# BROKEN WORLD, FRAGMENTED BEING: MARCEL AND THE EMBODIED AESTHETIC

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# Broken World, Fragmented Being: Marcel and the Embodied Aesthetic

by

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## Abstract

Brokenness saturates the finite realm that is human-being. The lion's share of twentieth century thinkers have responded to brokenness by tending towards violence and nihilism. In contrast, French Christian existentialist and playwright, Gabriel Marcel, does not. Marcel offers that brokenness is the threshold of human experience, not its totality. Marcel offers brokenness as the loving threshold of human experience, not its meaningless conclusion. My thesis attempts to locate Marcel in the dialogue of twentieth century philosophy and aims to point to his thought as a viable alternative to brutality and ego.

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Love makes immortal.
*It is the wonder that is keeping the stars apart.*

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## Introduction
## Listening

*The horror of the Twentieth Century was the size of*
*each new event, and the paucity of its reverberation.*

*Norman Mailer, A Fire on the Moon*

The plot of the twentieth century boasts a string of titanic events, each punctuated by an appeal to progress: the light bulb, world wars, the automobile, nuclear war, television, genocide, antibiotics, the holocaust, space travel, and environmental collapse define an era of unmatched innovation on one hand, and peerless devastation on the other. It is because of the dichotomy between ingenuity and demolition, and the sheer magnitude of the events in question, that the twentieth century is best understood as epic: essentially without precedent.

Thus we are burdened with an unprecedented question: How are we to *be* in the wake of the twentieth century? Until now it appears that our dialogue in this regard has been left to Heidegger, and understandably

so. Heidegger's notion of being is proportional to the Herculean character of the twentieth century itself. But, this call and response between giants, history and Heidegger, has not satisfied the question. I therefore offer a radical and dramatic intervention: a step away from grandeur, a movement inward.

Gabriel Marcel's voice in philosophy's script is unfairly overshadowed by a number of his contemporaries: most notably Sartre and Heidegger. This oversight is not owed to inferior thought, nor irrelevance of topic; instead this inattention may be due to something as simple as bad timing: the twentieth century being Heidegger's time to dominate. Marcel's bid to uncover the immediacy of the human condition appears humble when compared to the epic sweep of Heidegger's philosophical vision. Thus, it is because Marcel has willingly failed at playing Goliath that we must revisit his thought.

Please understand that my intention is not anti-Heideggerian, nor is it strictly pro-Marcelian. I aim, rather, to listen for Marcel's voice in the context of our current situation. It must also be made clear that I am not

proposing a dialogue between Heidegger and Marcel, not just yet at least. I intend only to interrupt, however briefly, our conversation with Heidegger so that Marcel may be heard.

Marcel has been labeled an existentialist, a Christian convert[1], a Christian existentialist, a neo-Socratic, a neo-Platonist, a neo-Bergsonian, a pseudo-phenomenologist, a philosopher of peace, a dramatist, a drama critic, a musician, a husband, father, colleague and friend[2]. Marcel himself has shown little inclination towards those titles from the first half of this list, preferring instead to identify with the latter categories[3]. For our purposes here it is important to note the diversity of Marcel's interests, as Marcel's thought is incarnate across various genres.

He begins his exploration of reality with the immediate: with sense; not mere sense experience, but sense that is common. It is the common sense

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[1] Marcel converted to Christianity, specifically Roman Catholicism, as an adult in 1929.

[2] I end this list with *friend* because in reading Marcel you feel a genuine tenderness towards him as a philosopher, but more importantly as a human.

[2] Gabriel Marcel, "*An Autobiographical Essay*" in *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Lewis Edwin Hahn, (Open Court Publishing Company: La Salle, Illinois, 1984) p. 48-49.

of being: a sense of the ontological, that Marcel holds as central. On the other hand, it is the loss of this sense that Marcel dreads.

The 'broken world' is a comment on the loss of sense: of human essence, through technology, or function, and is discussed in *The Philosophy of Existence (1954)*, and more subtly in the dramatic work *The Broken World (1973)*.

I must emphasize that the *broken* in *broken world* does not imply that the world was ever whole, or that a philosophical band-aid might unify it. Rather, the broken world is broken in essence, and stands in wait to be further fragmented by the events of history. In this way, Marcel does not endeavor to heal the world; in fact, he aims to honor its brokenness.

Brokenness constitutes the shape of humanity, for Marcel. Brokenness is the threshold of human experience. It is the unwilling nature of man who fails to reflect and transcend, preferring instead to glory in the particularity of menial tasks or functions, that contributes to this fissure and fragmentation. *Ontological exigence* is stilled by an unconscious relativism that discounts the personal, "ignores the tragic and denies the

transcendent"[4]. Marcel is aiming at transcendence[5] through lived experience. Deed solidifies the unity of being and transcending: the surpassing of threshold through action.

Not surprisingly, this call to action and Marcel's message of brokenness is echoed by the political wake-up call demanded by Giorgio Agamben and Frantz Fanon, among others. However, where Agamben and Fanon celebrate violence, Marcel concludes that all action must be grounded in active reflection. More importantly perhaps, Marcel holds that just because the world is broken, man is not obligated to follow suit. The role of the philosopher, artist, or priest, is to point to our brokenness so that we might move beyond it: transcend. Marcel states:

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[4] Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existence*, trans. Manya Harari, (The Harvill Press Ltd.: London, 1954) p. 5-6.

[5] Marcel makes a conscious effort to employ common language in his philosophical texts. His use of the word transcendent does not hinge on prior knowledge of Plato or Kant, nor does it relate to forms or systems. Rather, transcending refers to a movement above and beyond, a surpassing of the ordinary. Such a movement, for Marcel, is not reserved for the philosopher king but, is a real possibility for each member of the community.

