The Concept of the Person: The Contributions of Gabriel Marcel and Emmanuel Mounier to the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur

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The Concept of the Person:
The Contributions of Gabriel Marcel and Emmanuel Mounier to the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur

by

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Abstract

The thought of Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) and Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950) deeply influenced the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005). Marcel’s existential, concrete, incarnate person and his theory of intersubjectivity were foundational for Ricoeur’s understanding of personal identity, including his theses of the hermeneutic and narrative selves and the ethical, capable self. Mounier’s affirmation of the absolute value of the human person and his emphasis on community informed Ricoeur’s ethics. This thesis offers an original contribution to the field insofar as I am unaware of any work published thus far in English that addresses this topic. I will argue that Ricoeur expanded and refined Marcel’s vision of hope and Mounier’s dream of a caring community, carrying their aspirations to a practical end. In this way, he offers a realistic interpretation of the human condition and a model that provides authentic hope towards a future with justice for all.
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List of Abbreviations in the Work of Gabriel Marcel

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<tr>
<td>CF</td>
<td>Creative Fidelity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MJ</td>
<td>Metaphysical Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MB1</td>
<td>The Mystery of Being, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PF</td>
<td>Philosophical Fragments</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWB</td>
<td>Tragic Wisdom and Beyond</td>
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Introduction

This thesis examines the work of Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) and Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950) with a view to the way in which their ideas influenced the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005). Specifically, both Marcel and Mounier established different concepts of the person that were foundational for Ricoeur’s understanding of personal identity, including the narrative unity of the self. Further, their thoughts on the relationship between persons set the stage for Ricoeur’s ethical theory of *Oneself as Another*.

Marcel speaks of “the indubitable character of existence” (*Tragic Wisdom* 221) and its non-reducibility. His existentialist ontology provides a realistic stance that affirms the dignity and unity of the person. His dramatic works emphasize the first person, and the intertwining of the life experiences of persons in his plays reveals his theme of *intersubjectivity*. Ricoeur’s idea of *solicitude* or “the movement of the self towards others who responds with an interpellation of the self by the other” (Ricoeur “Approaching” *Esprit* 57 (1990) builds on Marcel’s notion of *intersubjectivity*. Marcel’s theory of *creative fidelity* expresses the beginning of an ethics as well as showing the manner in which the *promise* allows for the maintaining of personal identity over time, ideas developed by Ricoeur. The Marcelian categories of *mystery* and *problem* and the strong emphasis placed on the freedom of the person informed Ricoeur’s thought. Ideas of incarnation led to historicity, a theme Ricoeur used in his analysis of the constancy yet changeability of the self.

Mounier’s *personalism* affirms the absolute value of the human person and the responsibility of selves one to another. Evil is regarded as personal and historical, a theme
restate by Ricoeur thus influencing his work on the fallibility of the human person. Mounier proposes a two-term dialectic of person and community from which Ricoeur later develops “a three-term formula - self-esteem, solicitude, just institutions ... to complete rather than refute the two-term formula [of Mounier] ... distinguish[ing] interpersonal relations, whose emblem is friendship, from institutional relations, whose ideal is justice” (Ricoeur, “Approaching” 57). In this way, Ricoeur advanced beyond Mounier’s thought to develop a global ethics, which offered a practical model for a just society.

Chapter One will provide a comprehensive background of Marcel’s life and how he constructed his philosophy, including an analysis of Marcel’s own understanding of the purpose of his work. This will show that Marcel did not intend to create a systematic metaphysic but rather to offer a Socratic look at examples from real life illuminated by personal reflection in contrast to the prevalent dogmatic theorizing. He considered himself foremost a playwright and sought to develop his philosophic thought through his dramatic works. This thesis will look specifically at three Marcelian themes: his incarnational phenomenology of personhood, his philosophic and dramatic interpretations of intersubjective relations and his growing emphasis on the ethical, as expressed in his ideas of creative fidelity. Marcel’s philosophy built on Husserl’s early phenomenology in developing these ideas, and he adopted Bergson’s epistemology which spoke out against Kant’s views denying that we can know anything about the absolute nature of a thing – the thing-in-itself. Marcel’s is a concrete, incarnational view of the existential human condition. He insisted on the primacy of the intersubjective in the formation of the self. This emphasis on the relational aspect of personhood was developed into the beginnings of an ethics through his theses of availability and creative fidelity. The chapter
will consider the foundations of Marcel’s work and the development of his ideas and worldview as these pertain to what it means to be a human being living in community.

With parallels to the first chapter, Chapter Two will provide a comprehensive background of Mounier’s life, the construction of his philosophy, and investigate Mounier’s personal intentions for his work. Mounier’s founding of the Espirit community and the associated journal of the same name, created a movement that was highly influential for Paul Ricoeur. Mounier developed a philosophy he christened personalism, a view which affirmed the absolute value of the human person and the responsibility of selves one to another. Personalism was a concept of the human person within a communal structure, with persons defined by freedom, responsibility and creativity. More than simply a philosophical viewpoint, his work was an influential political model for a renewed society whose goal was to “remake patiently and collectively the Renaissance” (Mounier quoted in Ricoeur, History and Truth 137).

Chapter Three will provide an analysis of the influence on Paul Ricoeur of Marcel and Mounier’s thought. Ricoeur expressed appreciation for Marcel’s secondary reflection, “a second-order grasp of experiences that primary reflection, reputed to be reductive and objectifying, was held to obliterate and rob of their original, affirmative power” saying that this method allowed him to grasp the direction of Marcel’s thought, much of which he was to take up into his own philosophy (Ricoeur “Intellectual Autobiography”7). Ricoeur is indebted to both Marcel and Mounier for their concepts of the concrete, embodied person and their understanding of the nature of personhood will be considered with respect to the way in which it facilitated Ricoeur’s development of his thesis of the narrative self. Without their work on the
incarnate person who bodily and creatively relates to other selves in time, as exemplified in such ways as the promise of fidelity carried into the future, Ricoeur could not have established his ideas of personal identity as the product of the narrative or story of one’s life as intertwined with the lives of others (Time and Narrative Vol. I-III, 1984-88). Their respective views on the interactions of person with one another also enabled Ricoeur to establish his ethical theory. Ricoeur posits that one must appreciate the other person in the same way as oneself, with the same integrity and rights. Ricoeur’s philosophic development from the phenomenological intentional self to the hermeneutic and narrative self, and then to the ethical thesis of Oneself as Another (1990) will be investigated in detail.

This thesis is a reflection on the reasons and the ways in which Ricoeur went beyond Marcel and Mounier’s incarnational, relational philosophies of the person. Primarily, Ricoeur produced a far more complex understanding of the ‘self’ and its entitlements. In addition, Ricoeur’s desire to develop an ethical dimension made it imperative for him to expand on his predecessors’ methodologies and arguments. Although Marcel and Mounier offered an affirmative and constructive contribution to Ricoeur’s practical philosophy, he moved beyond them in establishing his comprehensive ethics for humanity.

Marcel references the immortal hope put forward by Charles Péguy in The Portal of the Mystery of Hope as an inspired expression of his underlying theme. Ricoeur’s project is in accord with his aspiration.
The faith and love of human persons is not surprising to God, says Péguy.

But hope, says God, that is something that surprises me.
Even me.
That is surprising.

That these poor children see how things are going and believe that tomorrow things will go better.
That they see how things are going today and believe that they will go better tomorrow morning.
That is surprising and it’s by far the greatest marvel of our grace.
And I’m surprised by it myself.
And my grace must indeed be an incredible force (Péguy 6).
Chapter One: Gabriel Marcel

1.1 Introduction

In opening his Gifford lecture in 1949, Gabriel Marcel described his presentation as “a search for, or an investigation into, the essence of spiritual reality” (*MB1* 1). It was important, he said, to distinguish his quest from that of something more systematic which could be set out as an organic whole, described in structural detail, and compared with the systems of other philosophers. Marcel cautioned that “the philosopher who first discovers certain truths and then sets out to expound them in their dialectical or systematic interconnections always runs the risk of profoundly altering the nature of the truths he has discovered” (2). He admitted that for him, philosophy “has always remained ... at the stage of a quest” (2). Thus, when Marcel was asked to ‘define’ his concrete philosophy, he explained, in a nonsystematic manner, that “a philosophical question must be lived, it must be gripped” (*CF* 63). Marcel was not interested in the history of philosophy or in the objectification of problems, but he maintained that “there is something which is inexhaustibly concrete at the heart of reality or of human destiny the understanding of which does not proceed by successive stages as in the case of the empirical sciences. Each of us gains access to this inexhaustible reality only through the purest and most unblemished art of himself” (66). In this way, his philosophy was thoroughly existential.

Marcel struggled with the existentialist questions of life and death in his own life and wrestled with them in his philosophy and his writing for the theatre. What interested him was what he experienced “hic and nunc” – here and now. For Marcel considered himself foremost a playwright, saying “that experience, or, if you will, the existing subject can be adequately thought only where the thinking subject is allowed to speak. If we speak of this existing subject
in some other way, we insist in the words on its subjective character, but by the very fact that we are speaking of it we inevitable objectify it and consequently distort it” (TWB Conversations 231). Beginning with the experiencing subject, he moved to an exploration of interpersonal reality – that which he called inter-subjectivity. His understanding of the relational aspect of personhood was later developed into the beginning of an ethics. He wrote on issues of death, faith, fidelity, hope, and love. His impact on Paul Ricoeur was significant, both in his existential understanding of the person and the inter-subjective, and in the groundwork he laid for Ricoeur’s later work on ethics.

In this chapter, Marcel’s developing ideas will be analyzed by considering the questions he set out in his first work, Philosophical Fragments: 1909-1914, as well as through questions that arose as he reflected on his own life experiences. These initial questions will be addressed through an examination of his later writings and interviews. Recorded conversations between Marcel and Ricoeur (TWB Conversations, 1973) provide an interesting juxtaposition of philosophic theory, given they took place a full thirty years after a young Ricoeur sat questioning Marcel in the latter’s home. In those early years, Marcel had opened his home to a philosophy café and it is instructive to listen to their discussions, following each thinker’s years of study and development.

1.2 Background

Gabriel Honoré Marcel was born in Paris the 7th of December, 1889 and died there on October 8th, 1973. He was the only child of Henri and Laure Marcel. The early death of his mother in 1893, just before his fourth birthday, was to have a profound effect on him. He was
raised by his aunt, his mother’s sister, whom his father married two years later. His father was an agnostic, a lapsed Catholic; his aunt, a Jew, had become a liberal Protestant. Marcel relates that his aunt had “an acute and implacable sense of the absurdity of life and imposed upon me an extremely strict moral discipline. She shared my father’s agnosticism with this difference that his had an aesthetic and hers an ethical tinge. The result was that my early years were lived in an atmosphere of instability and aridity” (as quoted in Murchland 342). When he was eight years old, his father, who was a French diplomat, moved the family to Stockholm, Sweden, for a year. The young Marcel was a good student, but found his studies uninspiring. Following his early education, he entered the Sorbonne, from which he graduated in 1910 at the youthful age of twenty-one. During the First World War, he worked as head of the Information Service organized by the Red Cross, a role in which he was surrounded by death and grief. His duties included carrying news of injured and deceased soldiers to their families, an experience that influenced him deeply. During the war, Marcel began a journal, which later became his first book, *Metaphysical Journal* (1927). After the war, Marcel married Jaqueline Boegner who was a professor at the Schola Cantorum. They adopted a son, Jean. Their marriage gave him much joy, and his wife was a great support, encouraging him to develop his musical talents. His wife died in 1947. Following her death, Marcel continued to write and teach. He traveled widely and wrote regarding “the metaphysical implications of travel” (Murchand 342). It was the experiences that traveling afforded him that gave him his insight into the primacy of experience for the building of the personality. Marcel made his livelihood primarily as a drama critic and publisher’s editor rather than following the more traditional academic path taken by the
philosophers who were his contemporaries. He authored over thirty books and articles and numerous dramatic plays.¹

The early death of Marcel’s mother and his Red Cross work with the families of deceased soldiers caused him to question the meaning of life and death. Losing his young wife emphasized for him this existentialist predicament. He was preoccupied with the idea of maintaining relationship with those who have been separated from loved ones through death. This led to his inquiry into these existentialist themes in which he explored ideas of loving faithfulness and fidelity. As well, his views on interpersonal relations were deeply influenced by his own family’s relationships as he was growing up. Questions of openness and connection, of devotion and love, of fidelity and responsibility toward others grew in him as a result of these early experiences. As well, issues concerning conflict originated for Marcel in these early primary relationships. As an only child, and growing up in a household in which differing temperaments and opinions resulted in strained relationships, pressed him to take a more mature attitude than children at ease in their environment. He came to realize that “life presents radical incompatibilities which cannot be resolved by means of intellectual formulae or conventional attitudes” (Murchland 342). His difficult situation at home, as well as problems he experienced at school, resulted in a sense of anxiety that caused Marcel to seek philosophical and spiritual solutions.

A close friend, François Mauriac,² challenged him into acknowledging that his philosophic views implied a belief in God. Marcel comments that his subsequent conversion to

¹ An extensive bibliography of Marcel’s works and supportive titles is included at the end of this thesis.
Catholicism in 1929 “did not appear as a break but rather as the accomplishment and almost the conclusion of thoughts that had been developing in me for more than ten years” (Marcel Existential Background 64). Marcel relates that he “experienced a kind of peace” saying that “never had I felt more free while having to decide by myself and for myself while being fully aware” (Awakenings 123). He describes his experiences of God as being “more interior than myself” (123) and his conversion as a necessary action following his experience. His commitment was experienced as neither a constraint nor an obligation, but “more like new evidence that I greeted than something I underwent” (124). He observes that “the need for transcendence … is experienced above all, as a kind of dissatisfaction” (MB1 42).³ In this way, Marcel suggests the existence of a religious aspect in human experience.

1.3 Marcel’s Developing Philosophy

It is clear that Marcel did not intend to create a systematic philosophy. Rather, he offered a Socratic look at real life illuminated by personal reflection in contrast to the prevalent dogmatic theorizing. Marcel’s philosophy represents a turn from that of Kierkegaard (1813-1855) in its emphasis on relationship with others over against Kierkegaard’s individualistic approach. Marcel's philosophy of hope transcended Kierkegaard’s themes of anxiety and dread. His thought was therefore in stark opposition to the ideas of the atheistic French existentialists of the period that had developed from these Kierkegaardian themes, especially those of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980). Marcel rejected their view of despair at the absurdity of life, proposing

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² François Mauriac (1885-1970) was a French Catholic writer and winner of the 1952 Nobel Prize for Literature whose serious, psychological dramas revealed the workings of God in human lives.

³ In speaking of transcendence, Marcel does “not mean ‘transcending experience’, but on the contrary [that] there must exist a possibility of having an experience of the transcendent … Transcendence should never be interpreted as a need to pass beyond all experience whatsoever; for beyond experience, there is nothing (MB1 46-7).
hope as the texture of life and its essential condition. Philosophically, Marcel argued that Sartre’s extreme existential nihilism leads to a nothingness devoid of all value. For Marcel, emptiness and alienation are not the fundamental nature of existence. He offered a reality of love, hope and a faithfulness expressed as creative fidelity through time. His was a world build on the values of living commitments.

The text of Marcel’s first publication, *Philosophical Fragments: 1909-1914*, provides us with a number of questions that were to direct his research and form his philosophy. Writing in 1961, from the vantage point of one whose philosophic inquiry had developed and matured

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4 *Outline of Philosophical Fragment*

(Including comments from the introduction of *Philosophical Fragments* (27-32) by Father Lionel A. Blain, Our Lady of Providence Seminary, Warwick, Rhode Island). Philosophical Fragments is a collection of excerpts from various early Marcelian texts.

The collection is comprised as follows:

Excerpt from Manuscript IX (the orange notebook), *First Philosophical Notes and Sketches, 1909 to 1914* (PF 35-41), is “a short philosophical journal with entries dated from June 1909, to May, 1910 … Marcel wrote these notes during his last year the Sorbonne, the year leading to his agrégation. He was under the influence of the Idealists; but already, one senses that he is heading for his emancipation, witness his vigorous critique of their exaggerated intellectualism” (PF 29).

