The Meta Theater of Marcel

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"The certainty of the existence of a God who would give meaning to life has a far greater attraction than the knowledge that without him one could do evil without being punished. The choice between these alternatives would not be difficult. But there is no choice, and that is where the bitterness begins.

THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS

Our age has been called "the Age of Anxiety": a time of despair sprung from the recognition that man is surrounded by areas of impenetrable darkness, that he doubts his true nature and purpose, and that no one provides him with ready-made rules of conduct.

The breakdown in our values is complex. For at least three centuries Western man has been molding his inner and outer worlds with the aid of the machine and even in the image of the machine. Because of his preoccupation with the conquest of nature, man has increasingly lost sight of the human, the cosmic and the divine. Science has undermined man himself and all but eliminated from every department of life essential concepts of purpose and value. Man sees man as thing not person. The decline of faith in God and man could be said to have begun with the Enlightenment, with the belief that man could attain here on earth a kind of state of perfection. This was weakened by Darwin and Freud. Faith in man blew up in the trenches of World War I and was completely consumed in the atrocities of World War II. God seemed too weak and improbable—man too irrational and evil.

Advances in technology have helped to dehumanize and depersonalize modern man. In a society that requires of man only that he perform competently his own social function, man becomes identified with this function. The Mass Man, frustrated by lack of meaning in life is committed to nothing but comfort, security and pleasure. This imposed conformity, which fragments the personal and collectivizes the masses, annihilates all spiritual values.

The loss of a sense of value has caused a crisis of ethics. Our society believes in the possibility of discovering truth in the area of scientific investigation but it does not seem to believe in the possibility of discovering truth in the area of ethics or aesthetics. The outlook has developed and has become pervasive in our society, that judgments of value cannot be true or false, not even probably true or probably false. We can have our preference, our likes and dislikes, our personal opinions but that is all. There is no such thing as a value judgment. When two people argue about a value judgment, they are really only disagreeing about the facts of the matter. When someone says that a certain kind of action is wrong, he is only saying that the majority do not approve or that he himself does not like it. He is stating a fact and not making a judgment on what is "good." This view of value judgments does away with moral discussion by turning it into sociol-

ogy or some other social science.[1] True, this view is probably held unconsciously by most, but we can easily see the variations in moral standards on issues like cheating, drugs, pre-marital sex, stealing and many others.

How then can modern man, living in a society that is rootless and rudderless, himself disoriented and interiorly disorganized break out of the drift toward standardized mass society? Gabriel Marcel answers:

> "It can never be too strongly emphasized that the crisis which Western man is undergoing today is a metaphysical one; there is probably no more dangerous illusion than that of imagining that some adjustment of social or institutional conditions could suffice of itself to appease a contemporary sense of disquiet which rises, in fact, from the very depths of man's being."[2]

Marcel goes on to point out that to accept man as the measure of all things can only lead to moral relativism and a degraded humanism. Any values severed from their transcendental source become unreal and unrealizable. To deny the transcendental dimensions in man results in blighting man's highest aspirations. Without the transcendent, man is no longer man; he is man against man and man in bondage to man.

In this paper I would like to examine Marcel's thesis and see how these philosophical trends are reflected in the drama of Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet and Tennessee Williams. Against this background of protest and paradox I would offer the drama of Gabriel Marcel's paraodxical expression of mystery as an answer to their protest.

The modern drama rides on the dark fury of Neitzsche and his demands for a radical transformation of man's spiritual life.

> "Have you ever heard of the madman who on a bright morning lighted a lantern and ran to the marketplace calling out unceasingly; 'I seek God! I seek God!' And as there were many people standing about who did not believe in God, he caused a great deal of amusement. Why! Is he lost? said one. Has he strayed away like a child? said another. Or does he keep himself hidden? Is he afraid of us? Has he taken a sea voyage? Has he emigrated?—the people cried out laughingly, all in a hubbub. The insane man jumped into their midst and transfixed them with his glances. 'Where is God gone?' he called out. 'I mean to tell you! We have killed him,—you and I! We are all his murderers! But how have we done it? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the

> sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What did we do when we loosened this earth from its sun? Whither does it now move? Whither do we move? Away from all suns? Do we dash on unceasingly? Backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an above and a below? Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? Does not empty space breathe a promise? Has it not become colder? Does not night come on continually, darker and darker? Shall we not have to light lanterns in the morning? Do we not hear the noise of the grave diggers who are burying God? Do we not smell the divine putrification?—for even Gods putrify! God is dead! God remains dead! And we, how shall we console ourselves, the most murderous of all murderers? The holiest and the mightiest that the world has hitherto possessed, has bled to death under our knife,—who will wipe the blood from us? With what water could we cleanse ourselves? What lustrums, what sacred games shall we have to devise? Is not the magnitude of this deed too great for us? Shall we not ourselves have to become Gods, merely to seem worthy of it? There never was a greater event,—and on account of it, all who are born after us belong to a higher mystery than any history hitherto!"[2]

When Neitzsche proclaimed the Death of God he also signed the death certificate for all traditional values. Man must now create new values by becoming God. Confronted with this metaphysical absurdity, the modern dramatist rejects God, Church, community and family. Morality, conventions and rules of any kind have no claims against the rights of the individual.

These dramatists are essentially metaphysical rebels whose art is the expression of a spiritual condition. Their discontent extends to the very roots of existence where communication is impossible, encrustration is inevitable, and identity is an illusion. They rage against existence, seem ashamed of being human, and are revolted by the body itself. The anti-heroes of their drama cannot act; partly because of a growing paralysis and partly because of external forces. The central figure is sometimes very old but usually just inert or unwilling to face a problem.

Many of the plays have the theme of time and memory which seems to indicate a hatred for the present and a fear of the future which has caused a retreat into the past. Whether the anti-hero be a tramp, a criminal, an old man or a young man, all are prisoners confined in body and spirit and deteriorating in this confinement. A claustrophobic atmosphere pervades and oppresses us.

Beckett and Ionesco exaggerate selected aspects of everyday life, in the technique of paradox, to demonstrate the pointlessness of reality. They present the audience with situations strongly in conflict with norms for the reasonable in order to make all seem senseless and absurd. Genet reveals in making illusion indistinguishable from reality. He completely inverts the ethics of good and evil. Williams double theme of sexual indulgence and punishment through an overpowering sense of guilt provides the paradoxical and he too employs illusion and a glamorization of decay.

Samuel Beckett reflects stark pessimism about human affairs. His drama doesn't indicate values or acceptance of life. Beckett's philosophy seems to be based on the paradox that thought is useless. His men live in a world they did not make and that resists their efforts to make sense of it. *Waiting for Godot* unites the existential refusal, the search for and despair of religious salvation with the merciless accusation of force or forces controlling man's actions.

ESTRAGON: Suppose we repented.
VLADIMIR: Repented what?
ESTRAGON: Oh . . . (He reflects) We wouldn't have to go into the details.
VLADIMIR: Our being born?[4]

And after a rather disjointed conversation about the Evangelists:

VLADIMIR: But one of the four says that one of the two was saved.
ESTRAGON: Well? They don't agree and that's all there is to it.
VLADIMIR: But all four were there. And only one speaks of a thief being saved. Why believe him rather than the others?
ESTRAGON: Who believes him?
VLADIMIR: Everybody. It's the only version they know.
ESTRAGON: People are bloody ignorant apes.[5]

Beckett seems to imply that the ultimate truth upon which we base our conduct is based on flimsy evidence which is often contradictory. If the ultimate is meaningless then so is the immediate. This seems to be the message of *Waiting for Godot*. It doesn't tell a story, it explores a static situation. We are immersed in the ebb and flow of uncertainty. Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes. On a country road, two old tramps Vladimir and Estragon are waiting by a tree. At the end of Act I, they are informed that Mr. Godot, with whom they thought they had an appointment, cannot come, but that he will surely come tomorrow. Act II repeats the same pattern but the tree

now has five leaves which could mean the passage of time. The same boy arrives, claims he has never been there before and gives the same message. Act I ends with the following dialogue:

ESTRAGON: Well, shall we go?
VLADIMIR: Yes, let's go. (They do not move)[6]

Act II ends with the same dialogue, but spoken in the reverse order by the characters.

