Our discussion in the previous chapters has highlighted the nature of the problem, the thought, and the method of Marcel's and Descartes' philosophy, and their various characteristics. This, as we expected, has not been possible without referring to the answer to a philosophical question according to Marcel and Descartes. To follow, therefore, the same procedure as we did in the last two chapters, would be to repeat ourselves unnecessarily. Hence, in order to highlight some important points concerning the answer to the philosophical problem according to Marcel and Descartes, we shall adopt the following procedure. First, we shall consider 'what the answer is according to Marcel and Descartes'; and then briefly mention their characteristics as Marcel claims them to be. Secondly, instead of going into the details of the irrelevance and the impropriety of Marcel's characterisations of his and Descartes' answers as practical-theoretical, concrete-abstract, personal-impersonal, existential-non-existential, (which have already been brought out implicitly as well as explicitly
in the last two chapters), we shall consider some other important features of their answers which will bring home both the similarities and the differences between them, at least to a certain extent.

A

THE ANSWER TO A PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTION
AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

I. The Answer according to Marcel:

Marcel's problem was to challenge the conception of man underlying the life of man in a modern industrialised society, where man is considered as a non-free, functional and impersonal entity in a crowd or in a group of people owing to the trends of mechanisation, functionalisation and bureaucratisation of human life respectively - the three distinctive aspects of the process of this industrialisation. In other words, his is the problem of finding out an alternative to the life of a broken man in a "broken world". That is why he formulates his philosophical question as "Who am I?" or "Who should I be or, become?" in the face of this mechanisation, functionalisation and bureaucratisation of human life. As against this, indeed as an answer as well as an alternative to this, he presents the understanding of man as a free, whole individual
endowed with certain specific traits. And this he brings out, as we have seen, in his thought, as a way of responding to an actual situation in one's own practical living - as a matter of action and living in one's own actual life. If that is so, then it will be only either a Novel or a Drama that can bring out clearly the kind of problems and solutions that might be there. And Marcel himself supports this when he writes: "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 gushing from the source.... The drama, as a mode of expression, has forced itself upon me, and become intimately linked with my properly philosophical work".  

The same point is echoed by M. Warnock when she writes about existentialism as a whole: "Perhaps, we must conclude that Existentialism, as a way of thinking, is more naturally suited to express itself in novels, plays, films, and other unargued statements of..."  

Hence, we shall explain his answer to a philosophical question with reference to a play that we have already cited in connection with the Marcel's thought - "The Man of God".

Since the summary of this play has already been given in the previous chapter, what we are going to do here is to bring out the details of Marcel's specific understanding of an answer to a philosophical problem with reference to this play. The whole play can be divided broadly into two parts, namely, the first twenty years of the pastor's married life, and then, the rest of his life - his life right from Michael Sandier's first request to see his daughter, born of his adulterous involvement with the pastor's wife.

What was the actual problem of this play? The problem was to find an answer to the predicament created by the adulterous involvement of the pastor's wife with Michael Sandier. Now, what was to be done? In such circumstances, one can take recourse to different answers to the problem depending on one's own priorities of values and convictions. For example, one can find an answer to this problem in divorce. Another answer will be to severely punish the wife, one way or another. There can be still another
answer - love and forgiveness. And the pastor of this play, as we have seen, adopts the last alternative as his answer to the problem. Really, in the first part of this play, Marcel wants to bring out how an actual predicament, i.e., the problem of "participation" with reference to his wife's adulterous involvement was solved by the pastor in his own concrete, personal and existential life. Let us see how the solution is worked out by each of them.

First, the pastor's pardoning of his wife is made known to her, not only in words, but also by his continuing to live with her as if nothing had happened. And the positive response of the wife to his forgiveness is revealed by remaining with him, putting an end to her extra-marital affair. And the fact that the problem is solved to the satisfaction of both parties, for the time being at least, is shown by their happy and peaceful life in the following twenty years. Hence, we can conclude that the solution to this problem of "participation" is worked out by the pastor and his wife in their own concrete, personal and existential lives, rather than through a deductive demonstration based on abstract and universal principles or premises concerning concepts like forgiving, adultery, faithfulness, promise-keeping, and so on.
Another point to be noted here is that, by solving the practical problem of "participation" through their own actual living, they transformed their very lives. There is a change in both lives. That means, by confronting this actual problem and consequently solving it in their own lives, they worked out a metamorphosis of their personalities. This is brought out by Marcel through the pastor himself when, he says to his mother: "We couldn't hurt each other any more. In the old days, perhaps, before we have learned to suffer. But since then each has shared the other's sorrow, each has borne the other's cross. We are richer than we were before. Richer, yes, and better".¹ So, we can say that the answer to the problem really developed as the result of a struggle on their part to restore the "participatory life" of mutual love, hope and fidelity. And the twenty years of happy, peaceful married life bear witness to their transformed life of participation. Hence Marcel's conception of a philosophical solution as an "auto-creation"! Marcel supports this idea when he writes in the following manner. To repeat our quotation, "I think we must, first of all

