach and thought.

Marcel transcended Cartesian mind/body dualism in its two principal aspects. First he finds human consciousness enmeshed in incarnate being. Marcel's thinking is that of an embodied subjectivity inclusive of affective as well as cognitive dimensions. And second, as we shall examine presently, Marcel overcomes the subject//object or *res cogitans//res extensa* dichotomy in his notion of experience, as it is the starting point and the central datum in a search for human meaning through a reflective clarification of mystery as opposed to a merely empiric investigation of object-like problems.

Marcel has depicted the situation of a broken world. He has articulated the same essential criticism of modern idealism and empiricism as most post modernists do. And now we shall see further that as he tried to deal with the question, "Who am I? - Is Being empty or full?", which emerges in the situation of a broken world, Marcel has evolved his own approach for grappling with this task.

As Paul Ricoeur once mentioned, if phenomenology had not existed Marcel would have had to invent it. As Herbert Spiegelberg showed in his remarkable portrayal of *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction*, Marcel like other existential thinkers held in common the perspectives of the phenomenological movement, yet each developed their approaches in ways suited to the particular questions or area of investigation they chose to explore. Readers should not be surprised that Marcel's approach has much in common with the phenomenological method.¹⁵

Certainly viewing phenomena from different perspectives to bring into focus different aspects of meaning about the reality under investigation is an enriching approach that Marcel's thought has in common with phenomenology and postmodernism. And the same rules for certitude and evidence apply within phenomenology and

¹⁵Paul Ricoeur, "Gabriel Marcel et la Phenomenology," in *Entretiens autour de Gabriel Marcel, Neuchatel, à la Baconnière, 1976, pp. 53-74*; Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement, A Historical Introduction*, Vol. I The German Phase, Vol. II The French Phase, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1965, pp. 421-444.

Marcel's reasoned analyses, openness to a full experience of a given reality and a willingness to entertain alternative interpretations and research the attitudes and stances or even fundamental presupposition from which these attitudes and interpretations arise.

Marcel observed that freedom plays an extremely important role in his thought. Freedom is not so much a theme he explores, as it is at the heart and center of all his thought. For post modernism freedom is a value and a goal. Yet Marcel recognized freedom as determinative of the philosophic process. Indeed he wrote that metaphysics is the logic of freedom. One aspect of what I believe Marcel has in mind is that what we attend to in our experience and also in our viewing, analyzing, critical reasoning and interpreting is significantly influenced by our freedom. Marcel recognizes that the various interpretations we find for one and the same situation are influenced if not determined by the attitude and stance of the investigator.

As Marcel addressed the question, "Who am I? - Is Being empty or full?", he established the subject's credibility for examining this question by affirming the presence of being to the inquirer, and he sketched his method of inquiry by distinguishing problem and mystery, and then identifying the steps of recollection and reflection. When Marcel articulates the question that grows out of ontological uneasiness, he likewise opens a path for exploring it. One's access to Being is assured because "Being is an affirmation I *am* rather than an affirmation I *utter*: by uttering it I break it, I divide it, I am on the point of betraying it." And Marcel situates this question as a mystery by his classic statement that "my inquiry into being presupposes an affirmation in regard to which I am, in a sense, passive, *and of which I am the stage rather than the subject.*" (OM,12-15,18)

Marcel evolved his approach in his own way, using his own words. In his effort to overcome the subject//object dichotomy that has plagued modern thought he developed the notion of problem versus mystery. He also used the description of one's experience and the reflective clarification of mystery as a way to explore dimensions of human experience that escape the too narrow and reductionist interpretations derived from empiric observation exclusively.