Whether Godot is meant to suggest the intervention of a supernatural agency or whether he is some other human being who will somehow make things better is of secondary importance. Beckett himself claims that he doesn't know what he means by Godot. The subject of the play is not really Godot but waiting. Throughout our lives we are always waiting for something; an event, a thing, a person. In the act of waiting we experience the flow of time. We are all subject to the change time brings. Time causes us to face the problem of being. But it is senseless to face the problem because all is absurd.

ESTRAGON: In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.
VLADIMIR: You're right we're inexhaustible.
ESTRAGON: It's so we won't think.
VLADIMIR: We have that excuse.
ESTRAGON: It's so we won't hear.
VLADIMIR: We have our reasons.[7]
POZZO: (Suddenly furious) Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (Calmer) They gave birth astride of a grave, the light gleams for an instant, then it's night once more.[8]

In the play, *Endgame*, time, as a succession of meaningless events which merge to create monotony, seems to call attention to the illusion that the material world is rational. Here we see humanity suffering and isolated. Again no one comes and no one goes, all is nothing. The play takes place in a bare room with two small windows. The four characters are all cripples. Hamm cannot rise from his chair. His servant, Clov, is unable to sit down. In two ash-cans that stand by the wall are Hamm's legless parents, Nagg and Nell. The world outside

is dead. The characters inside the room are the only survivors of some great catastrophe. The plot is a playing out of human existence in the face of forces which control the universe but cannot be comprehended. The sameness of human beings and their actions, the vanity of human ambition, and the uselessness of thought all add up to the agonizing endurance of humanity.

HAMM: Have you not had enough?
CLOV: Yes! (Pause) Of what?
HAMM: Of this . . . this . . . thing.
CLOV: I always had. (Pause) Not you?
HAMM: (gloomily) Then there's no reason for it to change?
CLOV: It may end. (Pause) All life long the same questions, the same answers.[9]

* * *

HAMM: Nature has forgotten us.
CLOV: There's no more nature.
HAMM: No more nature! You exaggerate.
CLOV: In the vacinity.
HAMM: But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!
CLOV: Then she hasn't forgotten us.
HAMM: But you say there is none.
CLOV: (Sadly) No one that ever lived ever thought so crooked as we.
HAMM: We do what we can.
CLOV: We shouldn't.[10]

* * *

HAMM: Go and see if she is dead. (Clov goes to the bins, raises the lid of Nell's, stoops, looks into it. Pauses)
CLOV: Looks like it. (He closes the bin, straightens up.)
HAMM: And Nagg? (Clov raises the lid of Nagg's bin, stoops, looks into it. Pauses)
CLOV: Doesn't look like it. (He closes the bin, straightens up)
HAMM: What's he doing? (Opens the bin again.)
CLOV: He's crying. (Closes bin.)
HAMM: Then he's living. (Pause) Did you ever have an instant of happiness?
CLOV: Not to my knowledge.[11]

* * *

HAMM: . . . And now? (Pause) Moments for nothing, now as always, time was never and time is over, reckoning closed the story ended. . . .[12]

The main themes of the plays of Eugene Ionesco are the loneliness and isolation of the individual, his difficulty in communication with

the other, his subjection to degrading outside powers, sexuality and the ensuing feelings of guilt, the anxieties arising from the uncertainty of one's own identity and the certainty of death. Ionesco believes that society is one of the barriers between human beings and his plays are of social protest.

> "No society has been able to banish human sadness, no political system can deliver us from the pain of living, from our fear of death, our thirst for the absolute: it is the human condition that directs the social condition not *vice versa*."[13]

The Chairs shows some of these themes and the philosophy which underlies all of Ionesco's plays. In a circular tower on an island live two old people, a man and his wife, aged ninety-five and ninety-four. The couple is expecting the visit of a crowd of distinguished people who have been invited to listen to a message that, at the end of his life, the old man wants to pass on to posterity. Since the message is to be the fruit of a long lifetime's experience and the old man is not an orator, he has hired a professional. The guests arrive. They are neither seen nor heard. The old couple keeps filling the state with chairs. They pass among the guests pouring forth torrents of polite conversation. The crowd (chairs) becomes more and more dense. Finally the Emperor arrives. The scene is set for the arrival of the orator. Satisfied that his message will be delivered, the old man, followed by his wife, jumps to his death in the sea. The orator faces the crowd of chairs and makes them understand with gestures that he is a deaf mute. Then in an effort to make himself understood:

> ORATOR: He, mme, mm, mm, Ju, gou, hou, Heu, heu, gu gou guene. (He turns and writes on a blackboard.)
>
> ANGELFOOD
>
> NNAA NNM NWNWNW V[14]

The play certainly contains the themes of incommunicability and the futility and failure of human existence, made bearable by self-delusion. It satirizes the emptiness of polite conversation. But there is more. Ionesco wrote the following to the director of the first performance.