Manuscript XII (the green notebook), *Reflections on the Idea of Absolute Knowledge and on the Participation of Thought in Being, Winter 1910-1911* (PF 42-82), was written during a year of rest which followed “the months of overwork preparatory to taking his degree.” It is a critique of the notion of absolute knowledge, which led to “the first outlines of a theory of participation” (PF 29-30). His two early plays, Grace and *The Sand Palace*, from *The Invisible Threshold*, were written during this period, and in them, Marcel “treats the themes of faith and participation in a more existential manner. Manuscript XII serves as a theoretical support for [Grace] and throws much light on it: “It seems that Oliver, a man of good will and believing in the faith of his brother-in-law without being able to accept the reality of the object of this belief, is young Marcel himself, who, at that time, was wrestling with the problem of God and of the justification of Faith” (PF 30).’

Manuscript XIV (the gray notebook), 1912-1913, is untitled (PF 83-105), and contains three sections: Notes on the ground of values; ‘Notes on the Problem of Immortality’; notes on truth and the unverifiable.

“In this document, Marcel tries to show how the dynamism of dialectical reasoning is a thirst for individuality and freedom, that only a free affirmation makes it possible to pass to reality, and how love leads to belief in the personal immortality of the self and in that of other selves” (PF 30-31).

(“An article in the special September issues of the *Revue de Metaphysique et de Morale*, 1912, is probably prior to this notebook and serves as background for it” (PF 31).

Manuscript XVIII (the pink notebook), *Theory of Participation, 1913-1914* (PF 106-125). In these writings, “Marcel attempts to show what dynamic link exists between the self as act and freedom, love and faith. Related to this notebook are the play, *The Sand Castle* (written in August and September of 1913), the first part of the *Metaphysical Journal* (from January 1 to May 8, 1914), and five other notebooks, that is, manuscripts XIX-XXIII, which constitute a first draft of the beginning of Marcel’s thesis on religious intelligibility (in which the author tries to justify his choice of this subject and makes a critical review of the intellectualist and fideist positions)” (PF 31).
over many years, Marcel considered these early collected fragments “desert-like” and “juvenilia” (Forward (1961) PF 24). He contends that to understand these works, they must be read in conjunction with the first two plays from the same period (1913), Grace and The Sand Palace. He explains that, it is “as if I were saving for drama the concrete insights which, in my philosophical writings, are covered over by a kind of veil” (24). He advises that only certain passages held enduring import, such as “when I denounce the error that is so common among the Idealists and which consists in making an object out of the subject and in converting it thereby into a sterile form” (24). However, it is through this review of his earliest material, complemented by attention to his early dramatic work, that the questions which were to inspire and direct his investigations are to be discovered. A detailed analysis of his expanding inquiry will comprise the remainder of the chapter.

The focus of Marcel’s philosophic research is experience, not reason: “The world is only thinkable through the form of rational necessity; on the other hand, it is only knowable through an experience which inevitably leaves much room to the contingent” (PF 38). He concludes that contingency “is the expression of what is individual in reality; it is the clearest manifestation of the essential fact which metaphysics seems to have failed to explain until now and which is precisely individual experience” (38-39). Marcel considers this as going beyond Kant in that he seeks to understand the “passing from the universality of reason to individual experience” i.e., the “transition from the infinite to the finite” (39). In First Notes and Sketches, Marcel goes on to say that “experience is the mind itself exercising its activity” (40), based on his ideas that “the mind can posit the ideal and the real in their reciprocal correlation [because] the mind is not distinct from them, because they are the mind itself, because somehow they are the
fixation of what makes up its essence. Experience is inherent in the very nature of the mind” (PF 40). These thoughts approach idealism, which Marcel will later clearly denounce. However, what is apparent is his focus on experience, even to the point of attempting a reconciliation of it with mind.

Marcel’s philosophic arguments confirm him as an existentialist. Modern existentialism is regarded as beginning with Søren Kierkegaard’s (1813-1855) thesis of existence and subjectivity over against abstract, objective thinking. Kierkegaard proposed that “truth is subjectivity” (Kierkegaard 227), claiming that objective thinking makes the thinking subject incidental, whereas with subjective thinking, the attention is towards “the existing subject whose existence is a process of becoming” (Nucho 47). For Kierkegaard, the individual is a unity becoming and is offered possibilities and the freedom to choose. These themes were taken up by the French existentialists and developed using Edmund Husserl’s (1859-1938) phenomenological methodology. Husserl had developed the phenomenological method in his search to understand authentic human experience. He stated that every experience that we have is intentional. In other words, it is a ‘consciousness of’ or an ‘experience of’ something. Thus, every experience is correlated with an object. Consequently, every intending has its intended object (Sokolowski 8). The experiencing subject intends an object in an active manner over against the view that one simply ‘has’ an experience in a pure or undistorted form (Lowe xiv). As a consequence of phenomenological, intentional experience, what a person intends is temporal. Memory, therefore, is the remembrance of past experiences of intention. Thus, experience is not a thing, nor is it a space, neither is it something that happens to us. Rather, it is our act of participation in reality. In time and space, we act as we are acted upon, never
passively but receptive to all the acts or intentions of the universe. Marcel cautions that we must avoid the representation of various experiences as "modes of physical spaces" (MB1 48) for the reason that it is the experiencing self that is the ground, the focus, not some erroneous symbolic physical 'experience.' For Marcel, experience is outwardly focused: it is not simply the experience of one's own inner state as, in Cartesian idealism, and its view of the mind in a box. Experience is active and not "a passive recording of impressions" (83).

In conversation with Paul Ricoeur in 1973, Marcel relates that during the time he was writing the second part of his *Metaphysical Journal* (1927), he saw the "indubitable character of existence [and] the impossibility of reducing existence to anything else whatsoever" (TWB *Conversations* 221). From the vantage point of a lifetime of inquiry, he criticizes Schelling and Heidegger for their question: "How is it that something exists, that an entity is?" (221), which he sees as nonsensical, given that "it implies a possibility which is not granted to us, the possibility of abstracting ourselves in some way from existence or of placing ourselves outside existence in order to behold it ... What we are able to behold are objects, things which share in objectivity. Existence, however, is nothing of the sort; existence is prior ... existence is not only given, it is also giving ... existence is the very condition of any thinking whatsoever" (221). In this analysis, Marcel follows the Kantian dialectic of sensation and understanding, excepting that for Marcel it is existence that is the *a priori*, the given dimension behind and before sense perception. Just as Kant distinguished between sensation and knowledge, Marcel "made the

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5 This passage continues with "and there, of course, I am putting myself right on the margin of traditional idealism." Although some of his early thoughts appeared to approach idealism, his philosophy condemns it.
connection between the philosophy of sensation and that of existence [stating that] sensation testifies to our participation in existence” (221).

For Marcel, sensation is not passive. Rather, it can be likened to welcoming (MB1 118) - it is an act. Likewise, responsiveness is not an adequate description of human sensation. Rather, human beings participate - they are not mere spectators. It must be noted that participation necessarily takes place in the present. Participation includes contemplation. In contemplation there is “a kind of inward regrouping of one’s resources, or a kind of ingatheredness; to contemplate is to ingather oneself in the presence of whatever is being contemplated” (126). Thus, the inner and outer merge: “to enter into the depths of one’s self means... to get out of oneself” (131). Thus, our reality is a ‘being-in-situation’ over against an abstract reaching away from life towards reason. If we are able to judge ourselves at all, it is only through this “ingatheredness” in which we contact our inner being and become aware of the “gap between our being and our lives” (MB1 136). Marcel states “both that I am my life and that I am not my life [in the sense that] I am weighing the actual life I have been leading in the balance of the potential life I carry within me, the life that I aspire to lead, the life that I would have to lead if I wanted to become fully myself” (137). For Marcel, a fulfilled life comes through the struggle to become more oneself.

Marcel also understands human reflection as integrated with experience. Keeping in mind that experience is not “a passive recording of impressions” (MB1 83), Marcel claims that “the richer it is experienced, the more, also, it is reflection” (83). At this point in his argument, he introduces new terminology: that of primary reflection, to be understood as involving the

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6 Ricoeur suggest that this claim led to Merleau Ponty’s phenomenology of perception (TWB Conversations 222).
abstract, the analytical and the objective, and of secondary reflection, which concerns itself with deeper personal insights. “Whereas primary reflection tends to dissolve the unity of experience which is first put before it, the function of secondary reflection is essentially recuperative: it reconquers that unity” (83). Ricoeur describes secondary reflection as “a second-order grasp of experiences that primary reflection, reputed to be reductive and objectifying, was held to obliterate and rob of their original, affirmative power” (Ricoeur “Intellectual Autobiography” 7). Using this insight, Marcel developed a unique view in which the philosophy of existence is understood as the mystery of being. He sees mystery as enabling the possibility of a wider view of reality, with the key being the difference between a problem and a mystery. Problems, Marcel believes, are resolved using primary reflection. Mysteries, on the other hand, are approached with secondary reflection. A problem is dismissed from consciousness once it is solved, whereas a mystery remains alive and interesting.

The existing self is known, or more accurately, is manifest in the body. The self is recognized both by others and by itself through the body. Primary reflection sees the self and the body as separate: the self is detached from the body and is able to observe it objectively, as one body among many other bodies. According to Marcel, this type of reflection is essential as “a precondition of any sort of objectivity whatsoever” (MB1 92). Secondary reflection, on the other hand, refuses this separation of the body from the self, offering instead a “sense of one’s total existence” (MB1 93). Marcel claims that body/soul Cartesian dualism is the result of primary reflection: “The structure of my experience offers me no direct means of knowing what I shall still be, what I can still be, once the link between myself and my body is broken by what I call death” (99). Do I have/possess/own my body? Is my body my instrument in the world, a
tool? These questions are asked from the point of view of primary reflection in that they objectify the body, and consider it in an objectively detached manner. Secondary reflection, on the other hand, says “I am my body” (100). However, this is more than a simple identification. Marcel proposes “the idea of the body, not as an object but as a subject” (101). This leads him to suggest a definition of the incarnate being as “a being who appears to himself to be linked fundamentally and not accidentally to his or her body” (101). Marcel uses “the phrase ‘sympathetic mediation’ to convey the notion of our non-instrumental communion with our bodies” (101). He admits to dissatisfaction with the phrase as it indicates that “I am my body” in the sense that “I am a being that has feelings” (101). This is problematic in its illusions to instrumentality, i.e. “the body being, at one and the same time, what feels and what is felt” (102). Thus, Marcel is led to investigate feelings as a mode of participation, positing that sensation is more than the simple receipt of a message, which would be an understanding through primary reflection. Secondary reflection, on the other hand, yields the notion that our body is not our possession or our instrument. Indeed, we cannot step outside our own body. We are our body, not in a materialistic manner, but “in so far as ... the body is an essentially mysterious type of reality, irreducible to those determinate formulae (no matter how interestingly complex they might be) to which it would be reducible if it could be considered merely as an object” (103).

Marcel also states that consciousness is not “a sort of bodiless body which is capable of suffering an analogous series of modifications” (MB1 50). Consciousness is not a thing, but rather is “the contrary of a body, of a thing [and thus] the expression ‘states of consciousness’ involves a contradiction in terms” (50-51). Marcel asserts that consciousness itself is
problematic, as “the word implies something permanent which can only exist ideally” (51). The body, which is subject to change and not permanent, could thus not be linked with a permanent consciousness. This problem led him to a rejection of the theory of psycho-physical parallelism. For Marcel, it is the phenomenology of Husserl that is able to offer a resolution in maintaining that “consciousness is above all consciousness of something which is other than itself [and] self-consciousness being on the contrary a derivative act whose essential nature is, indeed, rather uncertain” (MB1 52).

Experience then is primarily made up of the acts of intention of the experiencing self or subject. In this way, Marcel refutes the materialistic theory of epiphenomenology which states that mental states are the result of physical changes in the brain. He also disagrees with the notion of an objective reality “out there” to which human consciousness corresponds. Language itself contributes to the problem in that experience risks becoming ‘objectified,’ thus becoming, in Marcel’s words, a simulacrum or hardened version of the initial, lived experience. When a simulacrum is repeated, it can become a poor substitute for real experience.

1.4 Marcel’s Questions

Marcel asked a number of questions that were based on his early experiences and investigations. The working out of these problems through his philosophy comprised his life’s work. Major questions which he explored and studied centred on the themes of finitude, morality and absolute knowledge, availability and intersubjectivity, the broken world and hope. Marcel’s incarnational concrete point of view, and his simple examination of his own
experience and those of the characters in his existential dramas provided practical and valuable
tools for the analysis of these issues.

Existential issues of life and death continued to concern Marcel and to inform his
thinking. He had experienced the reality of death with the loss of his mother when he was
barely four years old and it remained painfully present to him. His first play, written as a
schoolboy, was a tragedy, reflecting his experience of loss. This was a theme which resurfaced
in much of his dramatic work\(^7\) as he grappled with the desire to maintain a relationship with
those who had died. In this way, his philosophic views on intersubjectivity informed his analysis
of existential realities so that his focus was less on the personal experience of death, and more
on the struggle to maintain the presence of loved ones beyond death. As noted earlier,
Marcel’s experiences working with the Red Cross, speaking with the families of soldiers lost in
the war effort, again caused him to question the meaning of death and the significance of the
presence of persons one to another. The early death of his wife radically emphasized these
concerns. He bears witness to the existent reality of suffering in his dramatic works. For Marcel,
“in facing [sickness and death], we are at the very heart of our destiny and of our mystery”
(TWB *Conversations* 234). Ricoeur notes that death is “truly the crisis which completely shatters
all faith in existence, all certitude of presence” (234). Writing in the early years of his
philosophic investigations (1912-13), Marcel concludes even then that it is love that overcomes
death: “Love implies the affirmation of survival” (*PF* 97).

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\(^7\) Examples of Marcelian plays where death is the predominant theme are *The Unfathomable* (1919), *The Posthumous Joke* (1923) and *A Mystery of Love* (*The Iconoclast*), written in 1917, revised in 1921.
Marcel examines the concept of fidelity in addressing the existential realities of death and loss. He defines fidelity as constancy plus presence, with constancy understood as the opposite of immutability and that which forms the “rational skeleton of fidelity” (CF 154). He explains that when I am constant, I choose to commit or promise faithfulness to another. However, I am constant in my own regard, for myself, for my own purpose. Presence, in contrast, has to do with the other. I am present for the other. Presence can only be appreciated by the person to whom it is pledged. It is the quality of making the other person feel that I am with them. It is entirely subjective – for them. Constancy enacted alone entails obligation whereas a fidelity, which adds the quality of presence, involves freedom which cannot be coerced. It is the character of fidelity that “it offers an essential element of spontaneity [and is] radically independent of the will” (155). Marcel offers an illustration in which a person joins an association or party. As a result of pledging faithfulness, subjugation to the party can become hypocrisy or even rebellion. More dangerous still, it can result in a situation which “culminate(s) in the enlistment of the soul itself, [with] discipline becoming internalized to the point where all inner spontaneity is eliminated” (CF 157). This can result from constancy being enacted alone. It is concerned with duty. Fidelity, on the other hand, is an inner disposition directed towards the other, for their own sake.

Marcel then turns to the question of contingency with regard to fidelity. Given that fidelity is premised on inner feelings, he asks whether a promise of fidelity can honestly be made to another given the possibility of the feeling altering as time passes. He admits that a person is unable to guarantee that their inner disposition will not change. However, Marcel develops his theory using a phenomenological concept of time. He speaks to the danger of
regarding the past like snapshot moments in a film, stating that such an instantaneous attitude is illogical. “These snapshots can only capture an immediacy which has to be evaluated in terms of a larger whole which is actually indeterminate” (*CF* 161). The person is constantly changing and developing, and therefore the past must be viewed within this context. Phenomenology describes our remembering of the past as a re-experiencing. The past is not viewed objectively from the outside, with each moment an event frozen in time. There is a sweeping movement to the reality of life. Marcel also condemns an instantaneous attitude whereby a future state is understood as something which will occur in the same way as external events occur. Marcel contents that “this is tantamount to denying any efficacy … hence I am denied any capacity for acting on myself, for somehow creating myself” (162). This is crucial to Marcel’s theory in which an active decision, taken in the present to commit oneself to another, actually creates the future. The person envisions a different possibility after they give themselves to the other. Their behavior is completely colored by their act of commitment. Rather than fear that their commitment to the other will become reduced to an obligatory constancy, Marcel understands that “the decision that the commitment will not again be questioned [becomes] demoted to the rank of a temptation … the possibility has been denied” (162). Marcel names this fundamental value of human existence and relationships “creative fidelity” (*CF* 162). Not only is this the heart of a moral life, but also through creative fidelity, a person is able to transcend the temporal and the spatial. In this way, he or she can maintain faithful, loving relationship with those who are lost to them through death. To support this human fidelity, Marcel proposes an absolute fidelity which he suggests is faith in God, and he then posits that it is through fidelity to the absolute that human beings find hope.
Arguments concerning morality were a pressing issue for Marcel. Given that “the affirmation of God is implied in every moral act, and not only in the awareness that we might have of our rational eternity” (PF 36-7), Marcel posits that the moral self exists only in relationship to God and through action in the world of experience. This is contrasted with Sartre’s position, expressed in the words of Dostoyevsky: “God does not exist, everything is permissible” (Sartre 28).