> *Philosophy must bring to light the profound but usually inarticulated uneasiness man experiences in this technocratic or bureaucratic milieu where what is deepest in him is not only ignored but continually trampled underfoot.*[6]

Marcel offers us an opportunity for transformation grounded in thoughtful reflection. We are not to retrogress into the violent savagery of power, or isolation, we are to transcend the threshold offered to us by brokenness.

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[6] Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, trans. Stephen Jolin and Peter McCormick, (Northwest University Press: Evanston, 1973) p. 14.

# Chapter 1
# Broken World in Philosophy

> *Life in a world centered on function is liable to despair because in reality this world is empty, it rings hollow.*
>
> *Gabriel Marcel, The Philosophy of Existence*

One way into Marcel's concept of brokenness lies with what I term, if unimaginatively, the *fragmented man*[7]. The fragmented man is an individual who appears to herself, and indeed the world at large, as nothing more than a collection of functions[8]. The fragmented man has forced the idea of function to its limits, thus destroying any inclination toward curiosity: she has "[misplaced] the idea of function, taking function in its current sense which includes both the vital and the social

[7] While fragmentation is the condition of the broken world, it is not necessary that man himself be broken. The brokenness of man is not essential but acquired through unreflective functional activity and total denial of imagination and transcendence.

[8] Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existence*, trans. Manya Harari, (Harvill Press Ltd.: London, 1954) p. 1.

functions."[9] We can conceive of this functional individual most plainly as a sum of her parts: a sum of her functions. Marcel states:

> *I should like to start with a sort of global and intuitive characterization of the man in whom the sense of the ontological- the sense of being- is lacking, or, to speak more correctly, of the man who has lost the awareness in this sense. Generally speaking, modern man in his condition; if ontological demands worry him at all, it is only dully, as an obscure impulse.*[10]

Marcel offers the underground rail worker: opening doors or punching tickets, for whom work, sleep, nourishment, recreation, and (heterosexual) sex are all registered on the *to do list*: logged on the *time table*[11], to epitomize the fragmented man. For her, the inner reflection that delivers meaning to action is lost: intention ceases. She opens the

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[9] Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existence*, trans. Manya Harari, (Harvill Press Ltd.: London, 1954) p. 1.
[10] Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existence*, trans. Manya Harari, (Harvill Press Ltd.: London, 1954) p. 1.
[11] Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existence*, trans. Manya Harari, (Harvill Press Ltd.: London, 1954) p. 2.

door to the underground because it is her job, not because people require access to the trains. We may just as easily consider the modern office worker, bound to their unit in a cubical catacomb, as exemplifying the fragmented man. For this individual, meals, vacation and bathroom breaks are scheduled. The call centre attendant, whose job it is to answer phones and interact with other human beings, works from a script and is discouraged from stepping outside the confines of the page. The soldier offers up her life not because of any necessary emotional or moral motivation, but because the state demands it. The common man is also arguably dulled by the demands of society: go to school, get a job, get married, have children, retire, and die. Our lives are planned out for us, and as such, active intention is lost. This general state of ignorance and apathy defines us as a broken society.

The notion of broken society, or more specifically the broken citizen, is taken up in the work of Giorgio Agamben who presents us with a foil to the fragmented man: homo sacer. For Agamben, following Michel

Foucault[12], the modern political landscape is a manufactured terrain wherein the rule of law has created citizens and alienated human beings. Just as the functional demands of work, family and community have taken over in Marcel's fragmented man, so too has mass politicalization taken over in Agamben's citizen. But, there is a difference between the two: where the fragmented man is unable to imagine and transcend, the citizen is unable ground herself in her own animal nature[13].

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[12] And to some extent Marcel.

[13] A similar distinction occurs, according to Hegel, in Greek ethical life whereby divine law represents the natural, and human law represents the constructed. As such, the *Antigone* story provides an allegory whereby nature and construction stand at odds. Sophocles' *Antigone* is the final installment in the *Oedipus* trilogy of tragedy. Set against the backdrop of civil war, Oedipus' sons, Antigone's brothers, Polyneices and Eteocles, have slain each other in battle; as such the unfolding drama is an expounding of civil war: the inherent conflict of ethics' dual authorities: human and divine law. Creon, king of Thebes and Antigone's uncle, comes down on the side of human law, proclaiming that Polyneices, as enemy of the polis, must not be afforded the right of burial, but instead must remain on the battlefield as carrion. Conversely, Antigone holds that Polyneices must be buried, as that is correct action, dictated by divine law. Antigone eventually denies the wishes of the state and her uncle, in order to fulfill divine law, and buries her brother. As a result, Creon punishes her for breaking with human law and has Antigone imprisoned in a cave, where she eventually commits suicide. Creon's wife and son, Haemon who is betrothed to Antigone, take their own lives, leaving the solitary figure of Creon alone and without hope.

Agamben calls for reform: the move from *indifference, institution, and law* to *love, faith and violence.* This movement may occur only from the death of the rule of law and the subsequent reign of violence brought about by the movement towards *biopolitics*. The new *state of violence* is thus legitimated by the current tendency towards *biopolitical regimes* and away from the weary rule of law. The political is no longer about big ideas; it is about what we, as bodies, have the power to do.

Agamben describes the distinction between *bios* and *zoe* as the difference between qualified life and biological life: political life and *bare life.*

> *The Greeks had no single term to express what we mean by the word 'life'. They used two terms that, although traceable to a common etymological root, are semantically and metaphorically distinct: zoe, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods), and bios, which indicated the form or the way of living proper to an individual or a group.*[14]

[14] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller- Roazen (Stanford University Press: California, 1998) p. 1.

Criticism of the rule of law in light of Agamben's *life* distinction may be thus: Aristotle's political animal has given way to a political citizen that can no longer reconcile his animality with his political being. That is, through our experience as political beings, under the rule of law, we are alienating our animal side: we are losing the natural to the constructed[15].