> "The subject of the play is not the message, nor the failures of life nor the moral disaster of the old couple, but the chairs themselves; that is to say, the absence of people, the absence of the emperor, the absence of God, the absence of matter, the unreality of the world, metaphysical emptiness. The theme of the play is nothingness . . ."[15]

While the above playwrights may be said to belong to the Theatre of the Absurd, the next, Jean Genet, is classified as belonging to the Theater of Cruelty. He uses some of the same techniques and has much in common with the Absurdists. Genet operates with the paradox that there is no reality within society. Anyone who acts within the structure of society is literally unreal or non-existent. There is more reality, more possibility of achieving the dignity of an existence, outside society where primitive instincts are uncontaminated by the artificiality of civilization. Genet's technique in his plays is illusion. In his plays nothing is ever what it appears at first glance. Each apparent reality is revealed as an illusion. The first illusion may also be uncovered as an illusion. This device can again lead to absurdity and nothingness. These illusions are like a man caught in a hall of mirrors. He loses sight of the real.

In *The Maids*, the opening scene has a maid dressing a great lady, suddenly a bell rings and the great lady is revealed as another maid. Very early in the *Balcony*, the actors are revealed as not being what their costumes would indicate them to be, a bishop, judge and a general. These characters are revealed as individuals who need fantasy to feel real. Later they pretend fantasy to convince the populace that the revolution has not been a success and in so doing become convinced that they really are what they pretend to be. The effect is to make the characters seem like a reflection in a mirror or some type of dream-world. In fact the stage directions for *Deathwatch* indicate that the action is to unfold as in a dream. The actors are to use heavy movements or unexplainably quick ones. If they can the actors are directed to deaden the timbre of their voices.

Deathwatch will illustrate Genet's search for something absolute in an inverted system of values where evil is the greatest good. In dealing with the dream world of the outcast of society, he explores the human condition, the alienation of man, his solitude, and his futile search for meaning and treality.

The theme of *Deathwatch* is the hierarchy of crime. (This really makes this play more like Genet's earlier prose than his later plays).

The highest rank in this inverted society goes to a negro named Snowball who has murdered for his own gain. He is never seen but is spoken of with reverence by the other three convicts. Green Eyes is a murderer too, but he has killed in a fit of anger and so is not on a par with Snowball. Lefranc a thief, and Maurice a juvenile delinquent, are

the other occupants of the cell. The play turns on the relationship among the three prisoners. Green Eyes is a hero in the eyes of the other two. When he tells how he committed the murder in a fury that he could not help, Maurice is disappointed in his hero. Lefranc, to show that he is really a hardened criminal, (Maurice had taunted him that he was not.) strangles the boy. Green Eyes still refuses to regard Lefranc as an authentic killer. The play ends with Lefranc's realization that he is alone.

LEFRANC: I wanted to become what you were . . .

GREEN EYES: What we are in spite of ourselves. And what I wanted to destroy by dancing.[16]

* * *

LEFRANC: I did what I could, out of love of misfortune.

GREEN EYES: You don't know the first thing about misfortune if you think you can choose it. I didn't want mine. It chose me. It fell right smack on my puss, and I tried everything to shake it off. I struggled, I boxed, I danced, I even sang, and funny as it may seem, I refused it at first. It was only when I saw that everything was irremediable that I calmed down. I've only just barely accepted it. It had to be total.

LEFRANC: It's thanks to me . . .

GREEN EYES: Who the hell cares! It's only now that I'm settled down completely in misfortune and making it my heaven. And you, you cheat, to get there . . .

LEFRANC: I'm stronger than you. My misfortune comes from something deeper. It comes from myself.