In a problematic approach, the model of experience is characterized by a subject/object dichotomy. And in a problematic approach the ideal of objectivity rules, with its goal that interpretation of sensibly or scientifically observed data be free from the influence of the investigator. Data, observation and interpretation are to be based solely in the objective pole of knowledge. By contrast in the case of a mystery the subject investigating is included in the data under investigation. "A mystery is a problem which encroaches on its own data, thereby transcending itself as a simple problem." (OM,19) We might also paraphrase that quote to read, a mystery is a problem whose data encroaches upon the subject, for in the case of a mystery the subject investigator plays a uniquely active and indispensable role in the constitution of meaning. First the reality of a mystery does not enter into the realm of one's experience, unless that person is open and welcomes an encounter with the reality in question. One must be willing to be touched and affected by the mystery. Second the investigator plays a uniquely active role in constituting the careful description, reasoned analysis and critically weighed interpretation of the phenomenon in question. Another aspect of the problem versus mystery distinction is that a problem is something to be solved, and once resolved its meaning is laid bare, whereas a mystery discloses its essential significance, yet its full meaning is inexhaustible. (OM,18-21)¹⁶

An illustration will help clarify the problem--mystery distinction. From the problematic approach an explanation of the fact that two people chance to meet may be found in their socio-economic background, state of health or preference in sports. Then the probability of these two individuals meeting at a ski resort or a health spa can be calculated. The above factors are measurable variables that can account for the likelihood of an encounter taking place, i.e. two people being in the same place at the same time.

But taken as a mystery, an encounter that leads to a deep and lasting friendship is a reality that has a far deeper meaning. Approached as a mystery, an encounter is an event that has left a

¹⁶Cf. Katharine Rose Hanley and J. Donald Monan, S.J., *A Prelude to Metaphysics, Being interrogated through reflection and history*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall Inc., 1967, pp. 79-100.

deep and lasting trace upon my life. The occurrence of an I-Thou encounter depends on persons being open to it, being touched by it and welcoming it into their lives. And an encounter is a reality that belongs to the realm of intersubjectivity and should be reckoned in terms proper to human relations. The meaning of an I-Thou encounter, an event that has left a deep and lasting trace upon our life, occurs through a dialogue of freedoms. One person, the I, concretely expresses an appeal. The Thou, another I, is free to ignore, postpone, refuse or respond to that appeal. If both agree, there occurs the gratuitous and reciprocal gift of presence. Presence, that gift of intersubjectivity with and for one another, is the essence of an encounter. And it is coconstituted by a dialogue of freedoms. (OM,21-23)

Whether one is open to certain realities, like friendship, fidelity, etc., depends on the free choice and affective attitude a person adopts. Whatever attitude one adopts and whatever interpretation one espouses as the meaning of a phenomenon depends on the autonomous choice which springs from that individual's freedom and at times the interplay of freedom and grace.

Recognition of this fact leads Marcel to always include a second level of reflection about a phenomenon. For example, after describing the essential characteristics of an I-Thou encounter; Marcel investigates the necessary conditions of possibility for its occurrence. These he situates in subjective attitudes, namely availability or unavailability, *i.e.* freedom's willingness or unwillingness to be permeable, open in depth, to evoke, actively await presence.(OM,39-43)

Different interpretations result from different affective attitudes or different freely adopted stances. This is one distinctive and important way Marcel sees freedom as central to anyone's thought. We shall see a further significance of this idea in our concluding section.

When Marcel explores the question, "Who am I? - Is Being empty or full?", he approaches it as a mystery. And Marcel opens up a path of discovery when he suggests we may take up this quest through "Recollection" and "Reflection." "Recollection is that act

whereby I re-collect myself as a unity; and this hold, this grasp upon myself, is also relaxation and abandon. Abandon to ... relaxation in the presence of ... - yet there is no noun for these prepositions to govern. The way stops at the threshold." (OM,23) "... *in this withdrawal I carry with me that which I am and which perhaps my life is not.*" (OM,24) And a "second reflection is recollection in the measure in which recollection can be self-conscious." (OM,25)