The citizen, Aristotle's political animal stripped of his animality, is, however, just one side of the *bios/ zoe* distinction. Agamben names the other side of the political subject: *homo sacer*. *Homo sacer* is an outsider, specifically one who is outside of the law[16]. *Homo sacer*, or sacred man, is a criminal, punished through Roman law and sentenced to a life outside of the political community. She may be killed by any one individual without threat of recourse. However, as the laws of the state no longer apply to her, *homo sacer* may not be killed by the state; she may not be the sacrificial offering in religious ritual[17]. *Homo sacer* is both outside the

[15] Just as Hobbes sets up two opposing forces in *Leviathan*: the natural state of a war of all against all, and the artificial construction of the social contract, so too, the contemporary era takes up the juxtaposition of nature and artifice.
[16] In contemporary context: the migrant or the Vancouver prostitute.
[17] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller- Roazen (Stanford University Press: California, 1998) p. 71-74.

state and connected to it: as such, she can be understood as a reflection of Hobbes' sovereign who also stands with one foot inside, and one foot outside of the law[18]. Both *homo sacer* and the sovereign avoid the pitfalls of broken society by standing apart from it.

Standing apart from society, no matter how broken it may be, is problematic for Marcel as setting one's self off to one side only serves to further man's brokenness. This position rests in Marcel's view of ontology, which is communal rather than individual. Marcel offers, in his forward to *Mystery of Being Faith and Reality,* that the question of being is not contained in the utterance *I think*, but in the statement: *We are*[19].

The *I think*, the ground of Cartesianism, fails to recognize the world as communal and, as such, the *I* is unable to see the big picture. Marcel

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[18] The problem of the sovereign and the homo sacer in the light of the rule of law is thus the same: both straddle the zones of law and lawlessness and thus may be considered as apart from the remainder of society. The difference between the two however, is that the sovereign becomes, in a certain light, a tyrant, while the homo sacer, the non-citizen, the true outcast, becomes the new revolutionary.
I must also note that while I point to Hobbes' sovereign, Agamben picks up Schmitt's notion of the state of exception to make the same point.

[19] Gabriel Marcel, *Mystery of Being 2. Faith and Reality*, trans Rene Hauge (Gateway Edition Henry Regnery Company: Chicago, 1968) p. v.

equates this failure to *blindness*[20], where blindness is to be understood as undiscriminating. The Cartesian mantra will never illuminate the totality of being *I*: the *I think* does not account for community and as such *I* cannot know myself as part of a community[21]. Egocentricity highlights the *I* that is *zoe*, but cannot shed light on the *I* that is *bios*.

Thus Marcel holds that understanding of *you* and *me* rests with a starting point that is *we*. That is, being is grounded in *us*: in *we*: being is communal. It is the tension between being individual and being in society that makes one sided characters, such as homo sacer, useless to Marcel. Reconciliation of the *zoe/bios* life distinction must begin from the standpoint of community.

Marcel states:

> *First, we must understand that this enquiry [into being] can be developed only if we take a certain fullness of life as our starting point; secondly, we must*

[20] Gabriel Marcel, *Mystery of Being 2. Faith and Reality*, trans Rene Hauge (Gateway Edition Henry Regnery Company: Chicago, 1968) p. 8.
[21] Gabriel Marcel, *Mystery of Being 2. Faith and Reality*, trans Rene Hauge (Gateway Edition Henry Regnery Company: Chicago, 1968) p. 8.

> *at the same time note well that this fullness of life can in no circumstances be that of my own personal experience considered in an exclusively private aspect, considered in as much as it is just mine; rather it must be that of a whole which is implied by the relation with, by togetherness…*[22]

We are asked by Marcel to start from *we*: we are asked to be a part of each other: to participate. Here Marcel offers something different from many of his predecessors, and something that has been forgotten by many of his politically astute contemporaries[23] and successors[24]. There is a tendency, and indeed a history, of placing the philosopher over and against society, giving her special status: Plato's *solitary philosopher* leaves the shadows as a lone individual and returns from enlightenment only to be murdered by the cave dwelling mob. Marcel, the philosopher, asks that we resist the urge to segregate, perhaps more importantly; Marcel asks that we resist the urge to deify the philosopher and the martyr. We must participate, live, act, in order to transcend.

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[22] Gabriel Marcel, *Mystery of Being 2. Faith and Reality*, trans Rene Hauge (Gateway Edition Henry Regnery Company: Chicago, 1968) p. 9-10.
[23] Notably Sartre.
[24] Notably Levinas.

# Chapter 2.1
# Broken World Incarnation
# Marcel et Bergson Caught in the Act

> *Indeed, I think I can say that, among all those whose courses I took, Henri Bergson was the only one whose thoughts and words took a sure and lasting hold on me. To get a seat in the little hall of College de France, where he taught, one had to arrive an hour early and thus listen to (I would rather say undergo) the preceding class. As I have often said, what was marvelous and perhaps unique in Bergson was that during each lecture he conveyed a sense of proceeding in a sort of interior jubilation in a labor of discovery in which listeners were to participate.*[25]
>
> *Gabriel Marcel, An Autobiographical Essay*

In an effort to locate Marcel in the dialogue of twentieth century philosophy it is imperative to point to Henri Bergson's influence. This influence, however, extends far beyond mere context. As indicated by the above quote, and hinted at in the introduction, Marcel was Bergson's student and was taken in very early by the notions of participation and

[25] Gabriel Marcel, *"An Autobiographical Essay"* in *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Lewis Edwin Hahn, (Open Court Publishing Company: La Salle, Illinois, 1984) p. 576.

activity. Although both minds merge and diverge on a variety of topics, it is the notion of activity that proves to be the heart of their relationship, and also the point of interest for our purpose.

Activity is implicit in Bergson through his notions of pure mobility, creativity, free will, change and, most famously, *durée*.

Durée, *duration*, is associated with three examples in Bergson's *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. The last of Bergson's illustrations is that of an elastic band. The band is contracted at a mathematical point and then drawn out indefinitely to create a line. This line, without a limit, grows increasingly longer and longer[26]. Bergson's emphasis is not on the line itself as mere object, but on the motion of the line extending: the action of the line lengthening. Thus, durée is depicted here as an indivisible mobility[27]: as pure action.