The rigid moral discipline imposed by his aunt in his formative years initially led Marcel to question the origins of morality and the nature of the moral universe of experience. His view of morality differed from the Kantian variety. Marcel affirms that “the key-note of [his] dramatic work is ethical ... 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” (Marcel “The Drama of the Soul in Exile” Gabriel Marcel: Three Plays 34). Ethical truth is not simply arrived at through clear thinking, but through struggle in the real world. As Marcel says “lucidity reduced to itself is without doubt insufficient to establish a truth. Joined to it must be mutual compassion, and also humility” (TWB 95). Truth is a process which “can emerge only by means of an ordeal which always presents a tragic character” (101). Truth then is not separate from values and faith. “Truth on the existential level cannot depend exclusively on intellectual processes. Something must be added, something belonging to the soul” (95). Truth is action in the world, revealed in relationships. Therefore, Marcel envisions that a genuinely ethical person “is not

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8 Three Marcelian plays which investigate morality and ethics are: A Man of God (1925), Ariadne (1936) and The Votive Candle (1931).
merely someone who has a taste for life, but someone who spreads that taste, showering it, as it were, around him ... [he has] something essentially creative about him” (MB1 139). This is set over against a static existence of repetitive apathy, as often depicted in existentialism.

In this way, Marcel places creativity at the basis of ethics. He refutes an ethical individualism which sees the person as a self-contained monad and envisions instead an open, creative community (MB1 139). It is also through the mystery of freedom that the individual is able to become a moral person-in-situation-with-others. 9 This understanding of freedom is over against Sartre’s unsettling vision as vividly described in his play Nausea, where the possibility of change causes his main character to be physically sick with the disorienting perception that nothing is solid. In another of Sartre’s plays, Portrait of the Anti-Semite, his character “is afraid of freedom, openness, and change and longs to be as solid as a thing. He wants an identity, he wants to be something (italics mine)” (Kaufmann 44). As the play proceeds, we see how he abdicates his humanity by taking on the concrete role he so desired to achieve and, in the process, his freedom is forfeit. Freedom is premised on possibilities, possibilities on opportunities, and opportunities are premised on change. For Marcel, freedom for creative change is what allows for the development of the moral self.

Marcel questions the way in which absolute knowledge “seems to be infinite and to negate the finite as such. On the other hand, it obviously embraces and includes all that is real in the latter” (PF 44). Even in his early writings (1910-11), Marcel moves to resolve this

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9 For Marcel, a mystery is “something in which I am myself involved (engagé), [whereas] a problem, as the Greek literal meaning suggests, is ‘thrown’ before us and can therefore be objectified ... Consequently a mystery is not thinkable except as a sphere in which the distinction of what is in me from what is before me loses its meaning and its initial value” (EA 169 as quoted in Spiegelberg The Phenomenological Movement 452).
contradiction by letting go of the idealism in which “absolute knowledge [exists as] the ideal of finite thought” (58) and positing instead that through “intellectual intuition, through the act of transcendence, thought … affirms its identity … and its own complete freedom [and this is] the preliminary condition of faith and inaugurates a new type of intelligibility” (PF 82). In this way, Marcel questioned whether the absolute participates in finite reality, hypothesizing that “God … is infinitely above existence since He is beyond all truth and can only be grasped by faith through the act which links Him intimately to thought” (81). For Marcel, these questions raise ideas of participation, faith and mystery. He resolves that the absolute is unknowable, and that the finite subject only participates in the absolute through faith. According to Marcel, the nature of this participation is a mystery. In this way, being itself is understood as a participation in mystery, not a substance or an object, neither is it a representation. Being is “that in which thought participates” (84). I am is “the synthesis of the ego and being” (84). “The thought of being and being coincide” through participation, here defined as “the act by which the individual creates himself” (91). In this way, Marcel conceives of a “multiplicity of individualities” creating “an order of love” (91), as offering a view of reality far greater than anything put forward by idealism. For Marcel, ultimately:

Love is the act of a free mind, affirming another free self and which is free only by this very affirmation. There is, at the root of love, the belief in the inexhaustible richness and the unpredictable spontaneity of the being who is loved. From the moment when this being is posited as an object, love becomes knowledge, and the creative freedom of the lover becomes fettered and transformed into an abstract form which will soon allow the reappearance of that abstract content which is the empirical individuality. Thought, then, is love insofar as it is creative interpretation – and in this measure it is also pure freedom. Love cannot be an object of knowledge, for the individuality which is actualized in love goes beyond knowledge, and transcends it then and there. And love is not a game of subjective illusions, for there is not subjectivity, in the exact sense of that
term, except in opposition to the objectivity of an abstract knowing. We participate in being, therefore, only in the measure that we make ourselves individuals, that we create ourselves through love as pure subjects. But is love this participation itself? Is love this life in God to which one must be born anew in order to have true being? Or is it only an introduction or a prelude to it? (PF 109-10).

The preceding passage, composed early in his career (1913-14) reveals Marcel’s struggle to understand the nature of love and how it is that human beings are able to enter into relationship with one another. He formulates the term, “disponibilité” to encompass ideas of openness and the availability for communion with another. In his view, the other person is seen as unique and irreplaceable, a Thou in the same sense as the term is used in the work of Martin Buber (1878-1965). “Disponibilité,” and its converse, “indisponibilité,” can be understood as handiness and unhandiness, respectively, meaning “having or not having, in a given contingency, one’s resources to hand or at hand” (MB1 163) Thus, the self-centred person is seen to be ‘unhandy’ in that “he remains incapable of responding to calls made upon him by life … incapable of sympathizing with other people, or even imagining their situation. He remains shut up in himself, in the petty circle of his private experience, which forms a kind of hard shell round him that he is incapable of breaking through. He is ‘unhandy’ from his own point of view and unavailable from the point of view of others” (163). Sartre puts forward a view that reveals persons as ‘unhandy’ and unavailable, which he premises on each person’s individual freedom. His anthropology posits, therefore, human beings devoid of the reality of a primary dependence on the other, which Marcel suggested leads to moral breakdown. Marcel’s moral analysis is expanded through the notion of “crispation” which denotes a translucent lightness of being in which the person remains open to the world, “to fresh scenes and novel times,” with

10 Marcel would have taken these terms from Martin Heidegger (1889-1976).
experiences that are not fixed and lifeless, the result of a being enclosed in a secret shell (Marcel Availability 12-13). The subjective life of experience is primary, rather than an objective idealization of the personality.

Marcel proposes a theory of the interrelatedness of individuals, one to another, in his thesis of intersubjectivity. Marcel states that “a we-territory (the territory of intersubjectivity) is more original in experience that an I-territory” (McCown 43). In other words, our experience reveals that we constitute ourselves as interiority only as we recognize the reality of the other. The ‘we’ is described as the more basic reality in Marcel’s vision of the self arising within the sea of intersubjectivity, like an island in the sea. Intersubjectivity is the background or horizon against which the ‘I’ and the ‘thou’ stand out, and it is therefore the condition for the possibility of conversation … community … communion. “I am constituted by my relations with others. It is the ‘we’ which creates the ‘I’… Intersubjective acts found the subject” (Gallagher 28). Marcel’s intersubjective thesis is grounded on his existentialist philosophy which refutes the idealistic notion of the person as a mental representation, or a construct of the mind with its resultant outcome of making interpersonal dialogue and communion impossible. This counterpoint illustrates the value of Marcel’s approach, as Goethe confirms in saying that “the investigator of nature should take heed not to reduce observation to mere notion, to substitute words for this notion, and to use and deal with these words as if they were things (Goethe 283).

Intersubjectivity “plays its part within the life of the subject, even at moments when the latter’s only intercourse is with itself. In its own intrinsic structure, subjectivity is already, and in the most profound sense, genuinely inter-subjective” (MB1 182). Marcel’s thesis of the self
states that “the original unity and plurality are yoked together within the borders of the unique being that I am” (183). Marcel sees the past through the lens of this understanding. Given that “there are modes of existence that are not objectifiable, but that have infinite possibilities of resurrection,” (185) the past can be seen through an understanding of a “felt quality of identity [and a] continuity of an historical becoming” (187). This enables the recognition of people even after time has lapsed and they are quite changed. This “manifoldness within the self,” (188) refutes the representation of personal time as “a sequence of cinematic images,” (189) for it is impossible that a human life should be reduced to “a mere flow of images and .... that its structure should be merely that of a succession [given that] our inner experience, as we live that experience, would be an impossibility for a being who was merely a succession of images” (189). Feelings cannot be reduced to this simple play of images or the story of a life (190).

However, the inner life is not static and invariable, as in an abstract concept, but rather transcends “the opposition between the successive and the abstract, between the endless flow of sensation and the static eternity of the concept” (191). This new category is the mysterious “juncture of life and truth,” (192) a profound depth glimpsed at a distance yet intimately near which we recognize as our true home. The future is “somehow mysteriously in harmony with the most distant past” (194). Thus, just as the far and near merge, so too, the now and then merge. For Marcel, this is Eternity. Marcel states that “the opposition of the successive, as such, and the abstract, as such, can be transcended at the supratemporal level which is also, as it were, the very depth or inwardness of time” (MB1 194). For Marcel, time is not experienced in an objective sense as duration, but rather as the mystery within which we are involved. Eternity is the eternal present in which “we live and move and have our being” (Holy Bible NIV Acts
17:28). Marcel’s entire philosophy is supported by his understanding of eternity. For example, he affirms that “fidelity is conceived not as fidelity to a certain future state that I desire, but as fidelity to an underlying unity that grounds my being” (Tattam 81). Further, in his “phenomenological explorations of hope, time is associated with reductive objectification that does not even allow for hope’s (genuine) possibility, whereas eternity signifies ... a more global appreciation of human reality capable of recognizing the unconditional values that ground such a disposition” (82). In this way, Marcel’s philosophy was able to transcend the temporal, revealing the mystery of a reality overflowing with hope and the fullness of human potentiality.

In the play, *Le Monde Cassé*, the “broken world” of the title is revealed in the empty life and relationships of the attractive, yet despairing protagonist. Marcel describes this as “a world without heart” (*MB1* 22). The increasing unity of the earth’s peoples does not, for Marcel, lead to a coming planetary consciousness, but reveals a world without real community, one without close human relationships. In this world, persons are treated as agents; specialization leads to finding identity in assigned roles; inner life and creativity are lost. Although bureaucracy offers a certain social equality, in this world, slogans pass for truths so that “metaphysical thinking loses its meaning and even ceases to be a practicable possibility” (36). In the face of this, Marcel calls for reflection and imagination in creating a world of peace. In his address on the occasion of his receipt of the Peace Prize of the Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels at Frankfurt in 1964 (*Marcel, Preface: The Philosopher and Peace*, included in *PF: 7-19*), he spoke of a “brotherly world” (9) in which all persons can contribute to peace. This is the only legitimate goal for history, he insisted. Marcel admits that peace is an eschatological concept. However, he affirms that we must establish “a community of hearts and spirits” (17), in which each person works for
peace in this mortal world (17). This is his great hope – a hope he places in the God of peace and in humanity: “I hope for You, Who are the living peace, and for us, who are still fighting with ourselves and each other, that one day it will be granted us to enter You and share your completeness” (19). Marcel submits that the theme that dominated his work “is that of hope, understood as mysterium” (19). Hope and peace, he said, can neither be acquired by us nor forced upon us, but rather “rises like a reviving breeze at the end of a hot day to him who has erred much and fought much, often against himself ... like a blessing from another world” (18-19). Hope is a response to the infinite Being. The ontological condition of hope is that of absolute truth, in contrast to despair which is a temporal temptation. In this way, Marcel affirms a faith and trust in God.

Gabriel Marcel’s existentialism with its focus on the concrete person was important for Ricoeur as a beginning point for his work on the human person-in-situation, especially with respect to their relationships one to another. Marcel had developed a novel understanding of subjectivity through his theory of creative fidelity. Understood as fidelity plus presence, he put forward the view that a subject’s presence is for the other person. It is directed towards the other, it is for their sake. Thus, it becomes subjective – for them. This understanding of intersubjectivity was influential for Ricoeur’s ethical thesis, in which “the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other” (Oneself as Another 3). Marcel’s analysis of temporality clarified these insights as revealed in the human freedom of the constant yet changeable self who participates in communion with others. Ricoeur’s narrative self-identity is the result of and is created within this world of contingency. For Marcel, the ability to act freely reveals creativity as the foundation of ethics.
He posited that the moral self exists through action in the world of experience. In these ways, Marcel’s contribution to the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur can be seen as significant.
1.5 Appendix: Marcel and the Theatre

As a boy, Marcel exhibited a keen interest in the dramatic, and as an only child, he invented dialogues with imaginary siblings. His father read plays aloud at home and took the young Marcel to experience the theatre. At school, Marcel wrote his first play, a tragedy, which reflected his experience of losing his mother. It was a theme that resurfaced in much of his dramatic work as he grappled with the desire to maintain a relationship with those who had died. Along with music, Marcel considered drama one of the “the three concentric rings”:

“The first [ring] was music; the deepest and innermost, beyond words. The second, drama; the concrete incarnation of conflict expressed in dialogue. The third and outermost ring, philosophy, brought reasoned analysis to the issues affecting the meaning of life” (Hanley "Marcel: The Playwright Philosopher" 241).

In explaining the import of the dramatic in his life, Marcel emphasizes that: “it is in these imaginative works of mine that my thought is to be found in its virgin state, in, as it were, its first gushings from the source” (MB1 22). He describes how “the drama, as a mode of expression, has forced itself upon me, and become intimately linked with my properly philosophical work” (22). Marcel likens his plays to islands: “One lands on an island with both feet” (Hanley, Introduction Ghostly Mysteries). In other words, in his existential dramas, the audience, or reader, is enabled to enter into the situation. He considers his philosophy, on the other hand, as continents which can be “mapped out, juxtaposed, and thus compared and contrasted to the thought of other philosophers whose boundaries are contiguous to them”

11 Although his childhood was filled with musical experiences and as an adult, he wrote piano improvisations, Marcel only began formal composing in 1945 with the encouragement and assistance of his wife, writing musical interpretations of the poems of, among others, Baudelaire and Rilke.
(Marcel, Preface The Secret is in the Isles, 8 as quoted in Hanley, Introduction Ghostly Mysteries). Marcel presents his dramas as dealing with the transcendent, spiritual dimension of human experience. For him, “the chief function of the theatre [is] not to relate the particular to the general or to a law or to an idea, but to awaken or re-awaken in us the consciousness of the infinite which is concealed in the particular ... in this way alone can the dramatist penetrate to our centre and arrive at that zone of concrete universality which music and metaphysics reach by other convergent ways” (Marcel “The Drama of the Soul in Exile” Gabriel Marcel: Three Plays 27). For Marcel, the spiritual aspect of his work is of the utmost importance. His plays offer a glimpse of the eternal presence of God seen in the transcendent experiences witnessed in the concrete lives of persons of faith.