So pursuing the question of "Who am I?" through recollection and reflection, we can gather different perspectives of insight. Am I merely my functions, my roles, my curriculum vitae or life history? Recollection lets me be open to what is part of my life yet what is other and more than my life. Reflection is a turning back so as to view, bring into focus, and see more clearly what is given within one's life experience. Through recollection and reflection I may encounter and recognize as mysteries of being in which I can participate: love, hope, friendship, the personalizing force of loved ones who are present participating in my life, a Transcendent-immanent Force, an Ultimate Recourse, an Absolute Thou who is with and for me, or Nothingness. Recollection allows the fathoming of whether Being is empty of full. Marcel's reflections offer a preliminary indication of what Being refers to. "Being is -or should be- necessary. It is impossible that everything should be reduced to a play of successive appearances which are inconsistent with each other ("inconsistent" is essential), or, in the words of Shakespeare, to 'a tale told by an idiot.' I aspire to participate in this being, in this reality-and perhaps this aspiration is already a degree of participation, however rudimentary." (OM,14) Does Being not respond to an ontological need, a search for something that would withstand all attempts to debunk it and render it devoid of intrinsic or significant value. (OM,13-14)

As Marcel proceeds in the final part of his essay "On the Ontological Mystery" to clarify reflectively what can be found as part of the mystery of being, he shows again the central role freedom plays in the discovery and determination of meaning. He begins by considering the alternatives of hope and despair, noting that the human condition has only to let itself go to its own weight to be drawn toward the tragic. (OM,26) And he remarks that true hope in its greatest intensity arises in a situation wherein despair remains a genuine temptation. We cannot but think of the very similar situations

of Denise who committed suicide, and Christiane who in her dire moment found resources supporting her ability to love and to hope. Keeping central the awareness that freedom is what determines one's openness to participate in the mystery of being, Marcel clarifies the phenomenon of presence and develops the notion of fidelity, bringing to light the distinctive feature these have in common namely providing renewed resources and an incitement to create. (OM,32-40)

After a first moment that describes, analyzes and interpretes what is given to one's recollection and the critically clarified consciousness reflection brings, Marcel always introduces a subsequent moment to identify the underlying attitudes that are requisite conditions of possibility for the phenomenon to have occurred in the first place. For example, how is it that some people are capable of presence and others seem not? Marcel through a second reflection brings to light that a person's attitude of availability or unavailability will influence whether or not that person is capable of the openness, receptivity or permeability that are requisite for presence to occur. (OM,39-40)

A Way of Researching Ultimate Concerns

Of particular interest in this conversation about Gabriel Marcel and postmoderns are the different ways of dealing with questions of ultimate concern. On this point Marcel has something unique and distinctive to offer.

Marcel is very aware of different points of view and indeed very respectful of them. Marcel observed that one of the challenges of his life, even from the days of his early childhood, was to deal with the fundamental antinomies life presents. There seemed to be irreconcilable differences of opinion on the Dreyfus Affair, on how to handle divorce within the extended family, etc. His plays and essays try to deal with fundamental conflicts and present different points of view intelligibly and fairly. As Marcel wrote, he hoped to communicate a spirit of kinship, one that says, "you are understood." He also hoped his theater could bring people to a standpoint from which the diversity in stances and interpretations is understood in a spirit of

compassion that blends lucidity and love.¹⁷

With Marcel's respect for diversity there is a large place for freedom and tolerance in his thought, but Marcel does not succumb to the slough of relativism. He respects each person's right to their point of view, but he goes a step further and unearths the fundamental presuppositions and basic attitudes that underlie each different point of view. So rather than adopt the popular stance of pretending to be perfectly balanced in obedience before several varying options, Marcel is willing to move beyond this impasse and forge a path for freedom's commitment through a critically enlightened choice.

Marcel examines each position put forth to critically clarify its merits. He moreover examines the attitudes and fundamental presuppositions from which each interpretation springs. Thus Marcel brings to light through critical reasoning the significance of each option and also clarifies its subjective and ontological foundations.

Marcel acknowledges there is an ethical dimension to his work in that it offers an invitation to freedom "a call to be."¹⁸ Marcel invites people to freely espouse a commitment to what is our noblest human potential and to what will fulfill our highest human hope. By examining each position and bringing to light the fundamental presuppositions that underlie it, Marcel illumines a path enabling others to make authentic free choices. The criteria for a choice are as follows. What among alternatives would lead to a more authentic and humanizing life for oneself and others? Or what choice invites one to fulfill one's noblest human potential? Marcel's invitation is addressed to one's freedom and it is a call to authenticity. It is a call to be oneself in the noblest and most humanly fulfilling way.