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[26] Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. T. E. Hulme, (Hackett Publishing Company: Indianapolis; Cambridge, 1999) p. 26.

[27] In actual fact duration is not expressed fully by this example, or any other. This illustration does however shed light on the importance of motion and thus activity in Bergson.

The first note of Marcel's dissent from Bergsonianism came in the form of a challenge. Marcel challenged Bergson's association of being and the static in the last chapter of *L'Evolution Creatrice*, preferring a more *alive*[28] characterization of the ontological. In later work Marcel would challenge Bergson further, aiming for a grounded approach to activity. Marcel states in *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*:

> *As numerous philosophers, including Bergson, have seen, the relationship between attention and freedom is very close. This is what seems to escape entirely those philosophers who, with Sartre, interpret freedom as fundamentally a lack or privation. My attention, I would say, is the measure of my freedom. This formula has the advantage of displaying the central fact that freedom can only arbitrarily be dissociated from some kind of reference to the real, that is, from embodiment. I am not sure that the word*

[28] Gabriel Marcel, *"Response to Sam Keen"* in *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Lewis Edwin Hahn, (Open Court Publishing Company: La Salle, Illinois, 1984) p. 99.

*freedom means anything if we try to apply it to an omniscient and incorporeal being.*[29]

Marcel's criticism calls for a notion of being that is 'real', corporeal. Thus Marcel is continuing the Bergsonian project by stretching the band of activity around the groundedness of human-being. Marcel is looking to root the existential in the empirical[30]. As such, we must consider Marcel as a Neo-Bergsonian: as a believer in all things active so long as the activity is embodied. It is in Marcel that Bergson's durée begins its second life as act.

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[29] Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, trans. Stephen Jolin and Peter McCormick, (Northwest University Press: Evanston, 1973) p. xxxiii.
[30] Sam Keen, "*The Development of the Idea of Being in Marcel's Thought*" in *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Lewis Elwin Hahn, (Open Court Publishing Company: La Salle, Illinois, 1984) p. 99.

## Chapter 2.2
## Broken World Incarnation
## The Embodied Aesthetic

> *The idea of being creative… always implies the idea of being open towards others.*
>
> *Gabriel Marcel, Man Against Mass Society*

Man's transcendence is reliant on man's status as an actor; a status that enjoys double meaning in Marcel. The first instance of *man as actor* is the active man, the antithesis of the fragmented man. The active man moves beyond mere function through engagement with the world at large. She is reflective, she is intelligent: she is part of the communal experience. The second instance of *man as actor* is to be taken literally: in the theatrical sense; therefore the role of art, specifically theatre, is to be given serious thought.

As indicated, Marcel is a man of many talents and titles, however he is best known as a philosopher and a playwright[31]. The relation between these two genres is not to be overlooked as Marcel's plays may be viewed as the incarnation of his philosophical writing, or conversely as MacKinnon puts it: Marcel has "written highly individual philosophy, partly as the fruit of reflection on his work as dramatist."[32] In truth, the relationship between these genres is probably one of mutual inspiration as Marcel offers:

> *The retrospection in which I am now considering my work in its entirety enables me to confirm that this unity between my philosophical and dramatic work describes without a doubt what is most original as well as most essential in my contributions.*[33]

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[31] Marcel's autobiography points to his frustration at the success of his philosophical discourse in comparison to the relative obscurity of his dramatic works.

[32] Donald M. MacKinnon, *"Drama and Memory"* in *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Lewis Edwin Hahn, (Open Court Publishing Company: La Salle, Illinois, 1984) p. 576.

[33] Gabriel Marcel, *"Response to Donald MacKinnon"* in *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Lewis Edwin Hahn, (Open Court Publishing Company: La Salle, Illinois, 1984) p. 581.

In this way, we must explore the medium of drama as part of our dialogue with Marcel, as the dramatic appears to be a part of Marcel's need for being, his ontological exigence.

Marcel's words are mediated by the genre in which they are written, and demand a relationship with Marcel, his actors, and his audience. In this way, the medium of drama allows Marcel to deliver his message through the actors on stage. The nature of the difference between Marcel's notion of the *broken world* in his philosophical and dramatic work might be best understood as a matter of embodiment: as a philosophical text is to be read and drama is to be performed. A way into discussion of Marcel as a dramatist thus rests with the notion of embodiment, or incarnation.

Marcel's notion of embodiment, taken up by Maurice Merleau-Ponty[34] in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, is wrapped up in the concepts of *being and having*. Marcel holds that just as the unity of being and transcending culminates in the deed, the unity of *being* and *having* is located in the body. Marcel's *Being and Having*, part of his *existential diary*, is an extension of the contention that everything comes down to the distinction between what we have and what we are[35]. There is a firm difference between having a house and being hospitable; conversely, when we believe, we do not have a belief: we are a belief. A body however; more specifically my body, straddles both realms, as my body is both something that I have and something that I am. In this way, the relationship between the body and being and having must be understood as a both/and, as oppose to an either/or relation.

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[34] Merleau-Ponty holds that one's body is not merely an object (a having), but that the body is itself the condition for experience. (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 2002)

[35] Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having an* Existential Diary, trans. Katherine Farrer, (Harper & Row: New York, 1965) p. 155.

My relation to my body is not satisfied by the lone phrase: I have a body. This is the case as this statement makes possible a disassociation between me and my body. In this way, I now stand in relation to my body, thus becoming a force apart from it. In this instance of alienation, the body in question ceases to be my body and must be viewed as a body in general: I stand over and against the shell that is my body. Marcel contends that this view is incomplete as there exists a bond between me and my body.