In his conversation with Paul Ricoeur in 1973, Marcel considers the relationship between his philosophic and dramatic work, saying that the existing, thinking subject must be allowed to speak, for if we speak for it or of it, we objectify and distort it (TWB Conversations 231). In this same discussion, Ricoeur observes that in Marcel’s plays, nothing is resolved for the characters. Marcel speculates whether this may be likened to Kierkegaard’s ‘indirect communication’ (232), given the latter’s dramatic inclination. Ricoeur continues, noting that Marcel does not offer judgment in his plays, but exercises “what [Marcel] has called somewhere ‘that higher justice which resembles charity’” (231). Ricoeur observes that in his plays, “destinies remain intertwined, unseparated” (231), just as he had observed in life. Marcel uses his plays to present diverse perspectives, allowing the audience to interpret the events for themselves, without giving theatrical guidance for their thoughts or judgments.
As a child experiencing the relationships within his own family, Marcel had become aware that each person “had clearly diverging positions [and that] each seemed a prisoner of his own viewpoint” (*TWB Conversations* 232). For this reason, Marcel realized early on the need to raise oneself “up to a certain level where everyone would be included, where each one would have his place, where each one would in some way be justified” (232). In his plays, Marcel “refuse(s) to privilege any one character ... all his characters are plagued with uncertainty and indecision” (Tattam 713). In his earlier plays, Marcel notes that there is a condemnation of the person who judges, whom he labels “the one who condemns” (*TWB Conversations* 232). He suggests that this represents the beginning of his movement towards a Christian ethics. For Marcel, ethics is grounded in reality, not in lofty moral systems of the mind. He cautions that we “not sacrifice the duties of our situation in life to higher obligations, which may be no more than phantoms born of our own boredom or our own pride” (*The Drama of the Soul in Exile* *Gabriel Marcel: Three Plays* 33). Marcel was adamant that each person be understood as a being-in-situation and that their actions seen through the lens of their incarnate lives which include suffering and tragedy.

Marcel identifies that “the central theme [in his plays] is a living relationship seen at work in a particular situation” (*The Drama of the Soul in Exile* *Gabriel Marcel: Three Plays* 17). To accomplish this philosophically, Marcel made use of Husserl’s phenomenological attitude in which one reflects on human life as it is lived in a natural way, making use of the epoché in which judgment is suspended as actions and beliefs are observed. “The unfolding of the plays is the first reflection. The various personalities reveal their differing fundamental attitudes, and the interpretation of life situations those attitudes produce. The final scene does
not offer a solution rather it leaves the audience with questions that invite them to reconstruct
the play in retrospect (Hanley “Introduction” Ghostly Mysteries: Existential Dramas 14). By
leading the audience into secondary reflection of their theatrical experience, Marcel
demonstrates the value of his concrete, existential philosophy. Although Marcel considered his
plays an integral part of illustrating his philosophical position, others, including Paul Ricoeur, did
not agree on their import and their ability to convey philosophic theory.
Chapter Two: Emmanuel Mounier

2.1 Introduction

Although Emmanuel Mounier cannot be identified as an existentialist in the strict sense, he was influenced by existentialism to a great degree. His explorations into the human condition were achieved through personal experience. Like Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973), he became increasingly interested in the communal aspects of experience and focused his attention more and more on interpersonal relationships. In this way, similarly to Marcel, his work was not individualistic like Jean-Paul Sartre’s (1905–1980). As a young man, he was a devout Catholic and explored the inner life with fervor. His philosophic investigations developed as the result of his intense desire to grow in the spiritual life. The resulting thesis of personalism was well received by thinkers of various religious persuasions and was influential both philosophically and politically, in France and abroad.

Mounier’s story is the story of personalism and of the journal *Esprit*. Mounier was born a French Catholic in Grenoble in 1930. His parents were of humble means, but endeavored to offer him opportunities for intellectual stimulation and religious education. He was taken to concerts and lectures by his father and to confession by his mother. His grandparents were rural peasants and Mounier credits them with his closeness to these people and their ways (“Letter to Xavier de Virieu” 413). He was an introspective young man. His father had
encouraged him to become a country doctor, but his unhappiness with his medical studies led him into depression. He left medical school when he met Jacques Chevalier.\footnote{Jacques Chevalier (1882–1962) was a French, Catholic philosopher who later collaborated with the Vichy Regime. A disciple of Henri Bergson, he opposed the right wing Action Française. His ardent Catholicism combined with his modernist views cut him off from many schools of philosophy in France.}

Chevalier was a young philosophy professor who had dreams of creating an organization for young Catholic intellectuals in Grenoble and soon became a mentor to the young Mounier. Chevalier was a militant Catholic who restricted Mounier’s exposure to any philosophy with which he disagreed. During this period, Mounier read the mystics, studied theology from a philosophical point of view, and adopted his mentor’s view of “a divine pattern in modern intellectual development, a profoundly evolutionary view of history shared by few French Catholics at the time” (Mounier *Entretiens I*). As well, and with Chevalier’s blessing, Mounier devoted himself to Henri Bergson’s\footnote{Henri Bergson (1859–1941) was one of the most famous and influential French philosophers of the late 19th century-early 20th century. Bergson’s writings were placed on The Index of Forbidden Books by the Catholic Church in 1914. His philosophy emphasized lived experience, divine communication with human beings and the interior life.} teachings during this period. Chevalier sent him to Paris to study at the Sorbonne, where the young man was horrified by the insincerity of the religious environment he found there. Initially, he was devoted to the spiritual life over against intellectualism and opposed to politics, seeking faith in community. On the recommendation of Chevalier, Mounier, along with his friend, Jean Daniélou,\footnote{Jean Daniélou (1905–1974) was a young Jesuit seminarian who later became a Cardinal.} studied with Father Pouget\footnote{William Pouget (1847-1933) was a Vincentian priest, who taught philosophy, history, science and Scripture. Suspended from teaching by the Pope in 1905, he became blind soon after. His modernist teaching was influential with French intellectuals in his later years.} and Jean Guitton,\footnote{Jean Guitton (1901–1999) was an honored French Catholic academic philosopher, theologian and prolific writer.} as well as attending informal afternoons with
Jacques Maritain.\textsuperscript{17} Maritain was to have a strong initial influence on Mounier, although their thought later diverged.

At the age of twenty-four, Mounier came under the influence of the anti-clerical French writer, Charles Péguy,\textsuperscript{18} from whom he learned of a form of faith expressed through social action. He came to appreciate that not only were the mystics “founders of orders, of religions, of new spiritualities, [they were] the great movers of men on the political level as well” (Hellman 32). Mounier had sought inward enlightenment in the writings of the mystics, yet Péguy’s devotion to Joan of Arc had led him to see faith differently through a life of action. This turn was to culminate in a new mode of philosophical orientation, \textit{personalism}, which will be addressed in detail later in the chapter.

Mounier’s disenchantment with the intellectual pursuits demanded by his professors at the Sorbonne caused him to move more and more towards an engagement with social justice. It was not only academia, but the arid intellectualism and lack of true community in the French Catholic Church which also frustrated Mounier. He remained devoted to Chevalier, referring to his mentor’s “true philosophy” (Mounier “Letter to Jacques Chevalier” 949) as critical to him in an environment he found intolerable. During this difficult period, the death of a close childhood friend with whom he had felt united “by the discovery … of our souls” (Mounier “Letter to Madeleine Mounier” 429) caused him to explore the meaning of his personal relationships in depth. It was Jacques Maritain who was to draw Mounier’s devotion away from Chevalier. In

\textsuperscript{17} Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) was a French philosopher and Catholic convert. Known for his new Thomism, he was ambassador to the Vatican from 1945-48.

\textsuperscript{18} Charles Péguy (1873–1914) was a socialist, and later a Catholic. He was a writer, poet, and philosopher to whom Mounier looked for inspiration.
Maritain, Mounier found a disciplined intellect and a spirituality that moved Mounier to abandon Chevalier’s system and accept that Bergsonism should be recognized as simply a stage in his development. He began seeking guidance from Maritain. It was Maritain who aided Mounier as he worked to establish a journal as a vehicle to articulate his thoughts. This journal, which was to be known as *Espirt*, was to become the signature expression of his dual concerns with the inner spiritual life and religious expression through communal activity. It was his vision of a renewed and faithful society that motivated Mounier’s focus on the communal. His experiences with what he considered the lack of true religious faith and sentiment in Catholic France can be understood as an extension of his intense personal devotion: “His concern with the purification of his soul soon evolved towards a tightly organized communal effort to purify an entire society” (Hellman 35).

Both Jacques Maritain and Gabriel Marcel were instrumental in helping to launch *Espirt*. Maritain supplied editorial expertise and, together with Marcel, helped to secure financing. The exiled Russian, Nicholas Berdyaev,19 was also committed to the fledgling journal, attracting further support from the Left, owing to his positive analyses of the Soviet experiment. Berdyaev was in accord with Mounier’s project, which was “to make Christianity the foundation of culture and civilization” (Nucho 16). Also on board were Mounier’s long time friend, Jean Daniélou and his associates, George Izard,20 and André Déléage, Izard’s best friend. Déléage, a Catholic convert and activist, shared Izard’s disillusionment with the academic establishment.

19 Nicholas Berdyaev (1874-1948) was a Russian philosopher and religious thinker, a Christian existentialist who was exiled from Russia in 1922. He then made his home in Paris, and was active in the intellectual life of the city.  
20 George Izard was a friend and collaborator of Mounier’s, a passionate personality who had a strong influence on him. Izard married Jean Daniélou’s sister and worked with Mounier on a book on Péguy. He was destined for a career in law.
Mounier worked tirelessly bringing Esprit into being, becoming its editor and champion and ensuring its continuity. The journal became the mouthpiece of Mounier’s thought and was to constitute the cornerstone of his specific personalist approach, which was definitely to the left of Catholicism as it existed in France.

Esprit was the only French journal from the 1930’s to survive the war. Esprit did not court either the political Left or the Right, but was directed at the “spiritual man” and “the community of the spirit” (Hellman 5). Mounier’s turn to politics began with his association with Déléage and Izard. Together with the Daniélous, in the spirit of Péguy, they sought a radical alternative to French conservative, Catholic culture. Theirs was a unique interpretation of Catholicism that grew in reaction to the extreme Right of the traditional Roman Catholic Church in France. They sought a renaissance in Catholicism advanced through the spirit of what Henri Bergson called the élan vital, aspiring to “patiently, cooperatively remake the Renaissance after four centuries of error” (Mounier The Personalist Manifesto 10). Mounier and his collaborators desired to create revival in the French Catholic Church and restructure French society:

Contrary to what takes place with many petty reformers, our program must be cut in a pattern of large dimension. Historically, the crisis that presses upon us is more than a simple political crisis or even than a profound economic crisis. We are witnessing the cave-in of a whole area of civilization, one, namely, that was born towards the end of the middle ages, was consolidated and at the same time threatened by the industrial age, is capitalistic in structure, liberal in its ideology, bourgeois in its ethics (Mounier Personalist Manifesto 8).
2.2 Personalism

Although personalism is difficult to define, it was unquestionably something new, passionate and influential. It was more a way of life than an abstract philosophy. The philosopher, Paul Ricoeur\(^\text{21}\) was reluctant even “to define personalism as a ‘philosophy’” (Esprit 174 [Dec 1950] 861-2). Jean Lacroix, a founding member and regular contributor of Esprit, who became the philosophy editor of the newspaper Le Monde, called personalism an “anti-ideology” (Le personnalisme comme anti-idéologie). According to Jean-Marie Domenach, who took the editorship of Esprit in 1957, personalism can be said to be “a method for thinking and living,” a description taken from Mounier’s Personalist Manifesto (271). More precisely, as Mounier said, a person is more of “a presence … than a being, a presence that is active, without limits… self-determining and free” (Mounier Personalism 35). For Mounier, it is essential that personalism be expressed through community. The beginning of the review, Esprit, in 1932 gave him the opportunity to articulate and develop his specific personalist viewpoint.

What needs to be stressed is that personalism calls for the absolute valuation of the human person. Mounier himself explains that personalism is a philosophy, but not a system: “its central affirmation being the existence of free and creative persons” (Mounier, Personalism xv). According to Mounier, systematization is not possible due to the unpredictability of free human choices. For Mounier, the human person is “the most marvelous object in the world … it is the one reality that we know, and that we are at the same time fashioning … Present everywhere, it is given nowhere” (xvii). As a result, a personalist view is more than a simply

\(^{21}\) Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) was a distinguished 20th century French philosopher, noted for his pioneering work in phenomenological hermeneutics.
focus on individual rights as they have been enshrined in the Western statutes of human rights and freedoms, but envisions a non-reductive understanding of the human person, freely creating life and society “in the adventure of responsible liberty” (xviii). Personalism makes a strong distinction between the terms the individual and the person, the former being a simple designation of the human being as a part of the whole, i.e. of society, whereas the latter, the person, is the unique creature who has the freedom and creativity to grow as a personality and in relation to others and to God. This indefinable essence of the person is neither a substance nor a ghost within, but is “the living activity of self-creation, of communication and of attachment, that grasps and knows itself, in the act, as the movement of becoming personal” (Mounier Personalism xviii).

Politically, Mounier contrasts his vision of persons in a living, creative and free society as distinct from both the individualism of liberal capitalism and the communalism manifest in communism. He saw his philosophy as a defense against both ideologies which were so forcefully present in France in the 1930’s. Instead, he called for a third way, in resistance to these two powerful principles. Mounier had to deal with the extremist political views of the Ordre Nouveau with its ties to National Socialism, and the ultra-leftist Third Force. Both factions were represented among members within the Esprit movement itself. This caused Mounier to work towards reconciling the contradictory influences that existed within French society before the Second World War. He aligned himself with neither the Right nor the Left, although he had disappointing exchanges with both. Paradoxically, he was invited to join both the French

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22 In the same way, process philosophy posits the whole of the cosmos to be in the process of development, with evolution a process of freedom, a freedom that allows for new and creative possibilities. The human person is a dynamic becoming, enriched by others, their environment, the past and future possibilities.
Communist party and Vichy’s National Revolution (Hellman 249). The political process in its own right did not interest Mounier. He remained committed to a non-violent, spiritual revolution.

According to Mounier, the personal is “the highest form of existence” (Mounier Personalism xviii) and “the mode of existence proper to man” (Mounier Personalism xix). He considers Socrates’ ‘Know thyself’ to be the first great personalist revolution known to us, but that it had “only a limited effect against the surrounding resistances” (xx). Mounier suggests that it was not until the rise of Christianity that the notion of the person was possible. He explains that before this, human beings were neither free nor creative since they were absorbed into the communal, the family and the city, and bowed their will to Fate. With Christianity came the concept of a creation ex nihilo - a new creation - and of a personal God who affirmed the eternal destiny of each and every person, offering them an intimate relationship and the freedom to participate in communion with Him. This provided a real choice for persons, given the reality of sin. Not only is the individual human being given inestimable value in Christianity, but the Christian community is affirmed in the doctrine of the unity of the Body of Christ and in the Trinity. According to Mounier this reveals a deity who is actually involved in an intimate dialogue between the unique persons of the Trinity (Mounier Personalism xxii). Mounier views this Trinitarian understanding of God in Christianity as paralleling the importance of personalism.

Mounier concocted a rather mixed bag from philosophical precedents. He surprisingly maintains that what Descartes envisaged as the Cogito offered a fresh outlook which promoted
the personalist vision in so far as it established the centrality of the subject. At the same time, however, he recognizes that Cartesian rationalism and idealism led to the “dissolution of concrete existence in the idea” (Mounier *Personalism* xv). Moreover, Descartes’ metaphysical solipsism undermined personalism’s realistic view that sees the other person as existing and able to be experienced as-he-is rather than as a concept within one’s own mind.

Mounier reserves his greatest philosophic criticism for Hegel, naming him “the imposing and monstrous architect of the imperialism of the impersonal idea; in which all things and all beings are dissolved into their representations: it is not by chance that Hegel comes, in the final reckoning, to believe in complete subservience of the individual to the State” (Mounier *Personalism* xxiv). Mounier attributed the inhuman aspects of Marxism to its founder’s extrapolation to history and materialism of the Hegelian dialectic. However, much as he critiqued Marx (1818-1883), Mounier admitted that Marx upheld the human person over the Hegelian abstraction and fought against the depersonalization he saw inherent in capitalism. Mounier agreed with Marx that Hegel’s reduction of “the living reality of men to the Idea” (Mounier *Personalism* xxv) corresponds to that of the capitalist paradigm which treats men as objects used for production.

Kierkegaard’s (1813-1855) focus on the experiencing subject also informed the development of Mounier’s personalism. Kierkegaard had challenged the Hegelian system, defending human freedom and its origination in the divine. Mounier was, however, critical of Kierkegaard’s individualism and lack of attention to the interpersonal and the communal
aspects. In contrast, Mounier praises the personalist contribution of Maine de Biran. He considered de Biran a forerunner of French personalism in that he “denounces the mechanical mentality of the ideologues” (Mounier Personalism xxiv). He viewed de Biran as offering the beginnings of an existential phenomenology in which consciousness and the world are not in opposition, but instead see in the self “the effort by which man acts upon the world” (xxiv).

