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## THE QUEST FOR A POST-METAPHYSICAL ACCESS TO THE HUMAN: FROM MARCEL TO HEIDEGGER

ERNST WOLFF

### 1. Introduction

My decision to look at the work of Gabriel Marcel, despite the marginal position that scholars currently accord him, was motivated by my conviction that, from a historical perspective, he represents a pivotal position in French philosophy: his thought represents a hinge between the heritage of nineteenth-century philosophy and the reception of phenomenology and in particular the philosophy of Heidegger.

The heading of the last section of the current essay is “From Marcel to Heidegger – an appreciation”. It would be incorrect to assume that it suggests that I attempt to “rehabilitate” Marcel, as if once one “really” understands Marcel, his work will show Heidegger’s to be redundant or marginal – I make no such attempt. Nor is this an attempt to elevate Marcel to the position of a French master thinker from whom Heidegger took over the baton. Likewise, the reader should not expect a demonstration of the manner in which Heidegger accomplished everything and thus rendered Marcel redundant. Instead, I chose the word “appreciation” circumspectly, not only to indicate that in my conclusion I present an appraisal of the intersection between the work of Marcel and Heidegger (and the term “intersection” refers here to a historical transition or a shift), but also to show that it is my intention to appreciate their work in the sense of showing consideration and gratitude for it. One can indeed show one’s appreciation for the work of one’s predecessors by submitting their work to thorough scrutiny and criticism, but also by the recognition that one gives to the fact that, as a scholar, one has been constituted by the historical event of the work of these great thinkers and by the reception thereof.

Clearly this objective justifies a lengthy monograph. However, in order to restrict this study to the length of an article, I delimit the material as set out below, and present it in three movements.

First, the articulation of the relation between the two thinkers’ *oeuvres* is narrowed down to the central issue of the quest for a post-metaphysical access to the human. This is done by a historical and thematic contextualisation of the point at which their work overlaps within twentieth-century philosophy.

Second, Marcel and Heidegger are presented in turn to indicate how this issue fits into their work and how they address it. Attention is paid to the way in which their thought should be situated in relation to each other’s thought: whereas the similarities will be highlighted in order to establish the comparison, the dissimilarities will also be indicated in order to respect the peculiarity of

both philosophers' project. No attempt will be made to fit them into a makeshift, encompassing phenomenological framework that no historical author ever defended. The focus, in both cases, is on their earlier work (although I do refer to later texts to clarify the earlier ones). This focus appears to be justified by the fact that the early work of Marcel, which was written independently from that of Heidegger, partially precedes and partially informs the *courant* of existentialist thought that is, to some extent, responsible for Heidegger's good reception in France. No stretch of the imagination allows a reduction of Marcel's later work to a mere response to his discovery of Heidegger's work. However, the question concerning their relation changes markedly in Marcel's later work, since it is clear that these texts, to some extent, form part of the subsequent history of the reception of Heidegger in France.<sup>1</sup>

Third, an appreciation is given of the moment of French intellectual history represented by the transitional junction that co-ordinates (from our current perspective) the shift from Marcel to Heidegger – not, I repeat, as a shift caused by one master thinker taking over, putting an end to the work of a former master, but a moment in which the independent creative work of two original thinkers flowed together in a historically contingent situation that recognised Marcel's influence on the French intellectual scene, which has subsequently proven to be so receptive to Heidegger.

## *2. Historical and thematic orientation*

The important position that Marcel held in the French intellectual scene on the eve of one of the most fascinating eras of Western philosophy can be explained by noting two themes that also stand at the centre of the fascination that Heidegger has subsequently exercised in the same environment. These two themes that are so intimately interconnected and that have been such a decisive strand of the story of French philosophy in the twentieth century are the topics of subject and humanism, or more precisely of their criticism. These twin themes have, of course, their roots in the nineteenth century and even further back, but it was particularly the intellectual developments between the two World Wars that paved the way for the momentum which this topic gained in the aftermath of the Second World War, and even more so since the 1960s. The incessant work on these twin themes is one of the most significant means by which philosophers of the last three generations have thought through the cultural and political heritage of the Western world.

A serious critical stock-taking of Western culture was necessitated by the terrible consequences of National Socialist totalitarianism and its sphere of influence (as well as by other political events, such as the collapse of the colonial system). How could the terrible violence of these events be understood? What defects in Western culture contributed to and made these events possible? Where are the hidden sources of totalitarian violence still effective within

society? A diagnosis of the problem was summarised provocatively by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe: “Nazism is a humanism”.<sup>2</sup> One could reformulate the implications of this comment by arguing that the generic disease that Western culture carries within itself and that manifests itself in a variety of totalitarian, violent forms of conduct (fascism, colonialism, sexism, etc., but that is also to be found in technics, science, therapy and, alas, philosophy itself) is humanism. In this context, humanism can be understood as a collective term for projects that are devised and executed in the name of humanity and that owe their origin to a certain notion of subjectivity. To put this differently: the critics of humanism are critical of the metaphysical subject (they consider the metaphysical subject to be characterised by its being the self-reflective, autonomous, free founder of its own fate),<sup>3</sup> because it would be the logical point of departure from whence projects are invented and programmatically realised following humanistic values. In short, throughout the wide variety of forms of expression of Western culture, the underlying notion of subjectivity can be traced and it can be demonstrated that the supposedly autonomous, free, self-identical, foundational subject is at the root of violent excesses.

By contrast, as opposed to the fundamental position awarded to the subject in traditional metaphysics (according to its critics), the autonomy of the subject is now being problematised in many different ways. This is being done by the introduction of a series of notions of unconscious powers that work their effects on the subject. The analysis of unconscious powers exposes decisively the decentredness of the supposedly autonomous subject and tends towards a point where subjectivity would be eliminated. These descriptions, which are genealogical in one sense or another, were inspired particularly by Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, but a more recent invitation to continue this endeavour can be found in the work of Heidegger.

Already in *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger took upon himself the task of a “destruction” of traditional ontology.<sup>4</sup> By this he understood an appropriation of Western metaphysics by means of a phenomenological deconstruction of its notions, and of these notions, the subject is one of the most important. This was followed by his anti-humanist texts, of which the *Letter on Humanism*, the *Vorträge und Aufsätze* and the two volumes on *Nietzsche* enjoyed a particularly rich reception among French philosophers (although the precise nature and depth of the influence of these works on them obviously differed from one philosopher to another).