Conversely, the statement: I am my body, lacks fullness as well. This is the case as once I connect myself to a body, the body in question ceases to be something that I have; my body is me; my body is what I am. The difficulty here is that if one is their body, then that is all they are. Loosing a limb, or other appendage, would thus mean that one was less than whole. The Tom Stoppard play *Rock 'N' Roll* explores this concept through the relationship between an aging, materialist, philosopher and his wife, who is dying with terminal cancer:

*Eleanor:* *(breaks) I don't care! I don't care about it! Stay in- get out- I don't care, Max!*

*Max:* *What is it? What's happened?*

*Eleanor:* *It's you. My body is telling me I'm nothing without it, and you're telling me the same.*

*Max:* *No… No.*

*Eleanor:* *You are, Max! It's as if you're in cahoots, you and my cancer.*

*Max:* *Oh God- Nell.*

*He tries to hold her. Weeping, she won't be held.*

*Eleanor:* *They've cut, cauterized and zapped away my breasts, my ovaries, my womb, half my bowel, and a nutmeg out of my brain, and I am undiminished. I'm exactly who I've always been. I am not my body. My body is nothing without me, that's the truth of it.*

*She tears open her dress*

*Look at it, what's left of it. It does classics. It does half-arsed feminism, it does love, desire,*

*jealousy and fear- Christ, does it do fear!- So who's the me who's still in one piece?*

*Max:* *I know that- I know your mind is everything.*

*Eleanor:* *(furious) Don't you dare, Max- don't you dare reclaim that word now. I don't want your 'mind' which you can make out of beer cans. Don't bring it to my funeral. I want your grieving soul or nothing. I do not want your amazing biological machine- I want what you love me with.*

*She hits bottom and stays there. Max waits, not comforting her. Then he crouches close to her.*

*Max:* *But that's what I love you with. That's it. There's nothing else.*[36]

Through his careful dialogue, Stoppard points to crux of what being body alone suggests: that being body amounts to being the sum of parts *and nothing greater*.

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[36] Tom Stoppard, *Rock and Roll*, (Faber and Faber: London, 2006) p. 56-58.

Being without having rules out the possibility of transcendence; transcendence is the essential element to human life, not so that we may heal the *broken world* but so that we may recognize brokenness. Likewise having without being entails disconnect, where body is alienated from self. To avoid emptiness, the statement: 'I am body' must share the same breath as 'I have a body' in order to express what the experience of my body is. In this way, the combination of being and having through embodiment in the human form is the path to transcendence. Further incarnation of this contention lies in Marcel's philosophical participation as a playwright.

I have touched on Marcel's *broken world* as a philosophical concept linked to the broken man, however philosophy is not the limit of the broken world. Marcel takes issue with the malaise of modernity in his play *Le Monde Casser*: *The Broken World.* The genre of theatre allows for the movement of theoretical to practical: from paper to body. In this way,

the lead character Christiane embodies the broken world theme, as she ultimately finds no satisfaction in the simulacrum that is polite society.

*Christiane:* *(solemnly) Don't you have the impression that we are living… if we call it that living… in a broken world? Yes, broken like a watch that has stopped. Its main spring no longer works. To all appearances nothing has changed. Everything is in its place. But if you put the watch to your ear… you hear nothing. Remember, the world, or what we call the world, the human world… used to have a heart. But it seems that heart has stopped beating. Lawrence codifies regulations, Daddy has season tickets at the Symphony and keeps a mistress on the cheap, Henry is preparing a trip around the world…*

*Denise:* *Oh! I didn't know.*

*Christiane:* *Antonov conducts rehearsals of his symphonic poem. Everyone has their own little niche, their own little thing, their own petty interests.*

*People meet, or more accurately, bump into each other. That makes quite a racket.*

*Denise:* *How else could it be?*

*Christiane:* *(Following her thought) But there's no centre, no life, anywhere.*

*Denise:* *And where are you in all of this?*

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

*Denise:* *In a vacuum?*

*Christiane:* *You said it, in a vacuum.*

*Denise:* *And the rest of the time?*

*Christiane:* *I suppose… I exist. I am what you might call a "busy woman".*

*Denise:* *(Bitterly) I can't stand such talk. Actually all that means…*

*Christiane:* *Don't start again, Denise.*

*Denise:* *If you would at least recognize…*

*Christiane:* *Sorry, but I won't give you that satisfaction.* [37]

The actors that portray Christiane and Denise in this scene are literally the embodiment of the words that Marcel has given them. Thus the actor is the located-ness of concept: idea in a phenomenological body. The word is now accessible through the medium of body: an audience can stare the message in the face: the word is communion passed through the actors onto their audience.

In this way, the nature of the engagement has a profound impact on the audience, as the solitary act of reading a text differs from the social act of attending a performance. It is not what happens to me when I utter my

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[37] Gabriel Marcel, *Perspectives on a Broken World*, trans. Katharine Rose Hanley, (Marquette University Press: Milwaukee, 1998) p. 46-47.

lines, but the collective engagement of an audience of individuals that is key[38]. Marcel states:

> *I should say that in the case particularly of the true artist in paint, or stone, or music, or words this relationship with the transcendent is something that is experienced in the most authentic and profound way.*[39]

Marcel seeks to call his audience into mystery[40] by presenting them with the corporeal: Marcel's use of the dramatic thus entices his audience and

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[38] The post-modern account contends that art is in the response of the audience; as such the audience may have a bigger role to play in the area of the arts in comparison to literature.

[39] Gabriel Marcel, *Man Against Mass Society*, trans. G. S. Fraser (Gateway Edition: Chicago, 1967) p. 23.

[40] Problem and mystery are closely associated with the broken world as Marcel states that the broken world is such that "on the one hand [it is] riddled with problems and, on the other, determined to allow no room for mystery". The broken world is instead the realm of problems which do not depend on participation for solution. Problems are stock inquiries that have no specific connection to any particular individual, but may be solved by any individual through following a process. Mystery, the preferred avenue of query, on the other hand takes up the engagement of the individual and depends on the individual's participation. In mystery the individual is the most important

demands their engagement: the audience that sits in wait of dimming lights engages with Marcel's plays, prepared to be gripped, to be invested, to transcend.

aspect; as to change the questioner would be to alter the question: mystery depends very much on who it is that is asking the question.