For these reasons, Mounier’s personalism was in sympathy with the existentialism which emerged in France in the first half of the twentieth century. However, Mounier was opposed to the notion of the isolated self proposed by existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre. For Mounier, the person exists within the communal. However, he concurred with the passion for liberty and the freedom of the person that was so central to the thought of the new existentialists. This radical freedom was affirmed and enlarged through the methodology of phenomenology that had been established by Husserl (1859-1938). According to Husserl, the experiencing subject intends an object or situation in an active manner over against the view that one simply has an experience in a pure or undistorted form (Lowe xiv). Mounier, in turn, interpreted phenomenological intentionality as moving the human being towards an openness to the world and therefore to the opportunities for free choices.

Mounier was influenced by an existentialist understanding of freedom which claims a realistic stance. Freedom is not an object, nor a theorem, where “we try to establish that there is some freedom in the world – but in vain” (Mounier Personalism 54). Rather, he states that “freedom is the affirmation of the person, it can be lived, but not seen” (54). Yet, existence is not merely a continuous evolution and renewal. It has “continuity and density .... [Therefore] I

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23 Maine de Biran (1766-1824) was a French philosopher and psychologist, an aristocrat involved in politics.
am not only what I do, and my world is not simply what I will. I am something given to myself and [to] the world [that] existed before me” (57). At the same time, freedom for Mounier is constrained by personal limitations, those of others as well as by the self’s restricting necessities and directing values (57). Nonetheless, the human person is free, not in the sense of a freedom to pursue all desires and to exercise all power, but a freedom received as gift, a freedom given to each person. Mounier quotes Bakunin who said: “I cannot truly be free, until everyone around me, man or woman, is equally free … I become free only through the liberty of others” (58). Thus, freedom and intersubjectivity are intertwined and mutually dependent, for not only does intersubjectivity require the freedom of each soul, the freedom of a person “creates freedom around itself by a sort of contagious sanity”(58). In summary, freedom is subject to our concrete existential situation. It is not mere spontaneity, neither is it a thing: I become free as I move toward “the personalization of myself and of my world” (61).

Mounier saw the French Revolution as “an important phase of social and political liberation, limited though it is in its context of individualism” (Mounier Personalism xxvi). He remarked of the period that “individualism, finding a congenial climate in the period of capitalistic triumph, flourishes …” However, he criticized the individualism created by the Revolution as producing individuals without freedom, a “bourgeois politic of personalism” in which the people remain in “social, economic and finally political slavery” (xxvi). In contrast, Mounier’s own personalist philosophy makes a clear distinction between “the individual” and “the person.” Mounier describes the individual as “man in the abstract, unattached to any natural community, the sovereign lord of a liberty unlimited and undirected; turning towards others with a primary mistrust, calculation and self-vindication” (Mounier Personalism 19). The
common life for such individuals must necessarily be “institutions restricted to the assurance that these egoisms should not encroach upon one another, or to their betterment as a purely profitmaking association” (19). Mounier offers personalism as the antithesis to this self-focused model. In contrast to individualism, in which human beings organized themselves in mutual isolation and defensiveness, personalism is demonstrated by an openness and availability towards other persons. The individual is self-focused; the person is self-offering. Ego-driven, self-centred individualism is anathema to the personalist philosophy. Mounier’s philosophy is close to that of Martin Buber (1878-1965) and Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) in that they also assert that it is the Other who comes first. It is the Other who creates the self. Mounier traces the development of the child from infancy, revealing the development of personality through interaction with significant others, similarly to Buber and Marcel. “The person only exists thus towards others, it only knows itself in knowing others, only finds itself in being known by them ... The thou which implies the we, is prior to the I – or at least accompanies it” (Mounier Personalism 20). Personalism defines human beings as those who open themselves, making themselves available and transparent to both themselves and to others. Mounier thus affirms Marcel’s thesis of intersubjectivity and disponibilité (availability).

2.3 Personalism Defined

Mounier’s personalism accepts both the material and spiritual realms. It is an incarnational view in which persons are embodied beings, understood to be both wholly body and wholly spirit. For Mounier, the physical interpenetrates the spiritual and the spiritual

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24 See Marcel, Chapter 1: 25.
25 See Marcel, Chapter 1: 26.
influences the physical, in his interpretation of the primary Christian doctrine of the indissoluble union of body and soul. Mounier contends that it was the influence of Greek idealism and the Gnostic heresies that perverted the Christian embrace of the material world, offering instead a dualism that resulted in contempt for the body contrary to the original teachings of Jesus and the early Church, as well as the ancient Israelite tradition. For Mounier, Christianity understands all creation to be the handiwork of God. The bodily resurrection of Christ as the forerunner of the same for all believers gives further honor to the body.

Mounier’s concrete, incarnational philosophy understands that “man is a natural being: by his body he is a part of nature, and the body is everywhere with him” (Mounier Personalism 5). For this reason, economic conditions give rise to spiritual problems in whole communities. When one is mentally distressed, it often has a physical cause. Mounier is therefore not suggesting a dualism between the personal and impersonal, the spirit and nature, but a creative realism which recognizes materiality, and so views the relationship between human beings and matter in a phenomenological manner as set forth in Husserl: human consciousness perceives or intends the world. “The dialectical relation between matter and consciousness is as irreducible as is the existence of the one and of the other” (11). Further, our embodied existence is not a depersonalized materiality. There is no dualism between my body and my consciousness: “I exist subjectively, I exist bodily are one and the same experience” (11). For Mounier, a person is not conscious without his or her body. It is how he or she exists in the world.
On the other hand, personalism proposes that a human being transcends nature. For this reason, Mounier rejects determinism, suggesting that humans are able not only to know the world, but to transform it, and that this transformation occurs through love. There exists a movement or drift towards depersonalization in the universe, but Mounier contends the creative personality has struggled against it throughout history. Just as entropy results in the degradation of energy in systems, passivity and indifference can lead to sameness and repetition in human lives. Human beings drift into routine, succumb to generalized ideas and engage in loveless chatter (Mounier *Personalism* 7). In opposition to this entropic pull, Mounier proposes that the creative personality in humans is the evolutionary drive towards the personalization of the universe.\(^{26}\) For Mounier, although a perfected personalist universe does not yet exist, the advancement towards its attainment can be discerned throughout history in individuals and collective movements. For humanity, therefore, there will always be the struggle, contrary to the ‘pre-established harmony’ put forward by Leibniz.\(^{27}\) It is, however, a spiritual struggle, in contrast to Marxism’s class struggle for an earthly paradise. In this way, Mounier posits a tragic optimism in which humankind finds its “true destiny in a goal of greatness through unending struggle” (Mounier *Personalism* 16). Mounier thus responds to Nietzsche’s criticism of Christianity as a religion of the weak. For Mounier, the reality is that from the beginning of humankind upon the earth, “there has been no absolute nature, but only nature in process of humanization” (13). The personalist universe remains in the future, and the history of humankind is the narrative of its progress.

\(^{26}\) His contemporary, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), was a visionary French Jesuit paleontologist, who hypothesized the movement of creation towards the Omega Point in Christ, looking forward to “the inevitable spiritualization of humanity” (Hellman 128).

\(^{27}\) Leibniz Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) was a German mathematician and philosopher, known for his optimistic hypothesis that God created the best of all possible worlds.
Mounier also develops an understanding of the body which insists on a non-dual, incarnational worldview. On the one hand, he states that although the body can be seen as an object in space, it is also, for the person themselves, their body. It constitutes “a vacancy, an eyes wide-open to the world in self-forgetfulness. In its inner experience the person is a presence directed towards the world and other persons, mingled among them in universal space” (Mounier *Personalism* 20). On the other hand, however, Mounier’s thesis can be seen to be contrary to an incarnational view in his suggestion that the path to the personal consists of a striving in which “consciousness itself cannot but gradually disengage itself from the mineral, the plant and the animal that weigh it down (Mounier *Personalism* xix). Yet, it is this spiritual evolution that preoccupies Mounier. In this evolution, it is the Other that enables the growth of the person. The material world thus limits both the person and the Other, given the fact that they cannot both exist in the same space and time. The creative movement towards personalization that Mounier envisions in human history is an evolution that overcomes this physical limitation through the openness of each person one to another: “One might almost say that I have no existence, save in so far as I exist for others, and that to be is, in the final analysis, to love” (Mounier *Personalism* 20).

Mounier’s philosophy thus reveals that a person must reach out to others in order to fulfill his or her goal of becoming fully human. He delineates five actions of personal intercourse that produce the personalist community. When these are lived, individualism, narcissism and ego-centricity give way to loving community. These actions are outlined by Mounier as follows:
1/ Going out of the self: This is the decentralization of the person and their availability for others.

2/ Understanding: The person considers themselves from the other’s point of view, accepting both oneself and the other as unique, and welcoming the other. “It is to be all things to all men, but without ceasing to be, or to be myself.”

3/ Taking upon oneself – sharing: The person needs to take “the destiny, the troubles, the joy or the task of the other; taking him ‘upon one’s heart.’”

4/ Giving: The values of “generosity or self-bestowal,” of giving without measure, with no thought of reward. “The economic of personality is an economic of donation, not of compensation not of calculation.” Mounier holds that generosity opens up relationship as it “dissolves opacity and annuls the solitude of the subject” and this even if there is no reciprocation. Generosity disarms the other and the forgiveness and confidence we place in another person is able to liberate them.

5/ Faithfulness: Love and devotion to the other must be constant and continue over time. This is not merely a repetition or prolongation, but “a perpetual renewal.” Mounier equates this action to the “creative fidelity” of Gabriel Marcel 28 (Mounier Personalism 21-2).

Through these actions, persons treat each other as present. Others are not there solely for their convenience or to provide for their needs. The Other is not an object, but an inexhaustible presence with the freedom to act on the hope that is within them. For Mounier, when we

28 See Marcel Chapter 1: 21.
despair of another, we create desperation in them; when we extend generosity, we create confidence. This community of love liberates and grants confidence and valuation. This is in stark contrast to Sartre, who claimed that ‘the glance’ of the other deprives a person, enslaves them, creating them as an object. For Mounier, the Other liberates and reveals. Through love, the Other gives life to a person, and together they create a community of love.

The notion of transcendence is also extremely important for Mounier. He posits a transcendence that is not to be understood as being spatially ‘above’. Instead, it denotes a reality that is “superior in the quality of its being” (Mounier Personalism 65). The transcendent one, or God, is able to be “present in the heart of him whom it transcends” (65). As Augustine said, "God is closer to us than we are to ourselves" (Augustine Confessions, 3.6.11). Mounier’s Catholic faith was the primary element in his life and work and he considered that without a spiritual revolution, no social or political change was possible. His believed that “God was at the centre of his experience” (Hellman 249) and his confidence in the empowering love of the divine to move human beings towards renewal was the foundation of his personalist project. For Mounier, God was experienced in the human person and the love of neighbor in community revealed the love of God.

For Mounier’s personalism, all values come from the supreme Person, God. A value, such as goodness or justice, is not simply an idea, but is “a living and inexhaustible source of determinations, an exuberance and radio-activity of ideas [which] exhibits a kind of expansive singularity” (Mounier Personalism 69). His existentialist-related approach sees values as re-born through persons-in-situation. Further, values are not attached to any one person, but mediate
between them “drawing them out of their isolation and relating them to the universal” (70). It is through struggle that transpersonal values are born. “Violence must be condemned, but to evade it at any cost is to renounce all the principal tasks of mankind” (Ricoeur as quote in Mounier, *Personalism* 71). “Of a life dedicated to values, one may say, as Paul Ricoeur said of the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel, that it alternates between a lyrical extreme where value reigns in triumph [and] and a dramatic extreme where value is everlastingly subject to defeat” (Mounier *Personalism* 82). Joy and suffering are equally experienced in the pursuit of values. On the other hand, human freedom allows for the liberty to choose dis-values as well as values (Mounier *Personalism* 82). Consequently, Mounier views evil as personal and historical. “Evil begins with personality: without personality the worst there can be is disorder (82). In this way, Mounier asserts that both good and evil are expressed through the person.

For Mounier, human experience is one of a broken world in which communication between persons is far from ideal and often includes suffering. Even more, he observes, we often experience ourselves as if we are alone. For this same reason, communities are at risk of becoming places lacking in loving support. Rules and obligations, psychological and economic stresses can create far from optimum communal living conditions for the growth of persons and personal relationships. Yet Mounier is convinced that even though community living is sometimes far from a positive social experience, at the same time it offers the only real opportunity for growth, just as the body as our presence in the material world offers both the shielding from others and a real presence enabling relationship. He argues that a society which focuses on economic interdependence can often find it difficult to move beyond self-interest to a personalized generosity. Supportive judicial, economic, and legal structures can encourage
progress, yet they are unable to ensure the attainment of a fully-functioning personal community. Mounier is adamant in asserting that societies that are not sufficiently personalized cannot succeed as “no universal harmony can be established at the expense of the person” (Mounier Personalism 28). For Mounier, the absolute value of the human person must be foundational and must wholly permeate any group that is to succeed.

When one lives in community, one lives externally, and is therefore, counter-intuitively, immersed in one’s own desires, habits and relations. Mounier refers to this as a life lived in the present or ‘immediate’ (Mounier Personalism 34). Owing to this reality, the personal life requires one to “break contact with the environment, to recollect oneself, to reflect, in order to re-constitute and re-unite oneself on one’s own centre” (34). Yet, this is not a simple withdrawal. There is an initial withdrawal, but it is only the first phase in a movement in which “the person has only drawn backward the better to go forward” (Mounier Personalism 34). For Mounier, the inner life is not to be understood as a spatial mode which leads to withdrawal from others, but a requirement for communal living. It was for this reason that Mounier was alarmed by the lack of contemplation and opportunity for leisure in twentieth century society.

Following this inner movement, there must be the next phase, which is to act in the world. Mounier uses Husserlian phenomenological insight in saying that “reflection is not simply a turning of the power of consciousness back upon the self and its imaginations; it is also intention, a projection of the self” (Mounier Personalism 37). We do not have an image of the external object in our consciousness; we intend the object by an outward movement towards it. We identify with it, yet remain distinct from it. The consciousness is, like the light, “a
presence inscrutable in itself, which yet reveals and illuminates the entire visible universe” (38).

In this way, Mounier’s thought broke with Cartesian dualism, revealing the consciousness, not as an object, but rather as the person’s means of relating to the world.

Mounier distinguishes his thesis of the inward and outward dialectical movements of the personal life from Marcel’s thoughts on ‘being and having’ which are understood as mutually exclusive poles requiring human choice. For Mounier, they must be held in tension, “expressing the vocation, at once dual and integral, of the person – to be both centred in, and expansive around himself” (Mounier Personalism 39). There is a risk in an unbalanced focus on one aspect only: “we must not, then, undervalue the external life: without it the inner life tends to insanity, as surely as the outer life becomes chaotic without interiorization” (44). This dialectical movement is effected through “concentrating in order to find oneself; then going forward to enrich and to find oneself again; concentrating oneself anew through dispossession; such is the systole and diastole of the personal life, an everlasting quest for a unity foretold and longed-for …” (41). Mounier identifies this as a quest, a vocation, one that is never completely realized, as a person continually reinterprets their vocation. It is a search for identity and unity and for integrity and the integration of the personality.

Mounier points to Kierkegaard as an illustration of a person who exhibits an imbalance in this duality of need: the need to say ‘Yes’ and participate with Other, and the need to say ‘No’ and break away (Mounier Personalism 47). Mounier views Kierkegaard as a man who broke completely with others, rejecting the world, and refusing marriage, the Church and the intellectual contribution of others: “He sought to restrict the Individual’s powers of assent to a
kind of solitary and paradoxical fiat to the Absolute” (48). As a consequence, he “cleared a
space” around himself and found “nothing to fill it except terror [and was] perpetually on the
alert and the defensive” (48-9). There was no giving and receiving in his life. Neither was there
relaxation, which Mounier maintains is “constitutive of personal being” (49). Yet a person must
not give themselves into servitude, but must defend their independence and thus, their dignity.
Mounier envisions that through such persons, society itself will establish and maintain human
rights and freedoms. Personalism calls for complete equality. It is not however the equality of
individualism, in which each person has their rights in defense of the other, but “a society of
spiritual subjects, each of whom has its end in itself and in the whole at the same time” (31). It
is equality within relationship, which is a principle of true community.