Apart from the historical orientation that it provides, this brief sketch of the historical situation aims to highlight the importance of Heidegger for French philosophy.<sup>5</sup> Once one has remembered this importance, it is easier to indicate the role that Marcel has played in the pre-history of this development. Criticism of a certain notion of the subject and the attempts to think non-metaphysically beyond it – this is the theme in relation to which I present Marcel and Heidegger.

Whatever the continuities and caesuras might be between Marcel and the later French philosophers of the twentieth century, Marcel is co-responsible for the momentum gained by this central theme: a quest for ways in which to reflect that could problematise the metaphysical<sup>6</sup> subject and propose an alternative to it – in favour of what Marcel considers a more humane existence.

I do not ignore the fact that Heidegger's spectacular reception in France after the Second World War remains in many respects somewhat of a mystery.<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of the current essay, however, it suffices to recall that the fact that Heidegger was, often by means of the anthropologising reading that most of the earliest French readers gave of his work, (incorrectly) connected with existentialism, which was highly influential at that stage, played a role in his popularity in the French intellectual sphere. Marcel, despite his later explicit rejection of the "dreadful appellation of existentialism" to his work,<sup>8</sup> not only formed part of the general movement, but was also one of its important precursors in France.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. *Marcel: recognition of the existential mystery*

The term "quest for a post-metaphysical access to the human" in the title of this article is particularly apposite for Marcel: he did engage in a *quest*, meaning that he remained true to a world that he attempted to leave behind, as was also the case with so many other philosophers of the previous century. In order to be able to appreciate the originality of his attempt, one should recall the intellectual context in which his thought arose. The philosophical world in France in which Marcel commenced his intellectual itinerary when, between 1906 and 1910, he was a student at the Sorbonne (in other words, the world that he attempted to a considerable extent to leave behind), was characterised by three currents of thought: scientific positivism, rationalistic Idealism and a tradition of French spiritualism.<sup>10</sup> One has to bear in mind (if we leave aside two or three early commentaries) that it was still to be a good twenty years before Husserl burst onto the French philosophical scene, almost at the same time as Heidegger. However, Heidegger only became really popular after the Second World War, initially with Sartre's existentialism and later in the predominant opposition to Sartre's existentialism in the Heidegger reception.

In his presentation of twentieth-century French philosophy, Jean-Michel le Lannou indicates quite correctly that Marcel initiated, in opposition to Léon Brunschvicg, the wide-spread quest for a non-idealistic philosophy. It was considered necessary to overcome idealism because, according to its critics, idealism desubstantialised and denaturalised Being, life, the human being.<sup>11</sup> In his effort to find a resubstantialising or renaturalising philosophy, Marcel developed a new philosophical style: far from proposing a quest for supra-temporal, universal truths through the systematic conquering of the particular and the temporal, he valued and sought the concrete and particular.<sup>12</sup> In this

double effort to escape from what was available in philosophy at the time, namely by overcoming a denaturalising idealism and proposing the philosophical appreciation of the concrete, particular event, Marcel anticipates the work of philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur and Henry – important representatives of the reception of Heidegger.

But where does Marcel start? What drove his quest? What is his central question?

### *3.1 Beginning after the beginning; tracing the elusive origin*

Twenty years after the publication of his first important work, the *Journal Métaphysique* (1927, contemporaneous with *Sein und Zeit*),<sup>13</sup> Marcel writes that “the development of my reflection has been to a large degree an explanation [of my life]. It seems as if everything happened as if I have only succeeded in progressively dealing with that which at first had only been lived experience for me as matter for reflection.”<sup>14</sup> Marcel’s central problem is the human being, and in particular the one that he is himself. Marcel wrote a lot on Being, but he gives definite priority to the question of the human being. The point of departure of Marcel’s philosophical itinerary thus has quite a different focus from that of his contemporary, Heidegger, for whom the question concerning the meaning of the verb “to be” is the greatest puzzle (I come back to this point later). This particular perspective should be included in one’s reading of Marcel: his is a quest for a kind of reflection that bears the “bite marks of what is real”, for one that is constantly taken up in the movement of life itself.<sup>15</sup>

### *3.2 Ontological status of the question of the human being as bodily subject*

The human being as question to himself or herself is then a landmark in the landscape of Marcel’s thinking. The manner in which the human being is reflectively approached has consequences for ontology, epistemology, culture, ethics, and so on.

The human being questions himself or herself, asking: Who or what am I? Who is this I that is capable of posing this and other questions?<sup>16</sup> (and the presentation of the prominent place that the capacity of *Dasein* to question and to interrogate itself about itself plays in *Sein und Zeit*, should already be anticipated here). This I, says Marcel, is the one that has always already existed, even before I have posed this or any other question. There is someone that precedes any interrogation, because without such a person no question would have been posed. From this, Marcel concludes that this I is someone that could never become the direct object of an inquiry; it escapes this inquiry in the sense that it had always already been effective for reflection before the event by which it is questioningly thematised.<sup>17</sup> Thus the existence of the interrogator always precedes the event of interrogation and thus enables the interrogation that aims at taking it as object of reflection.

At first glance, it seems as if in this view, Marcel is not too far from Descartes<sup>18</sup> and the essence of the metaphysical subject: the person that interrogates or doubts cannot doubt his or her own existence, since the fact of doubting or interrogating presupposes the existence of the one that interrogates or doubts. However, there are a number of decisive differences. For Descartes, his methodical doubt leads to the assurance that he as the subject has this thinking subject as an indisputable and transparent point of departure for the progressive development of his philosophy. The subject of the *cogito* is a bodiless epistemological subject, the type that leads Descartes into an unsolvable dualism. Be this as it may, this subject serves as the foundation and point of departure of a system of thinking that ideally realises its aspiration of being all-encompassing. Marcel differs from Descartes on two significant points.

