

## COMPTES RENDUS

**COONEY, WILLIAM**, ed. *Contributions of Gabriel Marcel to Philosophy*. Vol. 18, Problems in Contemporary Philosophy Series. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989. 192 pp. ISBN 0-88946-346-8

In his essay, "Gabriel Marcel, Today and Tomorrow," an address delivered to the American Gabriel Marcel Society in 1987, Kenneth Gallagher proposes that the "greatest service that Marcel's admirers and interpreters could now do his thought and his memory would be to utilize his thinking to address our very concrete contemporary concerns and to dispel the confusion in which they are mired" (p. 8) Gallagher amplifies his recommendation by exhorting that "what is needed now are not discussions *about* Marcel, but meditations on present day issues *inspired* by Marcel." (p. 9) Now although Gallagher's exhortation is probably right in regard to what Marcel himself would have desired and what his thought ultimately expects, concrete philosophizing nonetheless requires a foundation--a basis which can be at least partly established by lucid explications and evaluative critiques of Marcel's thought. The articles in this anthology are mainly *about* Marcel, and though they are authored by many different scholars and treat different aspects of Marcel's works, their collection in one source does, perhaps serendipitously, insinuate a unifying theme; the tacit objective correlative that Marcel's most significant contribution may be the groundwork he laid for a *hopeful* Postmodern philosophy.

As a collection of discussions about Marcel, this text is an invaluable scholarly tool. Of the thirteen articles which comprise the volume, eight appear to have been written especially for it or are, like Gallagher's address, papers previously delivered but published here for the first time. The other essays represent some of the best Marcellian scholarship that has been published during the past fifteen years.

After a provocative introductory article by the editor ("Gabriel Marcel's Philosophy of Participation: Homo Spectans vs. Homo Particeps"), the remaining essays are grouped in four parts

according to content. What is worthwhile about the groupings is that the reader becomes acquainted with Marcel the person, the variety of his personal accomplishments and the personality of his philosophy. Along with Gallagher's address, Henry Bugbee's "A Point of Co-articulation in the Life and Thought of Gabriel Marcel" in *Part One: Marcel, The Person and His Thought*, offers some illuminating recollections of time spent with Marcel. *Part Two: Marcel and Theatre* contains two studies of Marcellian drama by Katherine Rose Hanley. Of special scholarly value in this section is her chart "Prospective Role of Theater in Relation To Philosophy" (pp. 35-7), which details the chronological parallels between Marcel's dramatic and philosophical works. Familiarity with Marcel's literary accomplishments is fundamental to appreciating his philosophical works since as Hanley indicates, "For Marcel dramatic inquiry was practically indispensable as preparation for philosophic reflection, and it can also prove to be so for others who would enter into and follow the pathways of Marcel's philosophic inquiry." (p. 26).

The third part, *Marcel and Ontology*, contains penetrating articles by Thomas Anderson and Francisco Peccorini which explore some of the very subtle features of the Marcellian encounter with Being. For instance, Anderson's "Gabriel Marcel's Notions of Being" masterfully articulates the various Marcellian meanings of "Being" as well as identifying the lacuna in his thought involving the restriction of "existence" only to what is manifest to the physical senses as opposed to "Being" which has the connotations of "transcendent" and "suprasensible."

The last part, *Marcel and Other Existentialists on Death, Hope and God*, seems to be a mixed bag of five worthwhile but unrelated articles. However it is these articles which most strongly suggest Marcellian possibilities for a hopeful Postmodern philosophy. Thomas Busch's "Marcel and the Death of Man (A Response to the Dissolution of the Self in Recent Thought)," for example, focuses explicitly on a Marcellian rejection of the post-structuralists' and deconstructionists' (specifically Michel Foucault) nihilistic elimination of the Modern subject. Busch argues that although Marcel also refuses the egological anthropocentrism of the Modern subject, he advances an authentic humanism based on a relational subjectivity and an ethic of other-regardedness, responsiveness, care and availability.

Other articles in the section by Clyde Pax ("The Time of Death"), Albert Randall ("Camus' Absurdity and Marcel's Mystery: Comparative Foundations for Hope"), Joseph Godfrey ("Appraising Marcel on Hope") and Thomas Anderson ("The Experiential Paths to God in Kierkegaard and Marcel") serve to elaborate Marcel's Postmodern subject and ethic with their reflections on the significance of hope. Randall's observation that to hope is to rebel casts Marcel's hope as a rebellion against Modern paradigms. For Pax, Marcel's hopeful rebellion challenges the old egological metaphysics with a metaphysics of presence which affirms the experience of a primordial being-with and the understanding that "authentic human reality is more deeply and more accurately described by the experience of 'belonging to. . .' than by the experience of being who I am as myself." (p. 123) For Anderson and Godfrey, Marcellian hope grows from his ontology of intersubjectivity to culminate in a community of Being, an incorporation of the "all in all" (p. 156) which is actually of the transcendent Being, God.