¹⁷"The Drama of the Soul in Exile," p. 21; "Essay in Autobiography," in *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, Secaucus, NJ, 1956, pp. 106-7; "My Dramatic Works as viewed by the Philosopher," in *Searchings*, NY, Newman Press, 1967, p. 116; "De la Recherche Philosophique," in *Entretiens autour de Gabriel Marcel*, p. 17; *The Existential Background of Human Dignity*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1963, pp. 17-18, 107.

¹⁸"The Drama of the Soul in Exile," p. 33.

Marcel thus presents an alternative to groundless relativism. And this he does in a way respectful of freedom and one's individual dignity. Always setting out clearly the alternative ways one can go and what these different ways involve, Marcel invites people in a postmodern world to explore their own experiences in quality and depth with the hope of finding something within being that withstands all attempts to debunk it and render it devoid of intrinsic value, something which cannot be reduced to a play of successive appearances which are inconsistent with each other. (OM, 14)

So while Marcel's work has affinities with postmodernism in that he transcends the artificially limiting constraints of idealism and empiricism, resists all "totalizing" efforts in philosophy and politics, and eschews systematic "rationalistic" thought to pursue a concrete existential approach, his work differs from postmodernism in several radically important ways. Postmodernism in general is epistemologically and axiologically relativistic and for the most part rejects foundations, especially ontological ones. Marcel, for his part, respects different points of view, but after having examined and understood them, and searched out the fundamental attitude from which they spring, does not hesitate to move his investigation further. His inquiry goes on to distinguish which attitudes and interpretations are respectful of human dignity and which are not. He investigates which attitudes and interpretations invite the actualization of one's noblest human potential and which fail to do so.

Another important way that Marcel's work differs from postmodernism is that he goes beyond relativism by illuminating the subjective attitudes which give rise to differing interpretations and also clarifying the way to discover ontological foundations for one interpretation rather than another. As *The Broken World* shows and "The Ontological Mystery" explicates most persons are not satisfied to live on a superficial level, but long to be in touch with their own being and to live out of their own center even at the depth which questions whether Being is empty or full. And Gabriel Marcel progressively explicates the ontological need that underlies this quest.

Beyond a Postmodern Assumption of Nietzschean Nihilism

Marcel opens up a path that leads beyond where postmodernism is today. While respecting diversity of opinion, affective attitude and fundamental stance, Gabriel Marcel offers a new way of pursuing the question of Being, Transcendence or the Sacred. In his "Essay in Autobiography" Marcel noted that the central metaphysical preoccupation of his thought was to discover how a subject in his/her actual capacity as a subject is related to a reality which cannot in this context be regarded as objective, yet which is persistently required and recognised as real. (EA, 127)

As we noted at the beginning of this essay Marcel's experience and communication occurs as it were through three co concentric rings. We shall follow that pattern of development in this final section that traces, perhaps too summarily, Marcel's perspective on researching a quest for God.

Questions of ultimate concern were part of Marcel's life from his early years on. This occurred first like music, the inner most circle of experience and communication, that is heard by way of inwardness and depth. As a child Marcel suffered from the desert like atmosphere of a household with no religion, where the only presence of the sacred was through the music of a Bach, Beethoven and the like. Marcel was also preoccupied with what becomes of loved ones after they have died. This preoccupation originated with his concern for his mother who died when Gabriel was four.¹⁹

These concerns continued through his adult years. Marcel researched them dramatically, the second co concentric ring, and philosophically, the third co concentric ring.²⁰ These two avenues of

¹⁹"Essay in Autobiography," pp. 109-10, 112; "My Dramatic Works as Viewed by the Philosopher", p. 96.

²⁰*Presence and Immortality*, Pittsburgh, PA, Duquesne University Press, 1967; Cf. K.R. Hanley, *Dramatic Approaches to Creative Fidelity, A Study in the Theater and Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, Ch. II: "The Unfathomable: A Search for Presence", pp. 55-75.

concern led Marcel to discover a mode of experiencing the presence of loved ones from beyond death. His clarification of intersubjectivity and the conditions of possibility for its occurrence suggest a way for persons to encounter a Transcendent.