First, for Marcel, the I becomes someone that is outside of, or rather, precedes the questioning, and that for this reason can never be placed opposite the questioner, since the I enables the questioning. This position is of considerable importance. It implies that Marcel departs from all desire to construct a total or all-encompassing system of knowledge, since the existence of the subject can never be completely recovered for representation. The human being is of such a type of reality that it can never be fully turned into a theme of inquiry. Existence precedes, conditions and escapes full recovery by thought, or to put it more like Marcel himself does: “Being has primacy over knowledge (not Being as it is *affirmed*, but Being *affirming itself*)”.<sup>19</sup> And since the existence of the human being can never be brought exhaustively to representation, the metaphysical notion of the subject as *hupokeimenon*, as basis or substrate, is thereby seriously problematised (however, as one can deduce from Marcel’s specific usage of the notion of “participation”, he did not leave behind this notion completely – see discussion below). This perspective on the human being, one that was probably inspired by the later Schelling and that was intended to be in direct opposition to the absolute ego of idealism, resembles at least partially – as I will show – the thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) of Heideggerian *Dasein*.

But what is this type of reality that the human being has and that is of this strange nature? This is the second important point of difference between Marcel and Descartes: Marcel conceives of the subject of questioning (the “I question”) as non-decomposable, as a unity, as a subject-body or as an incarnate subject. My body is not simply another one amongst the objects of this world; my body is different from those objects, in that it is mine. Strictly speaking, my body is not an object – what I call my body can never be placed completely objectively in order to be examined objectively, since I am the body that is to undertake such an objectivation. I am my body, I do not make use of my body as I use a tool. Furthermore, the fact that I can say of a certain object (my body) that it is

mine, and this in a manner in which I say it of no other object and which no other person can claim of the same object in the same manner, indicates for Marcel that the body is always already an object. The interval between me and my body that would have been needed in order to objectify it is denied. The existence that I can share with nobody is an incarnate existence. For Marcel, incarnation means exclusively “the situation of a being that appears to itself as fundamentally, and not accidentally, linked to itself”.<sup>20</sup> For him, the subject as body is the central point of reference of (a newly conceived) metaphysical thought<sup>21</sup> and it is in the importance awarded to reflection on the body that we find one of the most salient points of divergence with Heidegger’s reflection. The human being as incarnate subject is that “thing” which is not only itself, but is the “thing” that interrogates itself about its own existence.

That the question concerning who or what I am presupposes a bodily subject, constitutes for Marcel the ontological status of the questioning: the fact that a question is posed in fact testifies to a certain existence, an existence that is not primarily the result of being posed by judgement (that something exists), but an existence that affirms itself, amongst other things, in the event of questioning. This questioning has an ontological status,<sup>22</sup> thanks to the questioning body. The body thus becomes the bridge by which Marcel enters ontology; the body is the manner in which the subject participates in Being and gains access to it.

There can be no doubt that Marcel’s notion of the body retains some metaphysical remnants, whether we find them in association with the notion of “existence”, as in the earlier texts, or in association with the notion of “Being”, as in the later texts. Sometimes, for example, when Marcel presents the body as “participating” in existence or Being, it seems as if incarnation allows the human being direct presence<sup>23</sup> and participation in an ontological substrate. However, it is difficult to make an unequivocal judgement on this issue, because of a certain fluidity with which Marcel uses the notions of “existence” and “Being”: whereas in some cases they are presented more like a substrate, in other cases, their verbal character or again their mysterious elusiveness come clearly to the fore. This ambiguity in Marcel’s dealing with the ontological status of the bodily subject marks, perhaps better than any other part of his philosophy, his position as a pivot between the pre-Heideggerian French philosophy, and that initiated by the German philosopher. Whereas the recognition of this ambiguity already indicates the preparation of fertile soil for the reception of Heidegger’s *Dasein* (and this simultaneously implies taking critical distance from Marcel), it must be stressed here that this option for the radical phenomenology of Heidegger should not, as is so often done, be taken to imply retroactively an unequivocal condemnation of an author such as Marcel – one reads for instance: “[M]y interrogation concerning Being presupposes an affirmation in which I would in some way be passive, *and of which I would be the seat rather than the subject*. But this is only a limit and I cannot realise it



without contradiction. I orientate myself thus towards the position or the recognition of a participation that has the reality of a subject; this participation could, by its very definition, not be an *object* of thought”.<sup>24</sup> This sophisticated formulation, evidently formulated in Marcel’s own language, indicates clearly the author’s desire to argue for a destabilisation of a subject as foundation or *hupokeimenon* in the direction of an originary temporality and the non-transparency thereof.

### 3.3 Problem and mystery – first and second reflection

It is exactly this temporality and non-transparency of the bodily subject as participating in Being that requires considering anew the form of interrogation of the human being by himself or herself. How does one, for instance, interrogate oneself about the fact of being incarnate, and how does one speak about it if “strictly speaking it is not a fact, but a given from which a fact becomes only possible”?<sup>25</sup> In order to respond to this challenge, Marcel distinguishes between two kinds of interrogatory dispositions or strategies, and these in turn require two different ways of responding.

The first strategy by which the matter of interrogation is dealt with as a *problem*, consists of posing the matter at hand in front of or opposite the investigator as a *Gegen-stand*, that is as *ob-iectum* (following the etymology also found in Heidegger). The intention of the problem as a form of interrogation is to solve the problem and to generate new problems from that solution, and so forth.

Following the second strategy, the matter of interrogation imposes itself, as it were, on the investigator as a *mystery*, or as Marcel also calls it, as a meta-problem.<sup>26</sup> In *Position et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique*, a long series of examples of mysteries are submitted to scrutiny: my body, evil, love, creative fidelity, encounter, hope, absence and availability and holiness. What each of these cases has in common with the mystery of my own body is that the investigating subject is himself or herself constituted by the mystery – the event and after-effects of an encounter, of evil or of hope give birth to the person that can only retrospectively interrogate himself or herself about the constituting events. Even if mysteries are called “ontological” and the metaphor of participation in a substrate remains at least implicitly at work, the radical temporality of the mystery should be noted along with its non-transparency: “It is only by a kind of denial or treason that I could say: ‘After all, it [any mystery – EW] could just as well not have happened, I would have remained the same as I had been, the one that I am still.’ And one shouldn’t say either: I have been modified by it as by an external cause. No, it developed me from within, it has worked with me as a principle internal to me.”<sup>27</sup> The changeability of the human being is the reason why in Marcel’s thinking there can be no fixed metaphysics of Being; his metaphysics is of such a nature that it could best be written in a

diary, in other words, literally progressively as the ontological mystery develops through time.<sup>28</sup> The character of mysteries makes it necessary to take the particular contingencies of the individual life seriously, because it is precisely there that the ontological mystery manifests itself in a plurality of ways.