Though further detailing the many ways in which this collection reveals Marcellian prospects for hopeful Postmodern thought would extend beyond the scope of this review, focusing on just an additional few of them will perhaps emphasize that Marcel's contributions are most significant. Instead of terminating the Modern quest for certitude without offering hopeful alternatives as the deconstructionists do, Marcel challenges the Modern assertion of the primacy of knowledge over Being by describing how knowledge issues from Being. Cooney's discussion of the Marcellian knower as "homo particeps" rather than the disengaged Modern "homo spectans" identifies the ontological ground of knowledge as the intersubjective "we are" rather than the intrasubjective "I think." "Homo spectans" aims to assuage his metaphysical uneasiness about being uncertain as to whether he actually knows Being by freezing all facets of Being as problems which can be solved by calculating, objectifying rationality. The deconstructionists condemn this rationalism, charging that it merely sublimates metaphysical "angst" with the epistemological techniques of power which seek only dominance and control. Marcel's antidote for the "angst" is to encourage openness to an assurance of Being which is grasped beneath all beings as their bond and ground, and which renders impossible a nihilism which would claim that Being is not or

cannot in some way be known (Anderson, p. 54). This assurance is originally given through a basic, intuitive feeling which confirms one's being as an interactive participant in the world-with-others. As Cooney states, "'Homo particeps' is part of the world. Because he is part of the world, he feels it. At the same time, the world is felt by him. The participant is in a creative situation. His touch feels and is felt at a particular place" (p. ix).

This intuitive assurance of Being founds Marcellian epistemology and indexes hopeful possibilities for a metaphysics which can rationally express, albeit inexhaustibly, the intelligibility of Being. The intuition is the feeling of being bound-up-with-others; it is a feeling of ineluctable interdependence which conveys the sense that one's self-affirmation, both psychological and ontological, requires a conjoint affirmation-by-others. In contrast to Modern thought which founds its epistemologies on a hermetically affirmed "I," Marcel's subject is birthed by others, and only with and through others does one come to know oneself, the world and Being itself. It is in the concrete situation of valuing others and being valued by others that one encounters the value of one's own being and of Being itself.

For Marcel, then, the primary access to Being is not epistemological but axiological. Modern thought persistently hit dead ends in attempting to know Being through its rationalisms and/or empiricisms. Postmodern pessimisms like deconstructionism, frustrated by these failures, sardonically revel in the absurd and anarchic. Marcel's ontology of intersubjectivity proceeds from describing the intuitive feeling of participation to rational discourse about the communitarian nature of Being itself. In other, perhaps more clear words, Marcel shows that a primordial intuition of community can become the basis for rationally articulating features of Being itself since Being is relation.

The importance of intersubjectivity as providing axiological access to Being is established throughout this anthology. Godfrey's caution that "It is not wise to consider the realm of the intersubjective as just an overlay on the ontology of things and free selves" alerts one to recognize that intersubjectivity inspired Marcel's rebellion, one which exposes and rejects even the anthropocentrism of a Heidegger. As Pax indicates, "In Heidegger's

analysis of Dasein, the wholeness of Dasein is thought in relation to Dasein's own temporal way of being, that is, to Dasein's historicity. With the (Marcellian) change in perspective the issue of my wholeness is thought in direct relation to the other and to the intersubjective structure in and by which I am related authentically to the other" (p. 121). Pax illustrates the way in which intersubjectivity opens axiological access to ontological reflection with his insight that being-onto-the-death-of-the-other is more metaphysically revealing than being-onto-my-own-death because the face-to-face experience of the former centers my whole being primarily on being-with, which is the very nature of my being (see Pax, p. 121). And, since Being is relation, an understanding of my being-with serves to illumine cognitively the very essence of Being itself.

Gallagher accurately remarks that Marcel "is not the sort of philosopher who can generate a publishing industry--as Husserl and Heidegger have done" (p. 9). The Schilpp volume (*The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, ed. Paul Schilpp and Lewis Hahn. LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1984) has decreased the need for Marcellian scholarship, as Gallagher also notes. However, what the Cooney volume offers, and perhaps what future Marcellian scholarship should consider, are the suggestions for Marcellian Postmodern directions. Though the review copy I have suffered from some distracting infelicities of print (e.g., pp. 144 and 181), the Edwin Mellen Press is to be commended for its commitment to publishing high quality but certainly not wide selling works and collections of scholarship as this text and others about Marcel, as well as the seventeen or so other volumes in Mellen's Problems in Contemporary Philosophy series.

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