Indeed the drama of *The Broken World* witnesses the possibility of an experience of light and love from beyond that lets a person find her true self centered in the depth of her being, and the spiritual influx she experiences impels her to reach out to her husband in a spirit of truth and love. (BW, IV, 6 & 7) This breakthrough to a spiritual dimension brings a stunning ending to the play, and opens up for audiences a path toward discovering their rootedness in Being.

Christiane was living self-deception and deception of others. She was bored with her superficial relations and flirtations and likewise dissatisfied with her fugues and her artistic diversions as a dilettante. Overwhelmed with the shallowness, the emptiness of her life, Christiane is about to cast it all over, go off with a new young lover, perhaps even leave in a suicide of despair as did her girlhood friend Denise. But then there is a breakthrough of an event from the past. Genevieve's visit discloses that she knew of Christiane's love of Jacques. Genevieve's visit also brings the disclosure that after years in the monastery Jacques became aware of Christiane's love and reciprocated it. He recognized that the same act which meant for him his happiness and salvation meant for Christiane her loss and perhaps even perdition. Thereafter he felt responsible for her, and prayed for her that a light would come to her, and that he perhaps might have some small part in that.

It is striking to read the essay "On the Ontological Mystery" as a commentary on the events in the life of Christiane as she struggles in *The Broken World*. And yet this is precisely the manner in which essay was composed. It was not written as a philosophic paper or research thesis but as a philosophic reflection of the concrete drama of Christiane and her growing consciousness of the interpersonal relations that made up her life situation in *The Broken World*.

In *The Broken World*, a witness, Genevieve Forgue, communicates a spirit of love and truth that touches and affects

Christiane. Genevieve also invites Christiane to welcome this spirit of love and truth that Genevieve speaks of and radiates and which Christiane can accept and live by. (BW, IV, 6)

The reference in the essay "On the Ontological Mystery" to an encounter that has left a deep and lasting trace upon one's life certainly applies to Christiane and her relation with Jacques. Other comments refer to Christiane's situation as well. "It depends upon us to be permeable to this influx (of presence), but not, to tell the truth, to call it forth." (OM, 38) This is true for the original encounter and building of friendship, it is *a fortiori* true of the spiritual influx after Jacques' death that transforms Christiane's life, and it will be also be true of the future renewals of presence conferred from beyond death. We can hear Marcel's remark, as applying to Christiane situation and hope for the future, when we read that "Creative fidelity consists in maintaining ourselves actively in a permeable state; and there is a mysterious interchange between this free act and the gift granted in response to it." (OM, 38)

We cannot but help think of Act IV, Scene 6 when we read Marcel's description of the meta-problematic as a presence that becomes part of one's being. To deny it is to betray it. It is an assurance of the order of the affirmation, "you are loved." The gift of presence breaks through and heals a trauma thus liberating the love, the hope and all the creative energies of Christiane's life.

We can envision Christiane asking and reflecting on the question, "Who am I? - Is Being empty or full?". We can remember the alternative of her dissatisfaction with her life, in Act I, Scene 4, in conversation with Henry, and again in the beginning of Act IV, Scene 6 in conversation with Genevieve. Yet we can see a very different picture of the landscape of her life as the play ends. It is in the latter framework that encounter, presence, love - not betrayed without loss of ones very being and life, and presence renewed and maintained through creative fidelity and marked by its signal benefit an incitement to create. (BW, IV, 7; OM, 22-42)

As we reflect on Christiane's life, and the possibility of the new answer she can give through freely accepting the light and assurance of love, we get an inkling of the way in which Christiane is invited to

fulfill her authentic potential, called to become in action what her true self is in anticipation.

Toward the end of the essay "On the Ontological Mystery," Marcel highlights the alternative stances of availability or unavailability from which a response may spring. If one lives closed, absorbed in oneself, not caring for or really being with and for others, then one is a mere shadow of oneself - as Christiane admittedly was through most of the *The Broken World*. Or one may be permeable to the call to become one's true self, fulfilled through openness and response to the opportunities to be with and for others and the Other.