## Chapter 2.3
## Broken World Incarnation
## Strife

*During the struggle for freedom, a marked alienation from these [religious] practices is observed. The native's back is to the wall, the knife is at his throat (or, more precisely, the electrode is at his genitals)... After centuries of unreality, after having wallowed in the most outlandish phantoms, at long last the native, gun in hand, stands face to face with the only forces which contend for his life- the forces of colonialism. And the youth of a colonized country, growing up in an atmosphere of shot and fire, may well make a mock of, and does not hesitate to pour scorn upon the zombies of his ancestors, the horses with two heads, the dead who rise again, and the djinns who rush into your body while you yawn. The native discovers reality and transforms it into the pattern of his customs, into the practice of violence and into his plan for freedom.*

*Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*
*First of all I wish to express my deepest gratitude to those who have done me the great honor of awarding me the Peace Prize*[41]*. I must confess that I am very happy to receive it.*

[41] The Peace Prize of Borsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels was presented to Gabriel Marcel on September 20, 1964 in Frankfurt.

*It would please me to believe that my work, the significance and value of which is subject to my constant scrutiny the nearer I approach the end, might have contributed something, be it ever so little, to the cause of peace, which, in my opinion, is far by far the most precious of accomplishments. It is not sufficient to say that peace is good; one must contend that it is the basic condition for everything truly good.*

*Gabriel Marcel, The Philosopher and Peace*

Marcel's method of dramatic engagement calls his audience to participate in mystery, however there is another type of engagement that resists the cloak of mystique in favor of bold-faced, brutal, transparency. The flip side of Marcel's embodied aesthetic is conflict manifest: violence.

Nietzsche is dead, Hitler is rising, and Marcel is writing. France is under subjugation by the Nazis, and yet violence is conspicuously absent in Marcel's work. The tumultuous atmosphere that moved Nietzsche and Marx and later Sartre, Camus, and Heidegger, who are living and writing at the same time as Marcel, hangs heavy in the air. Marcel is not ignorant of his situation, and yet his work does not directly give evidence of his location in history. That is, Marcel does not take up the tone of violence

demonstrated by his fellows. Marcel offers instead an antithetical response to strife: love. I wish to draw our attention, briefly, to the arena of strife precisely because it is not the course of action that Marcel takes.

The work of Frantz Fanon, anti-racist, leftist, philosopher and psychoanalyst, has resurfaced as of late because of Fanon's specific engagement with violence. Following Marx, Fanon presents violence as a revolutionary force; unlike Marx however, it is the peasant, not the proletariat, who must rise up in physical protest. It is Fanon's position that freedom rests in absolute violence[42], where violence is a force of purification: specifically violence is meant to purge racial categories and eliminate the classifications of white and black.

In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon develops this concept of necessary violence within his chosen context of decolonization. Fanon's contention is that whatever name regime change is given, the outcome is always the same. Fanon, like Agamben, holds that the modern political landscape is

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[42] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, (Penguin Books: Harmondsworth; Middlesex; England, 1967) p. 37.

a constructed terrain wherein the rule of law serves as suppressor of violence. As such, violence is constituent to revolution, and must not be met with surprise or disgust: violence is a necessity. Fanon states:

> *The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it. For if the last shall be first, this will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between two protagonists. That affirmed intention to place the last at the head of things, and to make them climb at a pace (too quickly, some say) the well-known steps which characterize an organized society, can only triumph if we use all means to turn the scale, including, of course, that of violence.*[43]

The power of violence, converse to institution, is, ironically, its purity. Violence here is understood in its hard sense: that brute physical force or aggression with intent to kill. The image of blood and guts is not covered up in Fanon, but celebrated as evidence of the violent act. Thus, violence is not an illness to cure, but a fact of human existence.

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[43] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, (Penguin Books: Harmondsworth; Middlesex; England, 1967) p. 28.

Marcel is not in support of the totalitarian regimes of his time either, however Marcel looks to man's nature as a human being, and thus a human *doing*, rather than a human killing. The courageous act is to actively reflect. Marcel states:

> *I mean to bring to light the immensely important role reflection ought to play in the life of the political leader- and not only reflection, but courage. Unless courage is confused with an impulsiveness which is merely its most contemptible caricature, it will have to be affirmed that courage and reflection are inseparable… I believe that this lack of reflection and courage is the principal reason why false situations, or in other words inextricable ones, continue to multiply in the world today, creating the state of general anxiety felt by everyone who is not simply naïve…*
>
> *It would be sheer stupidity to interpret these severe remarks in a pro- fascist sense. Today it is evident that fascisms of whatever stripe have never been anything but sickness of democracy…*

> *The centre of this world [is] threatened at the same time by collective aberrations and technical excesses, what is needed is a reflection decidedly oriented toward truth as I have tried, not perhaps to define it, but at least to approach it.* [44]

Violence is not a solution to, but a result of, the broken world in which we live. Instead, "the man of faith comes repeatedly the assurance that the horizons of our age of violence are not the boundaries of the world as it is."[45] In this way, Marcel does not put all his eggs in the basket of groundedness. With feet firmly planted and engaged with the ground on which he stands, Marcel looks forward towards fidelity.

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[44] Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, trans. Stephen Jolin and Peter McCormick, (Northwest University Press: Evanston, 1973) p. 102-103.
[45] Donald Mackinnon, *"Preface"* in *Man Against Mass Society*, trans. G. S. Fraser, (Gateway Edition: Chicago, 1967) p. xi.