Green Eyes will not argue the point but calls the guards. Then Lefranc says, "I really am all alone!"[17]

Lefranc does not belong to the group. He has to will himself into being. Yet when he overcomes himself to commit the act that will make him Green Eyes' equal, he is rejected. He is like the man caught in the hall of mirrors, lost among his own reflections. All of his efforts to reach the world of acceptance and understanding are futile.

The last of the four pessimistic playwrights we will look at is Tennessee Williams. His is a typically American pessimism, showing a primitive driving force concomitant to life where materialism is master. In Williams the spiritual is rejected and nothing remains but animal motivation, the instinctive blind groping to follow the system and take what life offers even in the face of futility.

In *The Night of the Iguana*, the iguana is freed but the people cannot be freed of their bonds. They seem to be controlled by forces out-

side the control of the individual or society. Illusion is a technique used by Williams. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche is a victim of an illusion so carefully nursed and then so brutally destroyed that she is unable to face the truth and collapses mentally. *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* is a bitter play of emotions where all repressions are swept aside and only animal ferocity of an individual's loneliness remains. Again illusions are stripped away and Brick must recognize his inability to face responsibility to himself and to others.

Williams uses an existential technique in *The Glass Menagerie*. The Wingfield's live in a world of dreams. For one or another reason they have retreated from the world of the real. Brick lives in the dream world of the bottle and former days of glory as a football hero. Blanche clings to a dead aristocracy; Shannon to his clerical collar. He also employs a paradox: the double theme of sexual indulgence and punishment through an overpowering sense of guilt. The theme of loneliness pervades all these plays.

In one sense all of these plays of Williams represent a tragedy of society and not of the individual. Society does not give these characters a chance to save themselves. Spiritual values are lacking for any kind of redemption. On the other hand the characters seem to be lost before the action begins, they are all misfits of some kind. The rejected, the fugitive and the moral paralytic people are his drama. Yet Williams does not assign the responsibility for savage events that take place. Evil is explicitly present but why his characters should be thought to be helpless or victimized by some source of infection eludes us.

We have made man the cool and calmly detached observer of a valueless universe rather than the dramatic participant in a meaningful cosmos. We have seen the distorted picture of man that we obtain when we do this. Can we now look at man as dramatic participant and meaningful? We will need metaphysical moorings and hope to do this. In a metaphysical void, man is adrift in a quiescent cynicism. Gabriel Marcel's paradoxical expression of mystery can offer us both. Starting with the same material of existence and using metaphysics as an anchor, and hope as a guide, Marcel can lead us to a meaningful and valuable cosmos. We have spoken of value on two different levels. We have seen that lack of value on the ethical level leads to a notion of value on the metaphysical level. This could lead us to the question if one is really possible without the other.

We could call Marcel's a Drama of Hope. He uses drama as a probe

for a way out of dilemmas, but does not offer a synthesis. (Many themes of his plays were later developed in his philosophy). His drama approaches the problem of fragmented human relationships at the root of communion between individuals. Taking the approach that we cannot effectively divorce the self from that in which it participates, since it is only the participation which allows there to be a self, Marcel uses a dialectic of self-discovery. Marcel sees men as hiding behind masks while locked in a struggle for identity and authentic self-knowledge. By stripping off successive layers of mask the person reveals himself. Since only problems have solutions, and the truth about human life is not a problem but a mystery,[18] the meaning which breaks out at the end of his plays is simply a profound awareness of the desperate ambiguity of the human soul.

The central theme in most of his plays is that of a living relationship seen at work in a particular situation. In the context of the living relationship there will be, by one or more of the characters, an awakening of an awareness of contradiction, its acceptance, and finally its transcendence.[19] Because of the involved plot and subplots of Marcel's plays, I will discuss only one, but this will, I think, show how the characters interact with one another.

The main character in *A Man of God*, is Claude Lemoyne, a Calvinist minister. His routine life is suddenly threatened by a message from a dying man. This man, Michel Sandier, is the real father of the minister's daughter, Osmonde. Shortly after their marriage Claude's wife, Edmee, had admitted her adultery to Claude and begged his forgiveness. Her confession had come at a time that he was having a severe trial of faith. Somehow he had found the strength to forgive her and somehow this restored his faith. All of this had been forgotten and twenty years have passed. But now what is Claude to do? Doesn't Christian love and human kindness demand that he accede to the wish of a dying man to see his daughter?