Two ways of thinking correspond with this distinction between the problematic and the mystical dispositions of interrogation. The first is called “first reflection” because, according to Marcel, it represents the spontaneous way in which people deal with questions in their initial encounter with these questions. Usually this manner of thinking aims at general, impersonal judgements. This entails that reason abstracts the particular from its specific surroundings, from its attachment to a contingent situation and (in the case of human beings) often from their incarnation. It is, as one might easily suspect, when the matter of interrogation is a human being that the insufficiencies of this way of thinking come to the fore: in first reflection any particular human being tends to be interchangeable with any other human being. The fact that human beings do indeed lend themselves to reflection in this manner and that this manner of reflecting on them is not simply undesirable can be demonstrated by the use made of this mode of reflection in the medical sciences. However, Marcel was concerned about the generalised, one-sided use of first reflection, and this is at the heart of his criticism of a number of modern social pathologies.

Marcel calls the second manner of thinking, which he considers the appropriate manner to approach mysteries, “second reflection”, “reflection of the second order”, “recovering reflection”, or “contemplating recollection”. These appellations make it clear that the second reflection often follows the first, spontaneous reflection, with the effect that it has to reflect differently on its subject matter; it has to reflect again afterwards about something in order to regain or recover something that was lost in the first reflection. “In the midst of the recollection I take position – or more exactly, I prepare myself to take position, – opposite my life, I withdraw myself from it as it were, but not as the pure subject of knowledge; in this withdrawal I take with me what I am and what my life is perhaps not.”<sup>29</sup> This paradoxical description of what Marcel means by recollection or second reflection signifies simply that the spontaneous manner of dealing with things is temporarily suspended, but that the structure of the investigator as constituted by the mystery is not changed by the second reflection.

Although there is no direct influence from phenomenology on Marcel (at least in the first developments of his work), there is undeniably a kind of “reduction” at work here – not, of course, to lay bare a transcendental subject of some kind, but to provide a genealogy (one that remains in principle unfinishable) of the multiple experiences of lived-through subjectivity.<sup>30</sup> Through a continuous process of recollecting thought, the I testifies to that which constitutes that I most intimately. This is why Ricoeur calls the second

reflection “indirect speech”<sup>31</sup> – something that initially comes to my mind only as an intuition is gradually more and more related. Although the ontologico-hermeneutic framework of Heidegger’s early thought is not found here, the important passage from the pre-predicative level of implicit ontology that one is oneself to a secondary rendering of that in a propositional discourse (*logos apophantikos*) is undeniably similar.

The uniqueness of the Marcellian body-subject and the recollecting indirect speech concerning the constitution thereof by mysteries can be articulated further by changing our perspective: looking from Heidegger to Marcel.

#### 4. Heidegger and the “subjectivity” of *Dasein* as the question concerning Being

As important as the deconstructed subject – *Dasein* – may be for the early work of Heidegger, his concern is nonetheless not to say something about the human being. Heidegger was interested in the meaning of Being or, more precisely, the meaning of the verb “to be”. It is first and foremost in the context of this question that one particular kind of being, namely *Dasein*, becomes important for him. *Dasein* is the human being, but Heidegger does not develop an anthropology.<sup>32</sup>

*Dasein* is important, on the one hand, because it is the only being that interrogates itself explicitly concerning Being, and on the other hand, because *Dasein* is the being that exists in such a manner that it is always and in all respects busy understanding Being in one way or another. The entire existence of *Dasein* is an event through which Being is understood; *Dasein* is ontology.<sup>33</sup>

Heidegger explains the manner of being of *Dasein* in such a way that he ontologises the intentional structure of consciousness as described by Husserl. The manner of being of the being that always understands Being in an “intentional” manner is existence. Heidegger calls this particular manner of being, namely existence, by different names, amongst others “transcendent”, “ek-static”, “metaphysic”. It is vital to understand that *Dasein* is the place where the difference between the verb “to be” and the things that are becomes perceivable; *Dasein* is the happening of the ontological difference. This happens in that *Dasein* stands out of its own existence as being (according to Heidegger’s etymological usage of the word “existence”), in that *Dasein* exceeds or transcends itself into the Being-as-verb. *Dasein* is the only event by which we can get access to the verblivity of Being, or time.

#### 4.1 Heidegger and Descartes

I have already alluded to the central position that the notion of the “subject” takes in Heidegger’s programme of a phenomenological deconstruction of Western metaphysics. The preceding discussion should already have shown that the Cartesian *cogito* (that in the context of this programme is taken by Heidegger as his exemplum) produces a number of problems for Marcel. What

Heidegger identifies as problematic in the *cogito* is that the reflection on the manner of being of the *I* (that is, the meaning of the *sum*) does not get away from the description thereof as *res cogitans* (as thinking *thing*).<sup>34</sup> Despite his claims to the contrary, Descartes continues medieval metaphysics when he attempts to establish the *res cogitans* as the *fundamentum inconcussum*, the unshakable ground of all knowledge (as has also been argued by other scholars).

The *cogito*, as Heidegger explained later,<sup>35</sup> belongs to an era of metaphysics that was characterised by two prejudices. On the one hand, metaphysics attempts to find a hold on the beings by placing them, as it were, opposite the investigator in a clear and distinct manner – the truth that is sought in this way obtains an objective certainty that is founded on the certainty of the representation (*Vor-stellung*). On the other hand, these representations rest on the foundation that the subject would be itself, namely as substrate or base. The subject would be more objective than any object. Consequently, in order to be valid, every *cogitatio* (thought concerning a being) has to refer to the thinking thing (*res cogitans*), that is, to the subject.<sup>36</sup> The presence of the *res cogitans* is required for every true re-presentation of beings.<sup>37</sup>

Now we can understand why Heidegger opposes the Cartesian *cogito*: as a result of this double prejudice, Descartes understands the subject from the outset as a thing that is simply present.<sup>38</sup> If the subject and the essence of the existence of the subject are understood from the outset as objective presence, as a thing from which one can make re-presentations (in the sense explained above), the existence of *Dasein* as temporal and ek-static is lost from sight and the subject is degraded to a carrier of qualities.