## Chapter 2.4
## Broken World Incarnation
## Love

> *Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bares all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*
>
> *Corinthians 13: 4-7*

> *Love, in so far as distinct from desire or as opposed to desire, love treated as the subordination of the self to a superior reality, a reality at my deepest level more truly me than I am myself- love as the breaking of the tension between the self and the other, appears to me to be what one might call the essential ontological datum.*
>
> *Gabriel Marcel, Being and Having*

Love affirms being. This is the case, as the realm of love places the beloved beyond the talons of finite violence: love makes infinite: love makes immortal. Sam Keen states:

> *Within love as it is fully developed there is an exigence for perennially, an apprehension of the other that 'is' and nothing can destroy what truly is. It is precisely within the relationship of love that the assurance is given of something that resists, that abides, even if all else passes away."*[46]

The *horizons of our age of violence* are thus eclipsed, and indeed upstaged, by love.

I must pause here to address two points. Firstly, my account of Marcel's philosophy thus far might appear somewhat romantic. That is, it might appear that philosophical critique has given way to sycophantism. Secondly, we must address the elephant in the room. Marcel is not simply an existentialist: Marcel is a Christian existentialist[47].

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[46] Sam Keen, *"The Development of the Idea of Being in Marcel's Thought"* in *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Lewis Edwin Hahn, (Open Court Publishing Company: La Salle, Illinois, 1984) p. 109.
[47] The title 'Christian existentialist' was given to Marcel by Sartre.

To the first point I must offer the words of Donald MacKinnon[48], student of Marcel's and scholar in his own right.

> *A man who writes as M. Marcel does is vulnerable in many places: he is admittedly diffuse in style, and he would admit the reality of his own personal prejudices. But as we follow the arguments of his book, our many differences with him are subdued by his own demanding honesty of mind.*[49]

In short, Marcel's work does not solve the world's problems: he does not offer up neatly wrapped solutions for mass consumption. Rather, Marcel presents us with a passionate and convincing way of thinking that prefers engagement to nihilism. Marcel does not aim to serve up the truth; he instead takes issue with man's "illusion and confusion"[50]. It is precisely

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[48] It would be unfair to MacKinnon, from whom I take many of my cues, to omit a characterization of Marcel's work that differs from my own. MacKinnon holds that Marcel writes violently (Introduction to *Man Against Mass Society*, 1967, p. viii). I disagree. Marcel's writing does not employ the same brute force as his contemporaries. Marcel writes dramatically and politically, but not violently. In writing of violence he does not write violently.

[49] Donald MacKinnon, "*Introduction*" in Man *Against Mass Society*, (Gateway Edition: Chicago, 1967) p. viii.

[50] Donald MacKinnon, "*Introduction*" in Man *Against Mass Society*, (Gateway Edition: Chicago, 1967) p. ix

this humility that separates Marcel from the pack, not because he has the answer but because he asks the question.

Addressing the second point: when Marcel speaks of love as infinite he does not suggest that the truest of lovers will evade death. Rather, Marcel is pointing at a specific love that is not mere "carnal appetite"[51]: Marcel is not speaking of *Eros*, but of *agape*. Thus the influence of Christianity steers Marcel in a much different existential path from that taken by someone like Sartre.

Marcel is "*deeply convinced that there is and there must be a hidden cooperation between philosophy and religion*[52]". This conviction is most evident in Marcel's notion of community. Marcel states:

> *I believe that no man, however enlightened and holy he is, can ever really arrive until the others, all others, have started out to follow him. This is a great*

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51 Marcel, Gabriel. *Man Against Mass Society*, trans C. S. Fraser, (Gateway Edition: Chicago, 1967) p. 10.
52 Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, trans. Stephen Jolin and Peter McCormick, (Northwest University Press: Evanston, 1973) p. 15.

*truth, and applies to philosophy as well as religion…*[53]

The world is broken in essence, but Marcel is unwilling, and unable, to extend this brokenness to the whole of human nature. The friction between innate brokenness and necessary community is, as I see it, a function of Marcel's Christianity. Marcel struggles against the nihilism and ego of his secular and atheistic counterparts who decry the broken man. Conversely, Marcel holds that the community must be placed above the individual. Furthermore, the individual can only *be* within the context community. Thus, love is preferred to strife as strife designates the warrior as something outside of society: as a mere function: as Christ crucified, left broken, on the cross.

Brokenness is the tie that binds Marcel the Christian to Marcel the philosopher, as brokenness is the dynamic force central to Christian Trinitarianism[54] and triangular dialectic[55]. It is the emptiness of the Holy

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[53] Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having an Existential Diary*, trans. Katherine Farrer, (Harper & Row: New York, 1965) p. 199-200.
[54] The Christian Trinitarianism of Marcel's Roman Catholicism.

Spirit that allows for the relation of God the Father to the Son of God: the mediating force of the present absent, the Holy Spirit, is the joint between the infinite and the finite.

Philosophically, brokenness is a feature of Marcel's Neo-Platonism: bestowed on Marcel by Bergson. Brokenness becomes the ground and the possibility for Marcel's philosophical trinity: incarnation, transcendence and being; where being, specifically the feature of being that is participation, mediates the relationship between body and transcendence.

Brokenness, therefore, is not mended by Marcel, as brokenness is the condition of the possibility of our transcendence. We do not heal the broken world but transcend it through the selfless, participatory, infinite, embodied act of love.

Love is the human relationship that is grounded, and yet at the same time transcends. It is love that starts us on the path towards faith and

[55] The triangular dialectic of Marcel's Neo-Platonism.

hope. We might consider the path as such: loving binds us to another through fidelity. We hold fidelity to one another in the face of the unknown, and thus promise to be "responsible"[56] to, and for, the other. Loving nurtures hope, as "hope is inseparable from love" [57]. And now *these three remain: faith, hope and love*[58] in the face of brokenness. It is through love, or more correctly loving, that Marcel is able to tackle the final threshold of brokenness: death.