But Edmee is horrified. She asks how he could ever contemplate such a thing. She tells him that any normal man would react with revulsion. Claude is forced to face himself. Why had he forgiven his wife? Was she a kind of a pawn used in a game between his ego and his God?

> EDMEE: I'm sick of your tolerance, I'm sick of your broadmindedness. It nauseates me. What do you expect me to do with all this generosity that cost you nothing?

CLAUDE: Nothing, when I forgave you?
EDMEE: Yes, you forgave me, but it wasn't because you loved me that you forgave me, what was your forgiveness for? What do you want me to do with it? What good is it to me? (She bursts into tears)[20]

Ironically Sandier's visit to the home has more of an effect on Edmee. She is forced to ask herself if she was really remorseful or did she act out of cowardice when she asked for Claude's forgiveness. Did she look for security rather than risk an irregular life? In a discussion after Michel leaves Edmee tries to throw the blame for apparent cowardice onto Claude.

CLAUDE: A scandal for none but you in the end.
EDMEE: That's not what you really think. I helped you by staying on, helped you. Not only that, but I gave you a marvellous opportunity.
CLAUDE: What are you talking about?
EDMEE: An opportunity of exercising your gifts as an evangelist, my dear, of saving the soul of a poor sinner.
CLAUDE: (He has risen to his feet, livid.) Be silent!
EDMEE: Ah! I've made you see at last, have I?
CLAUDE: Be silent, you're destroying me![21]

Claude, for whatever the ultimate truth about him, is a man for whom it is supremely important to be counted on the side of what is right. The encounter with Osmonde then completes his destruction. Osmonde is tempted to a liaison with a married man. She has gone to her father to appeal for his aid against the surveillance of her mother, from whom she is increasingly estranged. The scene that follows is bitter and the truth of her parentage is revealed. Osmonde reacts with sympathy for him, thinking that he has just discovered it himself. He allows her to be confirmed in the mistake.

OSMONDE: . . . Or else you might have let her stay on, because you always think people can be saved in spite of themselves. Yes, who knows, you might have forgiven her and one would always have wondered whether . . . I'm glad it didn't happen aren't you, Father. It didn't happen that way, did it?
CLAUDE: (Speaking with an effort.) No, Osmonde, not that way.
OSMONDE: That's all right then, because if I thought you'd been acting a part all these years, it would spoil everything, even your love for me.[22]

All seems to collapse rapidly now. He tells his mother that his vocation now seems to him to be a role that he assumed because his parents

expected him to. Osmonde discovers her father's lie and leaves. Claude's world now seems to lie in ruins around him. His daughter is gone, his wife seems to hate him, his faith is shaken, his manhood in question, his past a fake, and his whole life like some cruel joke. But he has begun to know himself. He has accepted himself. He tells Edmee that he is not afraid to be judged. "I'm not . . . to be known as one is . . . or else to sleep."

Just before the end of act four a servant of some parishioners enters with flowers for the pastor and his wife. She speaks of their kindnesses. Here we see the intrusion of the public image for which Claude has desiccated his life but may also see here a faint glimmer of hope.

> EDMEE: There you are. . . . Those are the people we shall have to live for now.
>
> CLAUDE: (Sunk in his thoughts) To be known as one is . . .[23]

In this play we see persons communicating or conflicting with one another. All are linked together but they can fail tragically in the light of intersubjectivity. Man is seen in his human condition, not as characters adding up to some theory on man's condition. Man is seen as being capable of being interpreted but that failing man must be held in awe. Marcel had this to say about the function of the dramatist:

> "His task is to place himself at the very heart of human reality, in all its poignancy and intimacy. He must, it seems to me, link himself magnetically to the strand of our secret most agonies and our most secret hopes; and the accent with which expresses feelings we hardly dare admit even to ourselves, must be strong enough and *magical* enough to transfigure our interior landscape and illuminate it in a flash with a light that seems to come from beyond.[24]
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> It seems to me today that the key-note of my dramatic works is ethical rather than religious. In the end it is "good-will" in the Gospel rather than the Kantian sense which is held up for admiration; the will to remain faithful to an interior light, which is too often intercepted by a coalition of powerful forces born of our own vanity.[25]

In *Homo Viator*, Marcel discusses the position of the absurdist with respect to a code of ethics. The absurdist has denied any type of order and in so doing has offered a type of apologetic in which the total absence of value has become the supreme valor. The absurdist has confused the essential conditions of value. Courage and sincerity

become true values when they are in conjunction with other constituted values. If one detaches them artificially they are not values. If I choose to live in a bleak and depressing manner and to prove that I can do this, what is the value of this? It would seem that the desire is just to please the individual. In a world with meaning, transcendent to personal meaning, an individual has no need to establish himself as the central focus of values.