What the first Heidegger opposes to this is a hermeneutics of the possibilities of the meaning of the verb “to be”, in so far as it is involved in the existence of *Dasein*. *Dasein* is – as I have already stated – that being by which the question concerning the meaning of Being arises; it is precisely this question that makes of *Dasein* a unique being in distinction to whatever objectified thing. *Dasein* interrogates itself, not concerning itself, but concerning the Being of which *Dasein* itself is the event of (its) understanding. *Dasein* is not an *I*, in the form of a *subiectum*, but a question concerning that which *Dasein* always is already.<sup>39</sup> One key to Heidegger’s analysis of *Dasein* that is important to us here is his reinterpretation of the phenomenological reduction.

#### 4.2 Heidegger’s reduction<sup>40</sup>

In his analyses of the manners of being of *Dasein*, not only is Husserl’s idea of intentionality ontologised, but the same happens to Husserl’s reduction: by leading a variety of phenomena back (cf. *reducere*) to the ek-sistence of *Dasein* as the event of the ontological difference, these phenomena are led back to their verblability, or to their temporality. Reduction as an element of phenomenology enables us to identify the “double life of the subject”, as Bernet calls it. The well-

known form that it takes in Husserl is of a willed methodological enterprise of reduction, by which a distinction is laid bare in the transcendental subject. The double life of the Husserlian subject thus consists of the subject as constitutor of the world (this is revealed by applying the method of reduction) and of the subject as a spectator of the constitution of the world (this is the subject that practises the method of reduction). When Heidegger then ontologises phenomenology, he also describes a reduction by which a double life of *Dasein* is exposed (as can be seen in *Sein und Zeit*): on the one hand, there is the non-proper (*uneigentliche*) existence that exists dispersed in solicitude for people and concern for things; on the other hand, there is the proper (*eigentliche*) existence that is reconducted in anguish to care for itself alone.

Heidegger's reduction, however, is no willed procedure of investigation. It is rather an event that imposes itself on *Dasein* by means of something that is lacking or matters. Let us have a look, in turn, at the two lives of *Dasein* as exposed by the Heideggerian reduction.

With the first reduction, the structure of non-proper existence of *one* (*das Man*), in other words, as *one* exists or as *they* exist, is exposed. Thus, for example, one learns through the sudden dysfunction of a tool that *Dasein* is always, in its everyday existence, taken up in a whole set of references by which *Dasein* exists in the world and, in the same moment, the tool becomes perceptible as object for the first time. Similarly, in missing a friend, for instance, *Dasein* learns that *one's* everyday existence is constituted by co-existence (*Mitsein*) with other *Dasein* and so the other appears for the first time as an object of representation.

*Dasein* might well be always ontically itself, but ontologically it is dispersed in the world and in co-existence daily.<sup>41</sup> That *Dasein* is mostly and daily not itself means that (although it remains ontically itself) it exists ontologically as a member of an anonymous community where everybody exists as everyone does it, as *they* do it, without distinguishing themselves from others. Most of the time, *Dasein* is *one*-self, not himself or herself (or "yourself") – this is exactly the reason why phenomenology is needed in order to discover what *Dasein* itself actually is.<sup>42</sup> And it is precisely when the other's absence is suffered (when a form of reduction is undergone) that the structure of co-existence becomes apparent.

The others, who are never understood by Heidegger as objects (in the sense of *Vorhandenes*), nor even in the special sense of usability (*zuhanden*), but as *Dasein*, are co-constitutors of a shared world (*Mitwelt*), a world of all and of nobody in particular. This shared world is the world out of which *Dasein* encounters the other *Dasein*; and in this encounter the common world is (re-)constituted.<sup>43</sup> In this world *Dasein* exists daily, most of the time as *one* does it, deprived of its own most proper existence (*eigentliche Existenz*). In short, who is *Dasein* most of the time? It is the *Dasein* of whom the entire Being-understanding structure of existence (in other words, the ontological

structure according to which *Dasein* exists) is always intricately constituted by the fact of existing with others, with whom the world, the originary space and coherence of meaning, is formed.

In the second reduction, which is undergone in anguish, the own existence of *Dasein* comes to light as a whole. The familiar everyday world is not annihilated in this reduction, nor does it invalidate what has been learned about it, but in the experience of anguish, *Dasein* is withdrawn from its concern for the things and solicitude for others and thrown back onto its own existence alone. *Dasein* undergoes a reduction that does not cancel the ontological structures of being-in-the-world or of being-with-others, but in which the meaning thereof is deepened, namely by the fact that the temporal structure thereof is laid bare: being-in-the-world and being-with-others are both comprehended, not as qualities of a substantive subject, but as forms of ek-sistence, that is, as ways in which *Dasein* exceeds its existence as a being into the temporality of Being, as Heidegger puts it. *Dasein* discovers itself as the event by which its manner of being as a being is transcended in a continuous projection of its existence towards the future. It is to this fact of its existence that *Dasein* owes the understanding quality of its existence; it is because *Dasein* stands out into the temporality of the future that it is onto-logical or metaphysical (in the terminology of the first Heidegger). This reduction is executed (or not) independently of the initiative of *Dasein*. In this manner, its understanding existence is revealed to *Dasein* according to a life-long play of dis-covey and re-covey that is truth as *a-letheia* (according to the etymology dear to Heidegger, “dis-coveredness”).