Marcel himself was very aware of the difficulty there is in coming to faith. He acknowledged that he was perhaps more at home with the unbeliever than with the believer because for many years he did not believe, and even after he came to faith he was still keenly aware of the unbelief that remained at the heart of his belief - those areas of his life where the gospel had not yet been preached.²¹

Marcel explored extensively the conditions of possibility for someone coming to faith and the path by which an individual might access faith in *Le Seuil Invisible* and *The Metaphysical Journal*.²² A later work, *Creative Fidelity*, which originally had the title, *Du Refus à l'Invocation*, contains a remarkably thorough critical analysis of the difference between opinion and faith.²³ Marcel preferred to think faith along the lines of interpersonal trust rather than along the lines of opinion. His book *Creative Fidelity* traces a critical description of faith in its development as an interpersonal relation that can lead to an intersubjectivity of being.²⁴ He noted that "the act of belief in or about something or someone implies giving credit." And he adds that "the

²¹*Creative Fidelity*, Ch. VI, pp. 120-121.

²² *Le Seuil Invisible*, (*The Invisible Threshold: Grace and The Sand Castle*) Paris, Editions Grasset, 1914; *A Metaphysical Journal*, Paris, Gallimard, 1927; Chicago, H. Regnery Co., 1954.

²³*Creative Fidelity*, Ch. VI, From Opinion to Faith, pp. 120-139.

²⁴*ibid.*, Ch. VII, VIII, IX

credit I extend is, in a way, myself.²⁵ "Believing means giving oneself, rallying to." And as Bergson observed, "The strongest or most vital belief is one which brings all the powers of our being most completely into play..." Marcel further notes that one can only trust a "thou," a reality capable of fulfilling the function of a "thou," of being invoked, of becoming something I can fall back on. Then the question "Who am I?" changes imperceptibly into an appeal to an ultimate recourse.²⁶ "Reflection...is directed on an *I believe* which can be explicated only when construed in the form of *I believe in You, who are my sole recourse.*" And he further notes that "*this reality gives me to myself insofar as I give myself to it; it is through the mediation of the act in which I center myself on it, that I truly become a subject.*"²⁷ Rather than arguments, proofs for the existence of God or metaphysics that situate God as the keystone in the rationalist structure of an idealist system, Marcel presents an existential approach that leads not just to a logical conclusion about God, that God exists or that God has certain attributes, but rather leads to existential encounter, i.e. one's own experience of God present and active in one's life.

Marcel suggested an approach to faith lived as trust, not mere opinion. He moreover describes the steps in this approach to faith in terms drawn from interpersonal relations among human persons. He sees a dialogue of freedoms, an appeal and a response and then by mutual agreement a co-constitution of presence has the gratuitous gift of being with and for one another.

Marcel points out that such presence once conferred can be renewed, and encountered by way of inwardness and depth. Such renewals of presence are marked by a spiritual influx that uplifts and enriches ones personalizing acts of love, hope and creativity. Marcel also affirms that an absolute Thou may be met as one's ultimate recourse.²⁸

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 134.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 145.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 182-3.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 145.

One's confidence to open to the light and love of God, Marcel notes, is often facilitated by a human person who is a witness, i.e. someone who interacts in such a way that her spirit of light and love radiates to the person with whom she interacts and for whom she becomes a loving and mediating presence. Such is the case in *The Broken World* when Genevieve communicates Jacques' love and through his God's love for Christiane. A similar existential witness occurs in *Dot the I* when Aimée communicates God's merciful love to Felicia.²⁹

Final Reflection on Marcel's Conversation with Nietzsche about Humanity before the Alleged Death of God.

Aware of Nietzsche's influence in today's world, Marcel studied the development of Nietzsche's thought sympathetically and carefully. In a lecture "Man before the Alleged Death of God," Marcel examined the sense of Nietzsche's declarations of the death of God.