Man is a witness to the being in which he participates and within which his knowledge and freedom are exercised. A witness is neither a detached spectator nor an impossible self-creator of his situation. Contemporary man is no longer rooted in being. There has been a deliberate refusal to accept man's natural ordination to the ontological. The human person is treated as one more object among others and is presented as a problem to be solved by technical methods alone. But man is both a thing and more than a thing, for he can undertake an evaluation of his own life. This requires both an act of reflection and a moral judgment. When we inquire about the nature of him who asks these questions we are led to the concept Marcel calls mystery. In the area of mystery the inquirer cannot cut himself off from the data. The evidence has some bearing on the life of the individual and we are beyond problem. In the area of mystery the intellect acts in a new way in search of being. It is in this area that man sees himself as participating in being in a creature/Creator relationship. For Marcel, transcendence is a deepening of the implications of transcendence rather than a break with experience.

The condition of meaninglessness becomes for Marcel the condition for the possibility of meaningfulness.

FOOTNOTES

[1] The biggest influence in contemporary ethics in the United States has been from the school of language analysis. Employing the underlying assumption that all that can be known can be known by way of science they deny validity to all statements which are not empirically verifiable. Among some of the most influencial of these philosophers are G. E. Moore, A. J. Ayer, C. L. Stevenson, and R. M. Hare. They ultimately reduce ethics to emotions or feelings and psychology or sociology.

[2] Gabriel Marcel. *Man Against Mass Society.* (Chicago: Regnery, 1952) p. 29.

[3] Frederick Nietzsche. *Joyful Wisdom.* Cited by Gabriel Marcel, *Problematic Man* (New York: Herder and Herder. 1967) pp. 29-30.

[4] Samuel Beckett. *Waiting for Godot* (London: Faber and Faber. 1965) p. 11.

[5] *Ibid.* p. 13.

[6] *Ibid.* p. 54.

[7] *Ibid.* p. 62.
[8] *Ibid.* p. 89.
[9] Samuel Beckett. "Endgame". *The Modern Theater,* ed. Robert Corrigan (New York: Macmillan Company, 1964) p. 860.
[10] *Ibid.* p. 861.
[11] *Ibid,* p. 871.
[12] *Ibid.* p. 875.
[13] Eugene Ionesco. "The Playwright's Role". *The Observer.* June 29, 1958.
[14] Eugene Ionesco. "The Chairs". *The Modern Theater.* ed. Robert Corrigan. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1964). p. 854
[15] Martin Esslin. *The Theater of the Absurd* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1962) pp. 113-114.
[16] Jean Genet. "Deathwatch". *The Modern Theater.* ed. Robert Corrigan (New York: Macmillan Company, 1964) p. 825.
[17] *Ibid.* p. 825.
[18] Marcel points up the contrast between the restricted sphere of objects and the whole realm of being. Objects belong to the area of problem; these can be inventoried, characterized and manipulated. Problems are open to solutions. Mystery is the area of being in its generality; here the questioner enters the study and the data is no longer objective. Mystery is to be equated with revealed truth not the unknowable. Mystery can be operated on by the intellect but in a different mode from that of handling a problem. The distinction between problem and mystery is also a distinction between scientific and philosophical knowledge.
[19] If the apparent contradiction turns out to be illusory, we have a simple paradox. If it turns out to be genuine we have absurdity. If the apparent contradiction turns out to be real, but the affimation containing it is accepted with the assurance that the contradiction can be resolved on a higher level, we have mystery, and the antinomy is said to be transcended.
[20] Gabriel Marcel. *Three Plays* (New York: Hill and Ward, 1965) p. 59.
[21] *Ibid.* p. 79.
[22] *Ibid.* p. 93.
[23] *Ibid.* p. 111.
[24] *Ibid.* p. 32.
[25] *Ibid.* p. 34.