In brief, what remains after the second reduction is an isolated ek-static existence proper to *Dasein* alone. This proper existence that no-one could undertake in the place of *Dasein*, is the *sum*, the *I am* without an *I*-subject. The identity that Descartes established between the *I am* and *I think* is problematised by an ek-static *I am* that is decisive for, but outside of, the centre of the *I think*; the *I (ego)* of *Dasein* (the thinking subject that writes books on ontology) is only a derivative form of a more originary existence of the self (the *sum*) of *Dasein* (the ek-static *I am* that exists always in a Being-understanding, [pre-]ontological manner).<sup>44</sup>

In *Was ist Metaphysik?*, Heidegger indicates that in anguish there is no “ist-sagen”<sup>45</sup> – in other words, anguish is an event in which no statement with the copula “is” can be made; no judgements can be made. But if this is true, how is it then possible for Heidegger to write afterwards on what *Dasein* discovers during anguish? This is only possible in as far as one accepts a continuity between *Dasein* in anguish and *Dasein* as author of philosophical texts. What is the nature of this continuity which allows for an ontological exploration of the event of anguish? This is a continuity of the question concerning the being that lasts, of the Being-understanding existence, of the linguistic character of understanding. The ontological constitution of *Dasein* can become afterwards

a theme for a recollecting hermeneutics, thanks to this continuity between the (*I am* and the *I think*; the hermeneutic *logos* that *Dasein* is itself, lends itself to an interpreting *logos* written on paper.<sup>46</sup>

##### 5. From Marcel to Heidegger – an appreciation

It may be possible to reconstruct historical circumstances that, around the 1920s, favoured the emergence of two philosophies that share certain characteristics in form, content and character. However, the intention and aim of this study is elsewhere. Isolating Marcel and Heidegger and concentrating on their early, independent work could help us come to grips with a “transitional junction” that constitutes one of the important episodes of the intellectual history that formed a large number of us, their readers. I call this a “transitional junction”, because the way in which intellectual history developed in France and spread its influence over a large part of the world during the twentieth century was such that Marcel came to enjoy a certain recognition and the matter for which Marcel was a metonym facilitated the reception of Heidegger, whose work subsequently superseded that of Marcel by far, at least in the recognition Heidegger gained and the influence his work has exercised. It is in no sense my intention to elevate Marcel to *the* predecessor of Heidegger or to reduce French philosophical history to this episode. Instead, I merely aim to acknowledge and appreciate this transitional junction as part of a complex of history: by an examination of certain similarities within the delimited theme, the *junction* of this transition can be highlighted; by insisting on the dissimilarities of these two philosophies, the *transitional* character of the junction or historical intersection of Marcel’s and Heidegger’s work can be elucidated.

The transitional junction depends on a re-interpretation of metaphysics that, for all its originality in our two authors, could be said to be post-metaphysical, in that it still attempts to drive further and radicalise, in different ways, the Kantian project of the “end of metaphysics”. This re-interpretation of metaphysics or elaboration of a philosophy that could be qualified as post-metaphysical is radical enough to bring the entire philosophical project into play, to provide a diagnosis of its failures and to arrange an extremely important place for the everyday experience and activity in philosophical reflection. In Marcel, more clearly than in Heidegger, this endeavour has a definite socio-critical and socio-therapeutic intention. Furthermore, whether it be the phenomenological deconstruction (Heidegger) or second reflection (Marcel), the new vision of philosophy and the different vision for its scope and task call for a new way of going about the task, in other words, of doing philosophy.

These ambitions of both Marcel and Heidegger can be traced very clearly in their respective quests for a different point of access to or a different way to interpret the human being. I would like to stress that, for all the similarities between these two endeavours, the language and aim of the project are

markedly dissimilar: Marcel's focus is with the individual human life; Heidegger is intent on helping his readers to hear anew the question of the meaning of "to be", of Being. However, a number of central gestures in these two projects are so similar that they tend to strengthen one another, despite any differences there might be. We have seen the importance of a specific kind of criticism of the Cartesian subject which leads to a decentring of the subject to something that is decisive. The conscious life of the subject is not negated but relativised and is shown to be decisively conditioned by that "something" that decentres it. The intelligence of the pre-predicative or non-representational life of the subject is recognised by what could, in both cases, be called "reduction". It remains essential to these forms of access to the post-metaphysical notion of the human to argue for the possibility and why of following the path of intelligibility from the pre-predicative to the predicative. And all of this is carried out in a philosophical practice that either is primarily (Heidegger) or secondarily (Marcel) concerned with the old question of Being.

In the work of these two philosophers, one can see a passion that drove them: in Marcel, it is an explicit compassion with fellow human beings in a time of the dominance of first reflection and its social consequences; in Heidegger, it is an implicit ethos of the proper (*eigentliche*) existence in a time of forgetfulness of Being. The analyses above have foregrounded a number of comparable structural characteristics in these two passions – this should certainly be seen as among the reasons for which these two authors have been associated so easily. But whereas this association is fairly easy to make, it is particularly difficult to tell what the most appropriate manner is to co-ordinate these two quests (in the sense of the two driving questions) with each other. In principle, if we suspend the question of the talent with which each pursued his respective quest, it seems to me impossible to accord a priority either to the question "who am I?" or to the question "how is *Dasein*?" to which Marcel and Heidegger respectively answered so passionately. I do not know if one has to agree with Marcel when he comments as follows on the level of personal choice involved in human initiative:

[T]he fact that a human decision can intervene only on a level where in some way, in any case the decisive initiatives do not ensue from the human being – this fact seems to constitute to a certain extent something like a common denominator between Heidegger's thought and mine. For him, as for me, there is no question of seeing in a human choice the origin or source of values.<sup>47</sup>

However, this statement does, at least, caution readers against too rash a conclusion concerning the relative merit of the two respective *projects* and the impartiality with which their inheritors were involved in this transitional junction. Nor should such a word of caution be taken too seriously: no clarity on this matter seems necessary for one to appropriate or to succumb to the passion that drives these philosophies.