2.4 Freedom

For Mounier, freedom is not an object. We cannot “establish that there is some
freedom in the world [rather] freedom is the affirmation of the person, it can be lived, but not
seen” (Mounier Personalism 54). In other words, the world gives us objects and situations,
manifestations of space and time, and our ability to do with them as we choose is the essence
of freedom. Mounier views the findings of quantum physics and the indeterminism of matter at
the atomic level as indicative of “the non-rigid structure of a universe in which freedom is
operative” (Mounier Personalism 55). For him, this does not prove an inherent freedom in
nature, but offers a clue to the natural opportunities and inclinations to freedom in creation:

Such an accumulation of explosive energy makes no sense unless it represents a
multiplication of possibilities and a preparation for centres of choice. The achievement
by the animal kingdom of that autonomy over great physiological systems which
enables the individual to regulate its nutrition, its warmth, its movements and its
intercourse with others - this again is not freedom, but it is a preparation for the physical autonomy which can express the spiritual autonomy of the free human being (Mounier *Personalism* 56).

Mounier sees these developing, natural freedoms as embodied in humankind. It is through personal initiative, however, that true freedom is actually attained. The person chooses to be free and therefore makes themself free. Freedom is not a given nor is it assured. The person must enter courageously into the experience of freedom (56).29

Absolute freedom in which nothing whatsoever impinges upon one’s choices does not exist, for this would be an absolute subjectivity. Given that the world and others existed before me and other than me, my freedom is necessarily qualified. However, Mounier’s view is contrary to Sartre, for whom freedom at its most innocent risks being simple instinctive preference, and at its worst, demands enmity between persons, as is dangerously embodied in the infamous Sartrean hypothesis, “the glance.” Sartre envisions persons as condemned to freedom. For Mounier, freedom is not a punishment, but a gift, a gift which can be accepted or refused. He agrees with Marcel who maintains, “The free man is he who can promise or who can betray” (*Mounier Personalism* 58). Mounier insists that freedom must find its authentic existence within the community of persons. This is over against Nietzsche’s ultimately individualistic will to power. True freedom comes only through community: “I become free only through the liberty of others” (Bakunin, quoted in Mounier *Personalism* 58). For Mounier, only when the other is free, am I truly free. Therefore, personal freedom must conform to the freedom of others. Freedom “bullies the Narcissus which lingers in us. ‘We are free only to the

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29 For Marcel, creativity is the basis of ethics, and freedom for creative change is what allows for the development of the moral self.
extent that we are not entirely free’” (Ricoeur on Mounier in History and Truth 146, including quote from Mounier Qu’est-ce que le personnalisme 16). Yet, this is not simply adaptation to the restrictions of the will of others and the material environment, for this risks fatalism and a passive submission. Freedom is a divine imperative, according to Mounier, and this spirit of freedom is seen in the experiences, the passions, and the follies of struggling human beings. It is the “baptism of choice” referenced by Kierkegaard. Mounier states that human liberty is more than spontaneity or something regulated; it is something called forth, a call, giving it a spiritual dimension (Mounier Personalism 61). Freedom becomes a responsible uniting force, allowing for the ongoing building of community.

2.5 The Esprit Community

Esprit became the embodiment of Mounier’s thought. Not simply a journal, it was a movement - a movement which inspired a community. In 1935, Paul Ricoeur was involved with the beginnings of a new monthly review, Terre Nouvelle, a Marxist publication critical of the Catholicism of Esprit and its reluctance to carry forward the social revolution through violent means if necessary. Ricoeur was committed to and frustrated over what he deemed the essential work of furthering true community: “Be careful that socialism does not become mere verbalism ... It is with the mass of workers and proletariat, non-capitalist middle-classes, intellectuals and artist ... that the social order will be made .... You will do nothing without the masses” (Ricoeur «Réflexions» 8-9). Another commentator for the journal “Terre Nouvelle described the idea of transforming the world through ‘spiritual means’ [and their] fear of ‘blood

30 Marcel states that “Love is the act of a free mind, affirming another free self and which is free only by this very affirmation (PF 109).
on the pavement’ ” (Dupont 12). Although some of Mounier’s associates were on this review, he opposed their Marxist focus and the fact that they put “their patriotism and religious faith on the same level” (Mounier «Chrétiens et révolutionnaires» 423-4). Terre Nouvelle’s influence did not continue, as it was proscribed by the Roman Catholic Church in the summer of 1936. Through his review, Esprit, Mounier continued to write encouraging a personalist revolution. Ricoeur collaborated with Mounier, contributing articles espousing his practical, ethical thinking. For both Mounier and Ricoeur, ethics is obliged to be made concrete through action in the world.

Mounier had broadcast his message to many through his numerous lectures and, in 1938 he set up formal Paris Esprit groups which went beyond the original study groups that had preceded them. These groups became the model for similar organizations in other parts of France. In 1939, Mounier founded a personalist community in a park-like setting at Châtenay-Malabry outside Paris. Mounier’s wife and family shared the central house, the ‘Maison Esprit’ with the Fraisse and Domenach families. They began their life together by eating all their meals in common, but later limited this to periodic, optional common meals. They achieved a “happy balance... between privacy and community life, intellectual and spiritual collaboration, and the pursuit of individual careers” (Hellman 253). For several decades, some of France’s leading intellectuals lived in harmonious friendship at the Châtenay-Malabry community. They welcomed visitors, seeking “to demonstrate by example that their personalism is more than an intellectual position” (Hellman 253). They set up a school so that children could become “authentically free, that is consciously committed persons” (Mounier «Une nouvelle réalisation» 414-18). Six to eight boarders between the ages of fourteen and eighteen were
educated at the experimental school. Many of Mounier’s associates and friends joined him there, including Paul Ricoeur who was to later build on the personalist philosophy. Mounier died there in 1950 at the age of forty-five. The community at Châtenay-Malabry expressed and symbolized Mounier’s philosophy and his life work.

The influences of the personalist philosophy were many and diverse. Personalism was at the heart of Dorothy Day’s Catholic Workers Movement.\(^{31}\) John Paul II (Karol Wojtyła),\(^{32}\) through his “The Acting Person,” and other philosophical treatises, developed an integrated form of personalism. *La nouvelle théologie* of the French theologians Jean Daniélou, Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar and Marie-Dominique Chenu developed the personalist viewpoint.

Mounier’s personalism was a concept of the human person within a communal structure, with “the person ... defined as a movement towards a transpersonal condition which reveals itself in the experience of community and of the attainment of value at the same time” (Mounier *Personalism* 70). More than just a philosophical viewpoint, his work was an influential political model for a renewed society. His was a simple thesis of the personal and of Christian love in community, defined by freedom, responsibility and creativity. Mounier’s work is worthy of consideration, both for its influence on the philosophies that developed from it, such as that of Paul Ricoeur, and in its own right, for the insights it offers for 21\(^{st}\) Century living, the most important of which is the absolute valuation of the human person.

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\(^{31}\) Dorothy Day (1897-1980) was an American Catholic social reformer and founder of The Catholic Worker and the Catholic Worker Movement.

\(^{32}\) Pope John Paul II (Karol Wojtyła) (1920-2005).
Chapter Three - Ricoeur

3.1 Introduction

While Ricoeur was initially strongly influenced by both Mounier and Marcel, in time he was dissatisfied with regard to their respective explanations of the self. He sought to understand what was meant by the self and consequently, he embarked on a long philosophic journey. I will not go into all the details in this thesis, but simply describe those aspects that he developed that were different from theirs. Nevertheless, he will return to certain elements and ideas in their thought and these will be highlighted.

To be sure, Ricoeur found the methodological lessons he gained from Marcel invaluable. In 1935, the year of his agrégation, Ricoeur read everything by Marcel and was impressed with his Socratic method in which one must “always start from examples and reflect by oneself” (Ricoeur Critique 10). Through “the critical vigilance that we discerned in the written work and that we learned to practice in the famous ‘Friday meetings’” (Ricoeur in Hahn 7), Ricoeur gained a way of doing philosophy which consisted of active argument and the constant search and “concern with finding the right word,” (23). In this, he encountered a respite from the historical method and lack of active philosophizing at the Sorbonne. However, Ricoeur was to find that Marcelian methodology did not continue to address the needs of his philosophical searching.

Nevertheless, as Blundell observed, “the mode of primary and secondary reflection is the single most important dynamic that Ricoeur absorbed from his mentor [Marcel], and it proceeded to shape the way he pursued his own philosophical research” (61). The pattern of primary and secondary reflection manifests itself in Ricoeur’s pattern of detour and return, in
which Ricoeur has taken Marcel’s somewhat vague approach and given it conceptual clarity. Ricoeur remarked: “If I have moved away from [Marcel’s] philosophy, it is not because of his deep convictions, but because of a certain lack, in him, of a conceptual structure” (Ricoeur Critique 24). Marcel was apprehensive with regard to Ricoeur’s systematic spirit and cautioned him not to fall into what Marcel called the spirit of abstraction. Ricoeur felt that Marcel’s concern regarding abstraction led “to a somewhat caricaturized version of primary reflection ... [Consequently, Ricoeur] sought out ways to achieve greater clarity and structure from the very beginning, and without abandoning the fundamental values of Marcel’s philosophy” (Blundell 61). Concepts of the reflective self were indeed lacking in Marcel’s claims for the incarnate, existing person in which he did not offer any formulation with respect to the exact nature of the person involved.

Ricoeur’s friendship with Marcel spanned forty years, from 1934, the time of Ricoeur’s agrégation at the Sorbonne, to Marcel’s death in 1973. Marcel was both a personal friend and an intellectual mentor, contributing to shaping Ricoeur’s philosophy through his themes of existence, experience and embodiment, participation and presence, as well as availability and intersubjectivity. Especially influential was Marcel’s work on intersubjectivity which sparked Ricoeur’s own thinking on relationships between persons, ultimately developing this into his ‘little ethics’ in Oneself as Another (1990).

Ricoeur’s other formative relationship with Emmanuel Mounier began early in Ricoeur’s career and it was more the person than any philosophical influence that had an impact on Ricoeur’s growing philosophic views. In point of fact, Ricoeur suggests that Mounier’s concept
of the person was expressed and advanced more by Marcel and Jaspers than by Mounier himself, but posits that Mounier’s efforts to establish a philosophy of the person in community was formative for him. As well, Ricoeur points to Mounier work in uniting spiritual beliefs to political positions as introducing him to this important area of concern that was also to come to fruition in his work on ethics. Prior to this time, Ricoeur’s only experience of a spiritually informed politics had been with university and Protestant youth movements. More than anything, it was Mounier’s character and commitment to the personal life lived in community, culminating in his establishing the Esprit community in Châteenay-Malabry that influenced Ricoeur’s thinking.

3.2 Background

Jean Paul Gustave Ricoeur was born on February 27, 1913, at Valence, France. He lost both his parents early in life, his mother shortly after his birth and his father at the war Front in 1915. He and his sister were raised in Rennes by paternal grandparents and an aunt who were devout Protestants. Already devastated by the loss of his father, the boy learned, at the age of eleven or twelve, of the injustice of the Treaty of Versailles. As a consequence, the young Ricoeur was “stripped of the reassuring halo of a just war and of a stainless victory [and felt] his father’s death proved to be been a death for nothing” (Ricoeur Intellectual Autobiography 8). As a war orphan, he was a pupille de la Nation and awarded a small stipend. He was dedicated to his studies as a boy, devouring all the recommended books before classes began in the fall. His philosophy class during the last year of high school initiated a lifetime of devotion to the

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33 Treaty of Versailles severely punished the Germans after WWI, requiring huge reparations payments, reduction of the army, as well as territorial concessions, which included the French region of Alsace-Lorraine. The treaty humiliated the German people and created great economic hardships.
discipline. His teacher, Roland Dalbiez, was to have a lasting influence on him. Dalbiez was opposed to idealism as well as offering his students a view of the subconscious he had gained from his Freudian studies. He guided his students through engaging debates and encouraged them to wrestle with problems, to face them and never give up, an attitude that Ricoeur never failed to remember.

After finishing high school, Ricoeur became a university student. During this time, Ricoeur made the acquaintance of Emmanuel Mounier and was influenced by the man, and by his journal *Esprit*. Ricoeur received a master’s in philosophy from the University of Rennes in 1934. Always an exceptional student, he received an award to study at the Sorbonne. It was there that he first met Gabriel Marcel. He began attending the famous ‘Friday meetings’ at Marcel’s home and the two became lifelong friends. The year 1935 saw the completion of his university studies with a successful agrégation examination in philosophy followed by his marriage to Simone Lejas, a childhood friend who shared his dedication. They were to raise five children together. Ricoeur settled into teaching at the high schools in Colmar and Lorient. He learned German and read Husserl and Heidegger. The war interrupted this period of tranquility and Ricoeur was drafted in 1939. He was captured in 1940 and made a prisoner of war for five years. He was interned with Mikel Dufrenne, with whom he was later to write a book on Karl Jaspers. During his captivity, together with Dufrenne, he read Jaspers and Heidegger. As well, he began his translation of Husserl’s *Ideen I* and worked on his own writing. The latter was to be published as Vol.1 of a projected three part series on the Philosophy of the Will.
After the war, the family moved to Chambon-sur-Lignon, a small Protestant village which had sheltered Jews hiding from the Gestapo. The entire village had participated in this exercise, influenced by Quaker, pacifist ideals. Ricoeur describes how this “stirred up again [feelings] inside me concerning ‘non-violent man and his presence in history’” (Ricoeur *Intellectual Autobiography* 10). This instigated an article published in 1949 which outlined Ricoeur’s inner struggle “that had its origins in the discoveries [he] had made as a child concerning the injustices and the lies of World War I” (Ricoeur *Intellectual Autobiography* 10).

During this time, his teaching supported his doctoral candidacy work. For the first of the two part doctoral requirements, he submitted his translation of Husserl’s *Ideen I* which he had begun as a prisoner of war along with a commentary in which he criticized the idealistic interpretation Husserl applied to his phenomenological thesis. His book, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, Vol. 1 of Philosophy of the Will, was presented as his major thesis work. In 1956, Ricoeur was granted the Chair of General Philosophy at the Sorbonne.

From 1965 to 1970, he was administrator at the innovative University of Nanterre in suburban Paris where he hoped to create a more open learning environment. However, he was greatly disappointed in this respect, and in academic life in France generally, with the result that he took a position at the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, where he taught one term a year from 1970 to 1985. He gave the 1986 Gifford Lectures which were published as *Oneself as Another* (1990). After retiring from his chair the University of Chicago, he returned to France in 1991. Paul Ricoeur was awarded the Balzan Prize for Philosophy in 1999 and the John W. Kluge Prize for Lifetime Achievement in the Human Sciences (shared with Jaroslav Pelikan) in 2004. He died at the *Esprit* community in Châtenay-Malabry on May 20, 2005.
3.3 Ricoeur’s Philosophic Beginnings

Ricoeur was influenced by Marcel’s focus on an examination of existence over against the philosophic search for objective knowledge. For Marcel, existence precedes essence, and he claimed “the indubitable character of existence [and] the impossibility of reducing existence to anything else whatsoever [and] of even putting existence into question” (TWB Conversations 221). Marcel had questioned the meaning of the ego, but he could not go any further because of the limits of his subjectivism. He had also posited the concrete, incarnational self, but was unable to define the nature of this self. Finally, he declared the intersubjective interrelatedness of individuals, yet could not delineate the process in which persons attained this intimate connection. As Ricoeur advanced in his investigation into the meaning of existence, he moved beyond Marcel in realizing that direct knowledge of the self was not possible. He put forward the view that all understanding is mediated by interaction with what is external to the self: myths and symbols, narratives and language, culture and institutions. Ricoeur’s project became a search for meaning. In this search, Ricoeur’s initial philosophy of phenomenology expanded into a hermeneutical approach that endeavoured to make sense of human existence.

