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**Gabriel Marcel**, *Music & Philosophy*. Trans. Stephen Maddux and Robert E. Wood. Intro., Robert E. Wood. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2005. Index. 147 pp. \$17.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN-10: 0-87462-665-X. ISBN-13: 0-87462-665-0.

Review by Gary E. Aylesworth, Eastern Illinois University.

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This book consists of translations of essays on philosophy and music that Gabriel Marcel published in between 1920 and 1959. Drawing from a large collection of essays gathered under the title *L'esthétique musicale de Gabriel Marcel* (Aubier-Flammarion, 1980), the translators have selected those essays they found most representative of Marcel's meditations on music for the present volume. As they note, Marcel himself complained that the reception of his thought did not sufficiently recognize the connection between philosophy and music that he took to be of crucial importance. By making these pieces available in English, the translators hope to correct this oversight for those who do not have access to the texts in French.

Born in 1889, the same year as Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein, Marcel became one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century, a legacy that continued in the work of his most famous student, Paul Ricoeur. He was recognized by his contemporaries, most notably by Jean-Paul Sartre, as one of the four leading figures of existential thought, including Sartre himself, Heidegger, and Karl Jaspers. Having converted to Catholicism in 1929, Marcel was designated by Sartre as a "Christian existentialist," a term he accepted at first but later rejected. His interest in music was religious as well as philosophical, and he wrote that in an age where religious faith is lacking, music itself becomes religion for many people. For him, music is an experience of the non-objectifiable depths of being, where the listener participates in being's mysterious presence and finds himself in communion with a higher power. Indeed, he claimed that his experiences as a musician and composer led him to his reflections on being as something that can only be experienced aesthetically.

In "Music in My Life and My Work," the lead essay of the volume, Marcel remarks "it was with music as a starting point that I was led to reflect on Being or to affirm Being" (p. 46). Philosophically, his approach is broadly phenomenological and owes much to the work of Husserl and Heidegger, particularly to the latter. But many of his characterizations of the experience of being bring him close to the *Existenzphilosophie* of Jaspers as well. In music, says Marcel, feeling frees itself from its psycho-somatic matrix and becomes a structure "in time and above time," thus arriving at a moment of ontological disclosure. Music is fundamental in this regard because traditional metaphysics conceives of being in terms of vision and objective reality, but Marcel insists that being is better disclosed as something heard rather than seen, as something encompassing us, eliciting our participation, and joining us in a moment of communion as with a "thou." In this respect, his conception of being and his ontological interpretation of music are decidedly

humanistic and religious. However, the divine is part of the mystery of being itself and is not attributed to a particular being, i.e. it is not "God" in the sense of what Heidegger calls "ontotheology."

While Marcel is indebted to Heidegger in many ways, he parts company with him on the issue of being and its temporal modality. Where Heidegger de-structures the traditional interpretation of being as presence, Marcel seeks to revitalize this interpretation and to find new depths within it. "The musical mystery is the very mystery of presence," he says in another essay, and "it is precisely in presence that the spirit frees itself from the *apeiron* that is pure dissemination and mournful repetition" (p. 113). This emphasis upon presence, however non-conceptual and aesthetic it might be, confirms Marcel's connection with the metaphysical and theological tradition, a tradition he does not seek to step beyond, as does Heidegger, but to renew through his "aural" phenomenology. Here, being's presence is not an object that we see, as if from the outside, but a feeling that we sense within us and that joins us to a structure (e.g., a musical figure or idea) that is sensuous and trans-sensuous at the same time. Musical feeling, as it were, intends this structure and rises above itself to find its meaning in a presence that joins together, for the moment, the scattered fragments of our lives. Hence, Marcel remarks that "the spiritual function of music consists essentially in restoring man to himself" (p. 114).

To fulfill its restorative function, Marcel believes music must maintain its power within human sensibility and that means it must remain tonal. He finds atonal music to be an experiment in abstraction that is dehumanizing because it addresses itself only to an elite audience and does not intend a unifying structure within aesthetic feeling. "What appears to me as absolutely certain," says Marcel, "is at the very least that music has gotten on a slippery slope, that of the worst kind of experimentation" (p. 69). It is, in his terms, an experimentation that contributes to the breaking and scattering of experience rather than to its joining in presence. This "music of the musicians" betrays music's essential function because "it has deceived the soul" instead of being the soul's privileged mode of expression. Furthermore, Marcel extends this criticism to the visual arts as well, insofar as they, too, have become experimental and abstract. In liberating themselves from the representation of objects, the visual arts have also lent themselves to a dehumanizing adventure that he characterizes as "an escapade without a future" (p. 106).

This aesthetic conservatism, as well as his philosophical commitment to presence, puts Marcel at odds with the intellectual and artistic avant-gardes of his time, avant-gardes that shaped European culture during the last century and presently continue their adventures unabated. A Christian liberal, Marcel deplored the "events" of May 1968 and what he took to be the nihilistic attitude of the students and intellectuals who barricaded the streets and disrupted schools and universities. (He confessed that he had little contact with the workers.) While theorists of the left saw in these events a moment of liberating experimentation inspired, in large part, by the artistic avant-gardes of the teens and twenties, Marcel could only regret the breakdown of community and the shattering of presence that came in their wake. Needless to say, the movements that have been associated with French intellectual life since the 1960s were profoundly troubling for him. We can imagine his disparaging reception of structuralism and poststructuralism, of postmodernism and deconstruction, as further escapades of a dehumanizing and spiritless intellectualism.

Those yearning for a restoration of presence amidst the dissemination and dispersal of experience in the (post)modern world will find a kindred spirit at work in Marcel's

writings. However, given the countervailing gestures of figures such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Derrida, to name but a few, his discourse will strike many as hopelessly nostalgic, if not politically suspect. One wonders whether yet another round in the debates over presence and non-presence (a.k.a. difference) will yield genuine insight or mere polemics. Nevertheless, for much of European philosophy the issue has acquired something of a perennial character, and revisiting Marcel's phenomenology may at least provide an occasion to play the rounds in a different key. At any rate, it is worth the attention of those interested in the history of twentieth century thought.

The essays in this volume are easily accessible for a general audience. They are largely free of technical terms and are written in a conversational style. In addition to laying out Marcel's philosophical interpretation of music, they include commentaries on philosophers such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson and Augustine, as well as references to musical figures such as Beethoven, Wagner, Franck and Schönberg. The introduction by Robert E. Wood provides a useful overview of Marcel's philosophy in relation to music and aesthetics, and provides a contextual framework for the essays that follow. Overall, the volume is a nice addition to the body of Marcel's work available in English.

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