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## References

1. Marcel reflects on the initial independence of the two authors and his complex reception of Heidegger in his “Ma relation avec Heidegger” [1957], in *Gabriel Marcel et la pensée allemande. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Ernst Bloch*. Paris: Aubier, 1979, pp. 25-38. As one would expect, there is no comparable text by Heidegger.
2. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *La fiction du politique*, Paris: C. Bourgois, [1987] 1988, p. 87. All translations are my own.
3. The essence of the problem of the subject could be located in the foundational efficiency ascribed to it in modernity, that is – as Renaut puts it in his summary of the critics’ judgement thereof – in “ce rapport au monde où l’homme se pose comme pouvoir de fondation (fondation de ses actes et de ses représentations, fondation de l’histoire, fondation de la vérité, fondation de la loi): c’est un tel pouvoir de fondation qui définit la subjectivité au sens où l’apparition de l’homme comme sujet désigne sa position comme le *sub-jectum*, le ‘sous-jacent’ sur la base duquel tout doit désormais reposer.” see Alain Renaut, *L’ère de l’individu. Contribution à l’histoire de la subjectivité*. Paris: Gallimard, 1989, pp. 27-28.
4. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, [1927] 1993, § 6.
5. Instead of following the schematic reconstruction of the “thinking of 68” (cf. Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *La pensée 68. Essai sur l’anti-humanisme contemporain*. Paris: Gallimard, 1985), one could consult the detailed report on the French reception of Heidegger by Dominique Janicaud, *Heidegger en France*. Paris: Albin Michel, 2001.
6. Evidently one should think here of a certain idea of traditional metaphysics against which both Marcel and Heidegger reacted. It is well known that they both (albeit in different ways) adopted the term metaphysics favourably in their early philosophy, precisely in opposition to the notion of metaphysics that they criticised.
7. Cf. Janicaud’s assessment: Heidegger “se soit vu porté au pinacle du snobisme de l’intelligentsia parisienne, son prestige soudain au zénith, sans que rigueur lui soit guère tenue d’être du camps des vaincus, ni de s’être compromis politiquement à partir de 1933, sans en outre qu’il ait pris aucune part – au début au moins – pour susciter cet élan de curiosité et de sympathie.” *Heidegger en France. op. cit.* p. 81.
8. *Le mystère de l’être*. Tome I: *Réflexion et mystère*. Paris: Présence de Gabriel Marcel, [1951] 1997, p. 5.
9. The connection between Heidegger and Marcel has been made at least as early as Jean Wahl’s *Vers le concret. Études d’histoire de la philosophie contemporaine*. William James, Whitehead, Gabriel Marcel. Paris: Vrin, 1932.
10. Cf. Vincent Berning, *Das Wagnis der Treue. Gabriel Marcells Weg zu einer konkreten Philosophie des Schöpferischen*. Freiburg/München: Karl Alber, 1973, pp. 44-51.
11. As unsatisfactory as it may be, for the sake of clarity, I render *Sein, être* as “Being” and *Seiendes, les êtres*, as “being(s)”.
12. Cf. Jean-Michel le Lannou, “La philosophie en France au XXe siècle.” in *Encyclopédie Philosophique Universelle*. Volume 1. André Jacob (ed.), Paris: PUF, 1991.
13. Marcel attests to the independence of the two books in “Ma relation avec Heidegger”, *op. cit.* p. 27.
14. “Regard en arrière”, in Etienne Gilson (ed.), *Existentialisme chrétien: Gabriel Marcel*. Paris: Plon, 1947, pp. 291-319, citation p. 319.
15. “Ebauche d’une philosophie concrète” (1938), in *Essai de philosophie concrète*, Paris: Gallimard, [1949] 1999, p. 97-98.
16. From a multitude of possible references to discussions of this question, see *Journal métaphysique*. Paris: Gallimard, [1927] 1997, pp. 242, 267, *Position et approches. op. cit.* pp. 54-55, *Être et avoir*. Paris: Aubier, 1935, p. 158, *Essai de philosophie concrète, op. cit.* pp. 28-31, *Le mystère de l’être I, op. cit.* p. 98.
17. Cf. for instance, “Ma relation avec Heidegger” *op. cit.* p. 33.
18. The contrast between Marcel and Descartes is presented here, not only for its clarification of Marcel’s position, but also because of the important place Descartes holds in French

- philosophy. Tom Rockmore explains (perhaps overstating the point slightly) that in France, Cartesian philosophy, “now as before, [...] continues to remain close to the centre of the French philosophical debate”, see *Heidegger and French philosophy. Humanism, antihumanism and being*. London/New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 7. See also his discussions in support of this claim, especially on pp. 6-8, 25, 30, 40-46, 51-53, 66-69. Marcel’s own strategy to present his thought in opposition to that of Descartes can be illuminated from this perspective. It is also in his polemics with Descartes that he could be considered to pave a way for Heidegger (cf. §4.1).
19. *Position et approches. op. cit.* p. 57.
  20. *Le mystère de l’être I, op. cit.* p. 117.
  21. See the title of the first essay in *Essai de philosophie concrète*: “L’Être incarné, repère central de la réflexion métaphysique” [1939] *op. cit.* pp. 21-59. Metaphysics, in other words, does not serve to enhance our understanding of the human being; instead, reflection of the body-subject is rather a pre-requisite of a new version of metaphysical thought.
  22. Cf. *Position et approches. op. cit.* p. 56.
  23. The presence in question here is that of being irrecoverably constituted by Being; and thus not simply the presence of Heidegger’s criticism of the metaphysics of presence. This mystery of presence forms an important element in the comparison by Chad Engelland, “Marcel and Heidegger on the proper matter and manner of thinking”, *Philosophy Today*, Spring 2004, pp. 94-109, see in particular, pp. 98 & 102-103.
  24. *Position et approches. op. cit.* pp. 56-57.
  25. *Être et avoir, op. cit.* p. 11 and cf. *Journal métaphysique. op. cit.* p. 281 and *Essai de philosophie concrète, op. cit.* p. 99.
  26. The first elaboration on mysteries dates from 18 January 1919, in *Journal métaphysique. op. cit.* pp. 159-160.
  27. *Position et approches. op. cit.* p. 61.
  28. Of this, the *Journal Métaphysique* is probably the best known, but aside from this volume, there are, in his early philosophy, *Être et Avoir* (1935) and the very early *Fragments Philosophiques. 1909-1914*, Louvain: Éditions Nauwelaerts, 1961.
  29. *Position et approches. op. cit.* pp. 63-64.
  30. In this, there is an important correspondence between Marcel and Husserl: “Husserl reconnaît [...] que la subjectivité ne peut pas être un principe absolu, un commencement radical, ni ce ‘point archimédique’ qu’y a vu Descartes. C’est pourquoi, bien que la phénoménologie transcendantale puisse être considérée à certains égards comme la figure accomplie de la modernité – si du moins nous comprenons la modernité comme ce processus qui, depuis Descartes, promeut la subjectivité et l’élève à l’être absolu –, c’est pourtant paradoxalement en elle que nous voyons émerger l’idée que le sujet vient toujours trop tard, qu’il est toujours déjà précédé par son autre, sous la double figure du temps et de l’autre sujet, qui apparaissent en un sens comme étant toujours ‘plus vieux’ que le sujet lui-même.” Françoise Dastur, *Husserl. Des mathématiques à l’histoire*, Paris: PUF, 1995, p. 44.
- In James Bennet’s examination of “Selves and personal existence in the existentialist tradition”, in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 37/1, 1999, pp. 135-156 a markedly affirmative interpretation of the self in Marcel is presented, because, while he correctly presents the affirmation of the self as a person in responsible, active participation with a society (cf. *Homo Viator. Prolégomènes à une métaphysique de l’espérance*. Paris: Aubier, 1944, p. 27), he passes over the originary “passive constitution” of the Marcelian subject in mysteries (as that of the presence that informs the discussion of the self-affirmation of the person in *Homo Viator*). In other words, a person who affirms himself or herself actively does so only as being previously and contemporaneously constituted by a series of mysteries, whether the person realises it or not.
31. Paul Ricoeur, “Réflexion primaire et réflexion seconde chez Gabriel Marcel.” in *Lecteurs 2. La contreé des philosophes*. Paris: Seuil [1984]1992, p. 54.
  32. On this, explicitly, see *Sein und Zeit. op. cit.* §10. See also *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, (Gesamtausgabe 3) Frankfurt-am-Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1991 pp. 273 &