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[56] Sam Keen, *Gabriel Marcel*, (John Knox Press: Richmond, Virginia, 1967) p. 35.
Keen specifically points to fidelity as an active process and not mere constancy or tenacity.
[57] Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, trans. Stephen Jolin and Peter McCormick, (Northwest University Press: Evanston, 1973) p. 43.
[58] I Corinthians 13:13

# Chapter 3
# Gaudium Essendi

*I was very pleased with the news from you and Mrs. MacKinnon. I can assure that the memories of the weeks I spent with you at Aberdeen remain with me, fully intact.*

*As for me, as you will already have noted at the beginning of this letter, I am scarcely able to read anymore, and I walk with great difficulty, which makes me terribly dependent. A sister of my wife, the only one who is still of this world, has been sharing my life for the past two years. She is also disabled, but her presence is nevertheless beneficial to me because everyday she reads to me in a loud voice.*

*Thank you again, dear friend. I send you my most affectionate regards.*

*G.M.*

*Gabriel Marcel,*

*Response to Donald MacKinnon*

The archetype of the *solitary philosopher* is introduced through the *cave analogy* in Plato's *Republic*. This model, or *philosophical persona*[59], has endured as an ethical prescription of what a philosopher should aspire to be: inquisitive, persistent, tortured, and alone. The solitary philosopher transcends bondage, shadows, and illusion to arrive at the light of knowledge. It is however, in her attempt to share this knowledge with her subterranean counterparts that the philosopher is most brutally cast apart from the tribe. In their ignorance and fear the cave dwellers silence the philosopher through brutal death, preferring instead a life of comfortable darkness.

The characters in Marcel's dramatic works, by contrast, often begin in solitude and conclude in communion. The character Christiane, in *Le Monde Casser*, is separated from those closest to her because of her notion that the world is a *heart that has stopped beating*. Like the solitary philosopher, she is disconnected from her own counterparts, a symptom

[59] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* , trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson, ( Columbia University Press: New York, 1994) p. 61.

of her insight into the broken world[60]. Although her knowledge of brokenness is the outcome of her existential reflection, Christiane comes to understand the importance of relationships and the reaffirmation of love and fidelity. Christiane begins solitary, gains knowledge of the fracture and sets about to connect. She rejects existential angst in favor of existential knowledge: the knowledge of *gaudium essendi*[61]: the joy of existing. It is in the light of joy, of hope, of love, that Marcel insists that we approach the terminal threshold.

It is a unique fate that man, and man alone, has knowledge of his impending death. Marcel offers this point quite coarsely in *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*:

> *When I try to become aware of my situation as an individual being, and when I consider this situation in relation to what I call my future, I notice that the only indubitable proposition seems to be I will die. But I am*

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60 Conversely, Plato's solitary philosopher is separated from his group because of his knowledge of unity.

61 Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, trans. Stephen Jolin and Peter McCormick, (Northwest University Press: Evanston, 1973), p. 42.

*completely unable to determine the spatial and temporal conditions of my death. In this perspective my situation resembles the situation of a condemned criminal who is locked away in prison with movable walls that are closing in by the minute.*[62]

With this said, Marcel contends that we are not in actuality prisoners. The despair and hopelessness that we adopt concerning our mortality is a function of our free will: "... when I reflect on the fact that the idea of my future death tends to paralyze my activity, I come to recognize that this is possible only with the cooperation of my freedom."[63] We have freely chosen to become captives, not captives of finite nature, but captives of a functional life that does not permit a true investigation into what death is.

*Our situation, then, is this: we ought not even to say, as the Stoics said, that even at the very worst there remains for us a possibility of suicide, as a happy way out. That is no longer a true statement of the case. A man to-day can be put in a situation in which he will*

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[62] Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, trans. Stephen Jolin and Peter McCormick, (Northwest University Press: Evanston, 1973) p. 42.
[63] Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, trans. Stephen Jolin and Peter McCormick, (Northwest University Press: Evanston, 1973) p. 42-43.

> *no longer want to kill himself; in which suicide will appear to him as an illicit or unfair way out; in which he will think of himself as under an obligation not merely to suffer, but to wish for, the punishment appropriate to crimes which he will impute to himself without having committed them*[64].

We are willing to live out a fate worse than death because we have taken up a burlesque of what it is to die. In this way, our choice to live in fear of death leads us to a *life for death*: we live each moment so wrapped up in fear of our final moment that we do not truly live at all. In running from our mortality we are running towards nihilism and all the dangers of functionalism that Marcel has warned us of previously. Death is not a force to hide from, death itself is easily overcome by living. Death is to be overcome by *gaudium essendi*. Sam Keen states:

> *Marcel's ontology does not move toward any systematic understanding of being but rather among*

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[64] Gabriel Marcel, *Man Against Mass Society*, trans. G. S. Fraser (Gateway Edition: Chicago, 1967) p. 19.

*those experiences that are immanent assurances of*
*the presence of being: love, fidelity, faith, and hope.*[65]

Furthermore, the notion that death serves as an antagonist to life is false. The true opposite of life is functional existence: the type of existence that obliges one to suffer: this life, according to both Marcel and Agamben, is epitomized by life within the walls of the concentration camp.

Death, then, must be understood as the conclusion of life. In this shared relationship life and death run together and are very much a part of one another. Thus choosing the activity of life implies the activity of death, where dying is not passive, but an active crossing over: life's final action.

In this way, when Marcelian commentator Seymour Cain states: "absolute fidelity to a being transcends and conquers death"[66], he is almost correct.

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[65] Sam Keen, "*The Development of the Idea of Being in Marcel's Thought*" in *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Lewis Edwin Hahn, (Open Court Publishing Company: La Salle, Illinois, 1984) p. 117

[66] Seymour Cain, Gabriel Marcel, (Regnery/Gateway Inc.: South Bend, Indiana, 1963) p. 86.

In truth: absolute fidelity to being a being transcends and conquers death.

The realm of brokenness is the finite realm of our human-being. In human being and human doing we transcend the brokenness that is egocentricity and violence. Marcel urges us to reflect, to act and to love thereby affirming our existential character. In death we lose the feature of embodiment, but the body must perish so that the existential might transcend.

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