In *Joyful Wisdom*, Bk. III, paragraph 125, Nietzsche portrays a scene of the madman who rushes onto the village square, casts down his lantern shattering it, and cries: "Where is God? *We have killed God*, you and I! All of us, we are God's murderers!...what a terrible deed. How can we console ourselves. . .?"³⁰ Marcel observed that for the young Nietzsche, God was real, an active presence in his life; so the loss of God is tragic even though out of this loss there is, at first, affirmed the dawn of a new humanism, the advent of a nobler freer humanity and a higher form of morality.³¹

In *Joyful Wisdom*, Book V, paragraph 343 written later in Nietzsche's life, the tone and character of the declaration are quite different. The affirmation of the death of God is now stated as an

²⁹*Two One Act Plays by Gabriel Marcel, Dot the I and The Expertise*, Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 1986, pp. 1-21.

³⁰Nietzsche: L'Homme devant la mort de Dieu, in *Presence de Gabriel Marcel, Cahier I*, Paris, Aubier, 1979, p. 9-24.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 10.

empiric fact. The authority for this statement is attributed to the perspicacity and farsightedness of "we other free spirits." The news is announced in the cool confident tone of a scientist who knows that a distant star is extinct even though less enlightened folk still perceive its light and believe in it.³²

Marcel investigates Heidegger's and others' attempts to make sense of Nietzsche's allegation of the death of God. Noting especially the difference in tone and mood between Nietzsche's first and then later declarations of the death of God, Marcel finds the key to their intelligibility through the process of ageing. On the one hand, ageing can be lived as an active receptivity to renewals of God's presence in our lives, a letting go of non-essentials balanced by a deepening openness to what is essential. Or on the other hand, ageing can be lived as a staling, a kind of sclerosis wherein one stiffens and breaks away from the presence of what was life giving.³³

The different ways in which one can choose to live the process of ageing, openness or closedness, permeability to mystery or the "hubris" of pride in power, may be recognized as the subjective attitudes that can account for the difference of opinion as to whether God is present and active in one's life or dead, (alleged to be dead). Thus Marcel's analysis lets us see beyond a "groundless relativism" to discern precisely what are the different subjective attitudes that account for various opinions or interpretations. He also shows, in a concrete existential way, through personal witness and critically reflective clarification, how one may proceed to search out and evoke the presence of Transcendence, an Absolute Thou experienced as a living God or as the ultimate recourse in one's life.

Marcel considers what is most significant about the impact of Nietzsche's declaration of the death of God. Today people can the more readily endorse Nietzsche's affirmation as they are caught in the "hubris of technics" that is a striking illustration of the tempter's phrase: *Eritis sicut diis*. However Marcel perceived as the much graver threat the radical pessimism which basically consists of being

³²*Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

³³*Ibid.*, pp. 12-22.

convinced, from the very beginning, of the certain failure and final inanity of human enterprises - in short, in that very same nihilism that Nietzsche wanted to overcome without being able to succeed, because the doctrine of the superman and that of eternal recurrence are not, it appears, capable of giving long-lasting satisfaction to a thought anxious to fathom the concrete situation of the human being.³⁴

What Nietzsche affirmed with exaltation developed into a radical nihilism. And we note parenthetically what Allan Bloom suggested in *The Closing of the American Mind*, that many American young people, and some older as well, are living fully the consequences of this nihilism whether or not they are aware of its intellectual and historic basis.³⁵

Marcel also asked what should be the attitude of people of faith before those who live and declare the death of God. He enumerates some inappropriate and appropriate ways for thinking relations between the one for whom God is a living presence and the one for whom God is not a loving active presence in their lives.

Marcel maintains that one's prime duty is to understand, and he adds that this understanding must necessarily imply self-scrutiny. For what is important is not merely to know that God is living in me, but rather to ask myself to what extent God is living through me. For between the one who insists that God is dead and the one who contests this, a definite relationship will come into being which will be at the same time existential and, to a certain degree, dramatic. So a responsibility lies in part with the person of faith, if the one for whom God is not a presence is to have the opportunity of experiencing the presence of God it will most likely be through the reflection of that presence in the life witness of the one for whom God is a presence,

³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

³⁵Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, NY, Simon and Schuster, 1987, pp. 68, 194.

i.e. living and active in their lives.³⁶

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³⁶"Nietzsche: l'Homme devant la mort de Dieu," in *Presence de Gabriel Marcel, Cahier I*, pp. 23-24.