The first question Ricoeur asked was: how do we understand ourselves and what does this mean for us, let alone for our understanding of another person? Ricoeur did not seek concepts to explain reality, but rather began with employing a phenomenological method in his attempt to understand the meaning given in experience. In this way, he expanded on the tradition of the existentialists.
In the same way as Marcel, Ricoeur builds on the Cartesian understanding of the Cogito which confirmed subjectivity, offering the self as the starting point. However, he questions Descartes’ subject-object model, alleging that it does not explain our experience of ourselves: if what the subject knows is an object to it, how does it know itself? Does it know itself as an object? Or is there a subjective knowing, an epistemological formula that allows a subject to know itself in a non-objective way. Cartesian thought does not yield an answer for this impasse, positing only that the self knows itself as existing given the fact that it thinks. Moreover, this problem moves Ricoeur to question how it is that we know other selves. Ricoeur concludes that the Cartesian model is ‘broken’ and in need of reformulation. He seeks a model of selfhood that is congruent with experience, one that does not see the self as “the object of an intuition” (Pellauer 46). For Ricoeur, this can be reached “only through reflection. However, reflection proves itself to be a process of interpretation which begins from the object, not from the subject” (46). In other words, we only come to self-understanding by way of mediated forms of otherness. From this perspective, the existential rejection of Descartes’ method which understands the reality of the Cogito as attributable to its consciousness of objective reality is not satisfactory. This is because it leaves the only definition existentialism can offer for the existing subject as an undefined, abstract knower who is unable to have knowledge of its own existence. This understanding, Ricoeur claims, creates the self as simply an unreflective agent. In contrast, Ricoeur wishes to discover the nature of the self “who has a specific identity and who is responsible for his or her actions” (8). In this way, Ricoeur’s existentialism became a search for the meaning of the uniqueness of each person’s individual existence.
In adopting a phenomenological view, Ricoeur adapts Husserl’s methodology. Phenomenology offered Ricoeur a descriptive methodology, something he had found lacking in “Marcel’s less systematic, more impressionistic way of taking up philosophical problems” (Pellauer 10). Husserl had gone beyond Descartes’ subject-object model, claiming that consciousness is always conscious of something, positing a phenomenological view of intentionality which demanded that meaning resides outside the self. In this way, Husserl showed the relationship of the subject to its environment. However, his suggestion that a person was able to intend phenomenon or appearances directly was not accepted by Ricoeur, given that for Ricoeur, knowledge is always mediated. Further, Husserl maintained that an absolute knowledge of reality could be attained through means of the eidetic reduction. Ricoeur disputed this thesis and the fact that one can one intuit an essence, especially of one’s mode of existence. At the same time, Ricoeur dismissed the positing of an “apodictic consciousness” on the part of Husserl. Finally, Ricoeur rejected Husserl’s ‘alter ego’ as a mode of “apperception” of the other. The latter leads to inequality and Ricoeur reaffirmed that “one cannot comprehend oneself, let alone others, as an object of knowledge, i.e., similarly to a fact. Instead, one can arrive at self-understanding and knowledge of the other person only by way of reflection on mediated forms of otherness” (Joy “Recognition and Intersubjectivity” 6-7).

Marcel had claimed that it is not possible to abstract ourselves from existence, placing ourselves outside existence in order to behold it and thus, he also refuted Husserl’s eidetic reduction. Marcel suggested that what we are able to behold are objects, things which share in objectivity. However, he was unable to explain how we are able to gain this knowledge of other objects, to say nothing of ourselves. Marcel posited a secondary reflection which has to do
with deeper personal insights, understood as non-objective and non-reductive. Ricoeur adopted Marcel’s method of ‘secondary reflection’ which opened up for him a way of using Marcelian themes without renouncing reflexive philosophy, “which itself tended toward the concrete” (Ricoeur in Hahn 7). In this way, Ricoeur was able to use Marcel’s philosophy while at the same time, advancing beyond it using the very methods embedded within it. Ricoeur states that, with Marcel, “conceptual precision was never sacrificed to impressions or intuition” (Ricoeur, in Hahn 7). Secondary reflection concerned itself with examining the mysteries of life, which Marcel claimed alleviated the objectification of human selves. However, this did not satisfy Ricoeur in his search in that it did not address what it means to be a self, offering only mystery as explication.34

Mounier’s influence was somewhat different. His ideas regarding embodiment viewed human beings as wholly body and wholly spirit, with body and soul being “an indissoluble union” (Mounier Personalism 10). Through our body, we are part of nature and the soul is “fused with the body in existence” (Mounier Personalism 10). For this reason, “even though original sin has wounded human nature, it is the composite man in his totality who is stricken” (10). In this way, Mounier endeavored to overcome Cartesian dualism, recommending the person in their completeness and wholeness. He thus proposed a unified person who is capable of forming real, concrete relationships.

Marcel, too, approaches the person as a body, offering the incarnate subject and the lived experience. For Marcel, sensation “testifies to our participation in existence” given that it reveals the human being as so much more than simply the carrier of a “message passing

34 For an explanation of “mystery” in Marcel’s philosophy, see footnote, page 21.
between one thing and another, between a transmitter and a receiver”  (*TWB Conversations* 222). Ricoeur also applauds Marcel for attempting to rescue sensation from the Cartesian focus on mind only. However, neither Mounier nor Marcel gives an explanation for the unity of the self and the lived body. Their ambiguous account of embodiment thus becomes a stumbling block for Ricoeur. He asks how it is that Marcel can claim that “I am my body” (*MB1* 100). Marcel defines the person as concrete, and examines the person through concrete reflection in his philosophy and through his dramas for the theatre. But his thesis of the concrete self is inconsistent, given that existentialism explains the person as fluid, existing and forming itself through lived experience. For Marcel, although the world is thinkable through reason, it is knowable only through experience. In this context, it is contingency, a necessary element in experience that “is the expression of what is individual in reality… [and Marcel claims that this is] the clearest manifestation of the essential fact which metaphysics seems to have failed to explain until now and which is precisely individual experience” (*PF* 38-39). In this way, Marcel considers that he is going beyond Kant by going beyond “the universality of reason to individual experience” [i.e.] “from the infinite to the finite” (39). In *First Notes and Sketches*, Marcel explains that “experience is the mind itself exercising its activity [and that] experience is inherent in the very nature of the mind” (40). However, his attempt at reconciling experience with mind provides no clarity on the question of the nature of the self involved in this exercise.

### 3.4 The Hermeneutical Self

Even in his move beyond Marcel and Mounier, and in his turn to phenomenology especially as undertaken by Husserl, Ricoeur became dissatisfied. His turn to hermeneutics was the result of his argument showing that the identity of the self can be attained only through
interpretation. He clarified his approach as a hermeneutic phenomenology which goes beyond a merely descriptive phenomenology as employed by Husserl. “On the one hand I maintain there is a continuity in hermeneutic phenomenology to the extent that hermeneutic remains fundamentally an understanding of the self. But on the other hand, the means of understanding are no longer those of a transcendental eidetic reflection [Husserl], but require understanding, interpretation, and thus a mode of intelligibility other than that of the immediate grasping the essence of mental phenomena” (Ricoeur in Reagan 124). Through this methodology, he initially investigated the meaning of symbols and myths in The Symbolism of Evil (1960), and then moved to the interpretation of texts. Written texts, discourse and ordinary spoken language revealed for Ricoeur not simply a description of phenomena, but more importantly, what we say about both appearances and actions. Ricoeur argues that “human existence [is] a movement of interpretation beyond itself [as] self-centering subject … always understand[ing] its present significations in terms of ‘other’ signs implicit in the past and future horizons of what Ricoeur broadly calls culture” (Kearney 28). In this way, human existence is teleological in that the self anticipates future meanings at the same time as it recovers meanings lost in the past.

Ricoeur conceives of a self that receives meaning from its environment indirectly, i.e., only as it is mediated to him or her. In other words, the self interprets the world; there is no direct access to things. This is over against Husserlian phenomenology which posits the intending subject as viewing what actually is, without filters. Ricoeur’s discovery that the self’s experience is always mediated discloses that the hermeneutic self resists any sense of narcissistic self-absorption in its openness and receptivity to others. In this way, Ricoeur
proposes a self that is non-egotistic, non-narcissistic and non-imperialistic. Ricoeur’s form of identity and self understanding “has never presumed the self as totally in control of proceedings” (Joy “Paul Ricoeur and a Hermeneutics of Human Capability and Fragility” 3). To be a self-sufficient master of one’s environment necessitates a distancing from experience, which existentialism avoids. Ricoeur’s thesis is also in opposition to the abstract reason’s apodictic view in which the person is an unchanging and in control of their environment. Self understanding is always a process of interpretation. As Ricoeur observes, “The most important consequence of all this is that an end is put once and for all to the Cartesian and Fichtean – and to an extent Husserlian – ideal of the subject’s transparency to itself. To understand oneself is to understand oneself as one confronts the text and to receive from it the conditions for a self other than that which first undertakes the reading. Neither that of the two subjectivities … neither that of the author nor that of the reader; is thus primary in the sense of an originary presence of the self to itself” (“On Interpretation” 152).

Ricoeur came to conclude that “although not everything is language, nothing in experience arrives at meaning unless it is borne by language” (Ricoeur “Approaching” 48). He thus considers the speaking person as the first condition of personhood. Ricoeur points out that Marcel takes the body, rather than language, as the primary focus for his reflection on existence. For Marcel, language itself contributes to the problem in that experience risks becoming ‘objectified.’ In this way it becomes, in Marcel’s words, a simulacrum or hardened version of the initial, lived experience which, when it is repeated, can become a poor substitute for real experience. Ricoeur’s linguistic turn was significantly more sophisticated than Marcel’s concept in its understanding of the living interaction between persons through language.
However, Ricoeur did see Marcel’s focus on the body as a corrective for the predominance of language in the discussions of French philosophy. This was mainly with reference to Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), whose argument for language as basically a form of structuralism sparked Ricoeur to develop his own theory of language. Ricoeur posited language as a diachronic system, i.e., one that changes over time allowing for changing meanings and new meanings. This is in accord with Marcel’s existential view in which meaning is arrived at through experiences over time. Ricoeur questioned the objective nature of structuralism over against a subjective focus on the human being in agreement with Marcel’s strong stance for the subjective in his thesis of the existent, experiencing self. The foundation gained from Marcel had encouraged Ricoeur to formulate his hermeneutic of existence in refutation of Saussure’s structuralism.

Finally, with reference to hermeneutics, Ricoeur offers a further insight as he introduces the term “hermeneutics of suspicion.” This states that texts should no longer be regarded as above suspicion or free from contamination by interests designed to dominate, control, or to incite violence. This was to inform Ricoeur’s future proposition of the ‘capable self’ in his later work (*Oneself as Another* 1990) as one who is able to discriminate in its creative capacity to make sense of its world.

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35 It was Ricoeur’s own use of the term “suspicion” in relation to the work of Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud in *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* that was in large part responsible for the coinage and circulation of this term (1970:33).
3.5 Narrative Self

As he continued his quest to define the self, Ricoeur proposed the narrative self. This understanding is of the self as the one who both reads and writes his or her own life (Proust as referenced in Kearney 109). The person’s identity is constantly reinterpreted “in light of new and old stories we tell about ourselves” (Kearney 108). Ricoeur’s narrative approach shows how “Enlightenment models of the disembodied cogito, no less than the traditional models of a substance-like self (idem), fail to appreciate the fundamental socialization processes through which a person acquires a self-identity capable of projecting a narrative into the world in which it is both an author and an actor” (Kearney 109). This is not to say that a person constructs one overriding narrative of their life, but rather that the self attempt to understand or interpret episodes in their life. “Ricoeur’s narrative thesis is hermeneutical in that it accepts that we are constantly part of a process of interpretation and reinterpretation … in a constant evolution whereby the past is being integrated into the present, and the present refining its perception of the past and of its own definitions [thus] there is no personal a-historical, objective identity to be constituted” (Joy “Introduction” Paul Ricoeur and Narrative Identity xxvi). In this way, a hermeneutical circle is revealed in which narratives influence the self, just as the self influences ensuing narrative readings. Joy references Ricoeur’s clarifying statement which states that “at the very heart of what we call experience [there is a tension] between the efficacity of the past we undergo and the reception of the past we bring about” (Ricoeur Time and Narrative III 220 as quoted in Joy “Introduction” Paul Ricoeur and Narrative Identity xxvi). In other words, narrative identity “is not just a psychological construct, but a composite of detailed memory and present re-evaluation” (Joy “Introduction” Paul Ricoeur and Narrative Identity xxvi). The
self recognizes “movements of change” (Joy “Writing” 38) over time while at the same time, is able to maintain its identity: “Identity is thus understood as a constantly negotiated process, which is never complete” (39).

In a similar way, Mounier sees the person as “the living activity of self-creation, of communication and of attachment, that grasps and knows itself, in the act, as the movement of becoming personal” (Mounier Personalism xviii). Thus, Mounier’s thought can be seen to have influenced the development of Ricoeur’s thesis of the narrative self. However, Mounier he did not discern any method in which the movement of becoming was able to accomplish the formation of the personal identity. Ricoeur’s model posits the creation of self-awareness as each narrative plot adds cohesion and coherence to the multitude of experiences. By giving meaning to events that have informed and form the self, it enables the self to make sense of experiences and construct an identity from them. Through creating meaning in sets of similar experiences, it allows for the formulation of action in response to related situations.

Ricoeur’s understanding of narrative identity is over against a postmodern understanding of the self as fragmented and empty, of the person without essence. Although the narrative self is not a substantive self in the sense of the Cartesian Cogito, it is a growing self which is both informed by manifold experiences as it creates new experiences. It is thus a hopeful self, as opposed to Sartre’s vision of nausea at the inherent instability of the self. For Ricoeur, contingency does not imply insecurity, but rather an ability to cope, to mature, to respond to life as it is in each moment and phase of one’s life. At the same time, his model allows for the creation of a self-identity as the result of and within the world of contingency.
Thus, Ricoeur’s narrative thesis of the self creates “a practical and critical commitment to change, not just with regard to one’s perception of oneself, but with regard to that of the world” (Joy “Writing” 47).

The narrative self as one who unfolds and changes over time agrees with Marcel’s thought in discounting the concept of a pre-existent self in favor of the self as formed through experience by the development of the personality’s gifts. Ricoeur saw the ego as “not a beginning, but an ambition, not immediately given but acquired only through a series of mediations, marked not by its innate possessions but by it ‘dispossession’ (désaisissement) of everything, even of itself” (Blamey 583). Like Marcel, Ricoeur understood the self as a process of becoming over against Husserl who posited the ego as a solitary, isolated subject, exhibiting a possessiveness in which “‘the’ world becomes world-for-me” (Ricoeur Husserl’s Fifth Cartesian Mediation 120). This Husserlian “monadic life of the ego” with its “sphere of owness” was compelled to conceive of the “Lebenselt” or “life-world” of common experience in an attempt to create a forum for relationship between selves. Ricoeur’s understanding differed in seeing the self in the tradition of reflexive philosophy in which the self reflects back upon itself in self-understanding, thereby gaining the capability to offer itself to others in self-forgetfulness.

The narrative of one’s life causes interpenetration with the lives of others. Contingency creates interdependence. Ricoeur saw that phenomenology had encountered difficulty in deriving reciprocity from a presumably originary dissymmetry in the relation of the ego to others” (Ricoeur Course 153), and proposes an existential category of reciprocity to address the
issue. Ricoeur’s theory of narrative unity of the person showed that each person’s life story is intertwined with the stories of the other people, yielding the understanding that meaning is not simply meaning for myself alone (solipsism) but is “a relationship of reciprocity” in which the other is necessary for self-understanding and mutual relationship creates accountability and justice (Joy “Recognition and Intersubjectivity” 3-4). Marcel, along with Martin Buber, had posited the originary nature of intersubjectivity by showing that our experience reveals that we constitute ourselves only as we recognize the reality of the other. For Marcel, it is only through the reality of the other that we create ourselves. “Intersubjective acts found the subject” (Gallagher 28). Buber proposed the ‘I-thou’ (Ich-Du) relationship and showed the way in which the I-it (Ich-Es) relationship devalued the person by regarding them as an object. Ricoeur’s philosophic development from the phenomenological intentional self through the hermeneutic narrative self to his ethical thesis of *Oneself as Another* built on their work on intersubjectivity, surpassing their efforts as he moved towards establishing a hermeneutical ethics. As Ricoeur explains in *Oneself as Another* (1992), “the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other” (3). “For what Ricoeur is proposing is not simply that I am similar to others, and thus accord them similar privileges and qualities as those I attribute to myself, but that one cannot come to full awareness of one’s identity unless this complex interrelationship of mutual recognition takes place (Joy “Recognition and Intersubjectivity” 4). For Ricoeur, the recognition of the other is based on far more than the originary formation of the self. It is more than a means of self-development. It is the origin of the reality of the person’s identity.
For Ricoeur, narrative understanding is able to free the self from narcissism without annihilating its identity. In this way, it creates empathy “whereby the self flows from itself towards the other in a free variation of imagination [as] dialogue which opens us to foreign worlds, enabling us to tell and listen to other stories ... transfigures the self-regarding self into a self-for-another, the moi into a soi” (Kearney 174). Not only for persons, but for societies and nation states, narrative identity is valuable in countering misunderstandings and distortions that can lead to conflict. Narrative identity offers a way forward towards a more just society: “We should not seek any fixed substance behind these communities, but neither should we refuse them the capacity to maintain themselves by means of a creative fidelity to the foundational event that established them in time” (Ricoeur “Approaching” 54). Similar to his narrative understanding of the self and its relationship with another person, Ricoeur offers a way in which communities of human beings can recognize and appreciate one another enabling them to live in just relationships.