283. On the gender neutrality of *Dasein*, see “Vom Wesen des Grundes” (1929), in *Wegmarken*. Frankfurt-am-Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1967, pp. 129-176, citation p. 158. Marcel understood this correctly, but in this was not in line with the existentialist reading of Heidegger, cf. “Ma relation avec Heidegger”, *op. cit.* p. 28.
33. Heidegger describes the Being-understanding (that is, the ontological) nature of *Dasein*'s existence as “pre-ontological”, but it is also perfectly correct to say, as Levinas does, that *Dasein* is ontology (cf. *Entre nous. Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre*. Paris: Grasset, 1991, p. 13. Levinas says “anthropologisingly”: “Tout l'homme est ontologie”). In Heidegger's well-known statement (*Sein und Zeit*, *op. cit.* p. 12): “Die ontische Auszeichnung des *Daseins* liegt darin, daß es ontologisch *ist*”, the adjective “ontologisch” has to be read as “adverb” to “*ist*”, in other words, *Dasein* is ontology, the event of the understanding of Being.
34. Cf. *Sein und Zeit* *op. cit.* p. 24.
35. Cf. “Die Zeit des Weltbildes” (1938) in Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege*. Gesamtausgabe 5. Frankfurt-am-Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1950, pp. 75-96.
36. Heidegger says: “*Ego cogito, ist cogito: me cogitare.*” in “Überwindung der Metaphysik”, in Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, (Gesamtausgabe 7), Frankfurt-am-Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977, pp. 67-98, citation p. 72.
37. In fact, the subject as *sub-iectum* does not necessarily have to be related to the *I*, but it is especially by doing so that Descartes sets the tone for modern philosophy – cf. Paul Ricœur, “Heidegger et la question du sujet”, in *Le conflit des interprétations. Essais d'herméneutique*. Paris: Seuil. 1969, pp. 226-227.
38. “*Dasein* ist unausgesprochen im vorhinein als Vorhandenes begriffen.”, *Sein und Zeit. op. cit.* p. 114.
39. Cf. Ricœur: “Heidegger et la question du sujet”, *op. cit.*, as well as the third chapter of Jacques Derrida, *De l'esprit. Heidegger et la question*. Paris: Galilée, 1987, pp. 31-42.
40. In what follows, I borrow particularly from the study by Rudolf Bernet, “La réduction phénoménologique et la double vie du sujet”, in: *La vie du sujet. Recherches sur l'interprétation de Husserl dans la phénoménologie*. Paris: PUF (Epiméthée), 1994, pp. 5-36, but also the study of which the latter is a continuation, Jean-François Courtine's “Réduction phénoménologique-transcendantale et différence onto-ontologique”, in: *Heidegger et la phénoménologie*. Paris: Vrin. 1990, pp. 207-247.
41. Cf. *Sein und Zeit. op. cit.* p. 15 & 16.
42. Cf. *Sein und Zeit. op. cit.* p. 129: “Das Selbst des alltäglichen *Daseins* ist das *Man-selbst*, das wir von dem *eigentlichen*, das heißt eigens ergriffenen *Selbst* unterscheiden. Als *Man-selbst* ist das jeweilige *Dasein* in das *Man zerstreut* und muß sich erst finden. Diese Zerstreung charakterisiert das ‘Subjekt’ der Seinsart, die wir als das besorgende Aufgehen in der nächst begehrenden Welt kennen.”
43. Cf. *Sein und Zeit. op. cit.* p. 123.
44. Cf. Dominique Janicaud, “L'analytique existentielle et la question de la subjectivité”, in: “*Être et Temps*” de Martin Heidegger. *Questions de méthode et voies de recherche*. (D. Janicaud & J-P Cometti, eds.). Marseille: SUD, 1989, pp. 45-57.
45. “Was ist Metaphysik?” (1929), in *Wegmarken. op. cit.* pp. 103-122, citation 112.
46. In short, “Das existenzial-ontologische Fundament der Sprache ist die Rede.” *Sein und Zeit. op. cit.* p. 160; the detail is developed especially in §§ 32-34 of the same book, but much more clearly in *Logik. Die Frage nach der Wahrheit*. (course of the winter semester 1925/1926). (Gesamtausgabe 21). Frankfurt-am-Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976, §12.
47. “Ma relation avec Heidegger”, *op. cit.* p.31.