3.6 The Capable Ethical Self

Marcel’s concept of intersubjectivity, which Ricoeur refined as “the personal encounter with another” (Joy “Recognition and Intersubjectivity” 2) provided a starting point for Ricoeur’s journey into ethics. It was through his concept of ‘recognition’ that he establishes a way forward. Ricoeur took from Hegel his thesis of mutual recognition, i.e. recognition of and by another. Hegel had gone beyond the Kant’s ethical model which stated that people are to be treated as ends and not means. Hegel called for the recognition of other self-conscious subjects as such as well as of oneself as a self-conscious subject. Ricoeur went further in proposing this relational symmetry as involving reciprocity. For Ricoeur, it is not just that I am similar to
another person, and thus enjoy the same privileges. It is that I cannot come to knowledge of my own identity “unless this complex interrelationship of both self-recognition and mutual recognition takes place” (Joy “Paul Ricoeur and a Hermeneutics of Human Capability and Fragility” 10). Although Hegel’s mutual recognition suggested a relationship between persons so intimate that Hegelian theory describes the outcome as one person passing into the other, Ricoeur’s thesis goes beyond Hegel in identifying the other as irreplaceable. In this way, Ricoeur also modified Levinas’ analysis of ethics as total responsibility for the other, suggesting that “the most profound ethical request is that of the reciprocity that institutes the other as my likeness and myself as the likeness of the other” (Ricoeur “Approaching” 46). However, he rejected Levinas’ one-sided thesis of the self’s utter responsibility to the other, in that it is a “manifestations of a ‘unilateral dialectics,’ instead of the dialogical exchange he wishes to advance” (Joy “Paul Ricoeur and a Hermeneutics of Human Capability and Fragility” 13). For Ricoeur, mutual recognition is vital and must be accomplished through reciprocity rather than under duress without critical reflection as Ricoeur’s evaluation of Levinas’ ethical injunction implies.

Ricoeur understands self-esteem as “the interpretation of ourselves mediated by the ethical evaluation of our actions. “Self-esteem is itself an evaluation process indirectly applied to ourselves as selves” (Ricoeur “Humans” 99). Ricoeur employs a hermeneutical phenomenology as he seeks to define the ethical self and identifies a three part structure in the makeup of the ethical person. The first concerns self-esteem, which he characterizes “as wish … prior to any imperative” (Ricoeur “Approaching” 45). This optative formula creates a self who says “If only I could live well, within the horizon of an accomplished, and in that sense a happy,
life!” (45). The person who expresses such a desire estimates themselves through a hermeneutic of suspicion of the self. Ricoeur considers this desire for an ethical life as over against a simple imperative to act morally. The benevolent desire to ‘live well with and for others’ means that “the self’s action towards others are never guided entirely by moral norms [due to] the mutuality of self and other that persists in friendships at times when the moral norms that usually govern them are threatened or annihilated” (Ellis and Stam 429).

Understood in this manner, self-esteem is neither egoism nor solipsism. Given that Ricoeur defines self-esteem by “intentionality and initiative,” (Ricoeur “Approaching” 46), the person is necessarily capable – capable of acting on their intentions and influencing the course of events. Their actions, linked with those of others, create the interconnected world of experience.

The second term Ricoeur discusses regarding the ethical self is solicitude, signifying ‘with and for others’. This is the “movement of the self towards others who respond with an interpellation of the self by the other” (Ricoeur “Approaching” 46). This notion was present in Marcel’s intersubjectivity. However, Ricoeur expands his ideas with his thesis of reciprocity that “institutes the other as my likeness and myself as the likeness of the other” (46). Ricoeur’s narrative understanding explains this thought, expressing it as “where one represents oneself as another” (Kearney 174). The third concept included in Ricoeur’s ethics is the desire to live in just institutions, which will be expanded later in this section after an examination of the theory of recognition and self-esteem in reference to Mounier and Marcel.

Mounier’ philosophy suggested the ultimate worth of the person and in this vein, Ricoeur considered his own investigations as an extension of Mounier’s work on personalism
(Ricoeur “Approaching” 45). Here the foundation was the ‘absolute value of the person’. Ricoeur, however, was seeking a way to advance an understanding of the supreme worth of each human being in order to discover a guide to reciprocal responsibly and careful concern one for another. Ricoeur’s experience at the *Esprit* community emphasized the import of a society built on equality and fair dealing, supporting his desire to develop an ethics of a just society. Unlike Mounier, Ricoeur was not a political activist. However, through his philosophy, he actively worked to establish a philosophic viewpoint that would enable human beings to live together in just communities, to care for each other and to be accountable to each other.

Mounier’s strong convictions set the tone for life at the *Esprit* community at Châtenay-Malabry, to which Ricoeur was drawn. Mounier envisioned a spiritual revolution and a society of free and creative persons. However, Ricoeur observed that, “particularly in the first years of the journal *Esprit*, the specificity of the institutional relationship was masked by the utopian idea of a community that would be, in some sense, the extrapolation of friendship” (47). This lack of distinction between friendship and justice, i.e. between the interpersonal and the institutional, risks a lack of authentic justice for those with whom one did not have a personal relationship. For this reason, Ricoeur developed a three-way division that allowed for “a richer idea of the person” (48).

This model of Ricoeur’s can now be compared with both Mounier and Marcel. To Mounier’s two-term personal and communal dialectic, Ricoeur adds a third element, thus distinguishing between interpersonal relations (friendship) and institutional relation (justice) in order to clarify and allow for “full justice” in the political dimension (Ricoeur “Approaching” 47). “By clearly distinguishing between friendship [solicitude] and justice, the force of the face-to-
face is preserved, while at the same time giving a place to the everyone without face” (Ricoeur “Approaching” 48). The other denotes both “the other person and everyone. The other person of friendship and the everyone of justice” (48). He suggests that distinguishing intersubjective relations from societal institutions purges personalism’s communitarian ideal of ambiguity.

Ricoeur had admired the goals expressed in the journal Esprit and in the community that grew out of it, yet he found that advancement was stalled by their utopian vision. Bridging his philosophic theory from the solicitous relations between individuals to encompass the larger societal group through his thesis of just institutions allowed for the creation of a practical and effective ethical frame for the benefit of ‘everyone’. Ricoeur’s theory of recognition values difference, and in this way, “otherness as a human being exists not to be incorporated, subsumed or even eradicated—as in Sartre’s dire reading of Hegel” (Joy “Paul Ricoeur and a Hermeneutics of Human Capability and Fragility” 11). In this way, Ricoeur’s thesis is able to make sense of the identities of larger communities and nation states as they struggle to create just institutions. Ricoeur suggests that confusion and conflict with regard to national identities can result from a lack of understanding of initial personal narrative identity, as was described “with its dialectic of change and maintenance of self by way of the pledge and the promise” (Ricoeur “Approaching” 54). The identities of communities are also not fixed, but have “the capacity to maintain themselves by means of creative fidelity to the foundational events that established them in time” (54). Ricoeur viewed his three-term formula – self-esteem, community, and just institutions – as a re-visioning of Mounier’s work which only identified a two-term dialectic of the person and the community.
As for Marcel’s own attempts, his existential intersubjective reality supplied Ricoeur with a framework for his ethical thesis, but Ricoeur expanded and refined it. According to Joy, “what Ricoeur is striving to express is a phenomenological ethics of intersubjectivity” (Joy “Hermeneutics, Philosophy and Religion” 32). Marcel proposed the incarnate person who bodily and creatively relates to others in time in his thesis of ‘creative fidelity’ which posits the promise of fidelity carried into the future. Ricoeur build on these ideas in the establishing his theory of self-identity as the product of the narrative or story of one’s life as intertwined with the lives of others (Time and Narrative Vol. I-III, 1984-88). Further, not only are we formed by the other, but it is in this identification with the other that our lives have meaning. Marcel’s investigations led him to the vision of persons committed to one another. However, his was a simplistic view of selfhood that did not account for how this is possible. Ricoeur’s hermeneutic and narrative self reveal the self as an agent capable of action in the world and responsible for its actions. For Ricoeur, furthermore, an ethical person develops their ethical self through such actions. The view that it is the choices taken through each experience of a life that determines moral character is congruent with Marcel’s thesis that the moral self exists only in relationship to God. Marcel suggests that freedom is more than simply a choice. It is a personal necessity. He explains: “I had made no real choice there and yet I had never felt more free than at that moment. Why? Because there was nothing resembling an outside necessity. There was just this certainty that I would be betraying myself, be wanting in my own person, be putting myself in contradiction with everything I had always thought and said yes to, if I failed to [act]” (TWB Conversations 242). Ricoeur interprets Marcel’s meaning to be that by reading one’s own story, i.e. the narrative of moral action, the person creates their ethical character which will inform
their future actions. But Marcel did not have the philosophical tools or insight to express this clearly.

Marcel had emphasized the existent, concrete self over against a “pre-existent self on whom … gifts were bestowed in virtue of certain rights, or as a recompense for some former merit” (Marcel Homo Viator 19). Ricoeur basically agrees with Marcel’s conviction that “there is nothing in me which cannot or should not be regarded as a gift” (19). If our talents are gifts, Marcel maintained, then we are ‘called’ to develop our gifts. The converse, in which the egocentric person considers their attributes as originating within themselves, leads to a paradoxical situation in which the self-centred person seeks affirmation from others to confirm and affirm their believes about their image of themselves.

In Marcel’s discussion of availability, he identifies the egocentric or self-centred person who is unavailable and therefore unable to empathize with another human being in their concrete situation. He describes this as a “moral egocentricity” in which the self-centred person is “possessed of unquestionable privileges which make [that person] the centre of [their] universe, while other people are either mere obstructions to be removed or circumvented, or else ... echoing amplifiers,” (Marcel Homo Viator 19). Their desire is, therefore, that the other person reflect back the image the egocentric person wishes to have confirmed about themselves. Ricoeur, however, saw the need to expand this position to include a view of human reality and relationships which would allow for the values of care and concern to be manifest. He thus undertook his long journey that led to his ‘little ethics’ as outlined in Oneself as Another
(1990), which illustrated that one must appreciate the other person in the same way as oneself, with the same integrity and rights.

For Ricoeur, as for Marcel, the ego’s concreteness follows more from its temporal, incarnational existence than from any idealistic essence. For Ricoeur, “the person designates themselves in time as the narrative unity of a single life” (Ricoeur “Approaching” 53). By thus defining narrative identity as “the cohesion of a person within the sequence of a human life” (53), Ricoeur frees the understanding of the person from the extremes of substantialism which posits an unchanging, atemporal personality as well as from the converse view in which, according to Nietzsche and Hume, the self does not consist of any enduring substance at all but is simply a collection of different, yet related, always changing constituents. For Ricoeur, the narrative self allows for a “dialectic of change and maintenance of self by way of the pledge and the promise” (54) over against any fixed substance comprising the self. Ricoeur was indebted to Marcel’s creative fidelity with its idea of the promise over time. Ricoeur explains that when the self “promises an other to remain the same despite any inclinations of character or changing circumstances [this is possible due to] a temporal projection of self-constancy rather than the permanence in time of an unchanging core” (Ellis and Stam 128). Ricoeur’s narrative identity of the self thus “involves the dialectic of self-constancy, which ... involves the dialectic of keeping one’s word. In keeping one’s word or in ‘promising to remain constant,’ an I promises to remain the same despite changing circumstances or leanings of its character ... an I is accountable for its actions in front of an other, as the other is counting on the I to perform them” (Ellis and Stam 129-29). This takes on an ethical dimension since both are responsible. It is this responsibility that creates self-constancy and character in juxtaposition to the self’s
changeability through its intentions and initiatives which produce growth and change over time. Ricoeur thus exhibits a far more nuanced appreciation than Marcel.

In addition, Ricoeur’s definition of ethics as ‘living well with and for others in just institutions,’ builds on Marcel. Such an ethics cannot be accomplished through a simple understanding of intersubjective relationships, but requires a thesis that includes the social other in which the intersubjectivity of friendship is replaced by institutional justice. Ricoeur’s ethics is an Aristotelian-influenced, teleological project in its consideration of the meaning and purpose of human existence and its aims at “the good life with and for others in just institutions” (Oneself as Another 180). Ricoeur is not offering simply a theoretical ideal, but the actual possibility of a just society. Ricoeur’s narrative understanding allows for the re-interpretation of the stories of the disenfranchised and downtrodden. In this way, the history of suffering creates a new narrative in the present that is able to inform an ethical response bringing forth an evolution in justice. For those persons who “have not had an unimpeded path to the task of self-esteem and designation, or automatic access to agency, there is a responsibility to bring these situations to consciousness” (Joy “Recognition in the Work of Paul Ricoeur” 529). In this way, Ricoeur offers a practical orientation, which is demonstrated in his most recent books, where, “deeply affected by the vast scale of unmerited suffering that he witnessed in the contemporary world, he endeavored to express an ethical position that recognizes the integrity and rights of all human beings to live well in just communities” (Ricoeur, The Just). Here, Ricoeur surpasses both Marcel and Mounier with a much enlarged global perspective of humanity.
Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined the ways in which Paul Ricoeur was influenced by Gabriel Marcel and Emmanuel Mounier. The model of personalism developed by Mounier and the intersubjective thesis offered by Marcel were influential for Ricoeur in his early years. However, I have shown that Ricoeur endeavored to build a philosophy founded on more complex and sophisticated ethical understandings, and thus it was necessary that he go beyond his predecessors’ views. Ricoeur established an understanding of the human condition that improves on their philosophy and proposes a way forward towards the realization of justice for all persons.

Ricoeur considered that the direct knowledge of the self suggested by Marcel was not possible. His own investigations led him to posit a narrative understanding of the self in which the person’s narrative identity is formed through the stories they tell about themselves. Further, the narrative identity of each person intersects with the stories of others, and as a result an interweaving of experience arises. In this way, Ricoeur’s understanding of intersubjectivity is more highly developed than that of Marcel and is based on an understanding of the self, its formation and its development.

Ricoeur valued, as well, Mounier’s personalist philosophy, which affirmed the absolute value of the human person. However, Ricoeur wanted to create an ethics in which each person was valued in the same way as every other. Mounier’s emphasis on the freedom and accountability of the individual person laid the groundwork for Ricoeur’s understanding. However, he went beyond Mounier’s straightforward insights and developed a highly nuanced
view of the human person and their responsibilities, as outlined in his ‘little ethics’ (Oneself as Another 1990).

Ricoeur used the phenomenological method developed by Husserl and expanded on the thesis of existentialism. He began with subjectivity, but found it unsatisfactory in explaining the way in which the self comes to self-understanding. He adapted his predecessors’ views on the embodiment of the incarnate self, but determined that these did not provide any clarity on the question of the nature of the self. For these reasons, Ricoeur turned to hermeneutics, showing that the identity of the self can only be arrived at through interpretation. As he advanced further in his examination of the self, he moved to a narrative understanding. Through this model, Ricoeur was able to posit a self who unfolds and changes over time, yet retains its identity. His investigations led to his development of the capable self, who was able to become an ethical self. The gift of Ricoeur’s model is its relevance to real people and their lives in the world. It is instructive for both individuals and for communities of persons. But more importantly, his ethics offers practical insight into the creation of communities with workable systems of justice. Thus, Ricoeur was able to expand and refine Marcel’s vision of hope and Mounier’s dream of a community in which each person is valued. He carried their aspirations to a practical end, offering a realistic interpretation of the human condition and a model that provides authentic hope towards a future with justice for all.
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