¹. Gabriel Marcel, "A Man of God", p.47
try to map it (i.e., concrete philosophy) out in relation to life as it is concretely lived, and not to outline its shape in the high void of pure thought".¹ This is more or less the same as to say that Marcel insists that a philosopher should not build up his philosophy with the sole motive of providing to others some kind of a theoretical system of logically certain truths; instead, his endeavour should be to show how an actual problem of participation is solved in the practical life of a particular individual in a specific situation, by transforming the very life of the person concerned. For, philosophising, according to Marcel, is a way of life rather than a mere theoretical or conceptual analysis or a logical theory or system about human personality and life. This is same as to say that Marcel "does not judge the truth of a philosophical solution or answer to a problem by its coherence with a rational system" as an exclusive criterion.

Now what happens later in the life of the pastor and his wife? A new situation arises which will bring out the real nature of his personality. The second part of this play shows that the pastor's self-assumed moral and religious

¹ Gabriel Marcel, "Mystery of Being", Vol.I., p.41 (Italicised are ours).
solution to the problem of his wife's adulterous involvement was not really a solution worth the name - it was not the right and proper solution. That does not mean that it was not a solution at all; but from the point either of quality or of grade, it still lacks something. And this is mainly brought out with reference to pastor's permission to Michael Sandier to meet Osmonde, his illegitimate daughter; and then his denial to his second request for the same purpose.

What is the solution or conclusion Marcel reaches through the second part of this play? Marcel wants to show how a generally assumed life of participation, on both the religious and the human levels, is not at all worthy of being so qualified. The pastor's life is actually a life of selfishness, since the main purpose of his actions is to keep the external decorum of behaviour generally expected of a pastor.

How does Marcel reach such a conclusion? He brings out this conclusion through the very life of the pastor - through the later developments that took place in the life of the pastor. For the purpose, Marcel, through Edmee, the pastor's wife, shows how certain actions of the pastor, considered *prima facie* as an act of participation, are
performed by himself in order to suit to his selfish motives and purposes. Then, towards the end, he will make the pastor reflect over his own past actions introspectively and examine their participatory aspects in the background of his wife's accusations. At last, in the light of his own introspective reflections, pastor realises for himself of the selfish character of his own so-called and religious activities.

The pastor's realisation of his selfish motives is climaxed in his decision to quit the ministry. This conclusion the pastor reaches through the transformation of his personality. Hence the pastor confesses to his mother: "I'm thinking about my ministry of the Gospel. As unfortunately I am not as convinced as you are of my spiritual gifts, or even of my..." Then he laments: "I am spiritually bankrupt, I've been living on assets that did not belong to me." That means, the conclusion that one's seemingly apparent act of "participation" as the solution to the problem cannot be judged as such right and proper one, unless it is seen in relation to the later life or

2. Ibid, p.98.
II. Marcel's Concept of Solution and of Mystery:

Marcel distinguishes his concept of solution from that of the systematic philosophers by qualifying them as "mystery" and "problem" respectively. For example, a mystery, in his terminology, is the kind of truth in which a person is actually involved. He writes: "But a mystery is something in which I myself am involved, and it can therefore only be thought of as a 'sphere where the distinction between 'what is in me and what is before me', loses its meaning and its initial validity'. That means, mystery is a truth which the philosopher should "live" and not merely observe as a disinterested 'onlooker'. That is why Marcel holds that the practical and concrete solution of the philosophical problem comes to be disclosed only through the personal and existential 'commitment' to, or involvement

in, the very problem as well as in the solution on the part of a person. Here, the famous Augustinian dictum will clarify the meaning of Marcel's concept of solution of and of mystery: "To know the truth we must be in the truth".

As against this understanding of his solution as a "mystery", Marcel qualifies the understanding of the systematic philosophers' solution as a "problem". According to Marcel, a problem is "Something which I meet, which I find complete before me, but which I can therefore lay siege to and reduce".¹ That means, a problem is something in which the person concerned is not involved. It is the same as to say that a problem is something which is being treated, not in relation to the one who treats it, but from a general point of view.

By developing his understanding of solution through the concept of mystery, as opposed to the concept of problem, Marcel is also emphasizing, in a different manner, the concrete, personal and existential nature of his problem and solution. Since the nature of mystery demands or implies a personal content or involvement, it cannot be

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approached and tackled with theoretical detachment, i.e., an impersonal and non-existential approach, but only personally and existentially. That means, all the characteristics attributed to Marcel's philosophical solution can also be attributed to his conception of 'mystery'. Hence, mystery, according to Marcel, is concrete, personal and existential, whereas a problem is abstract, impersonal and non-existential.

III. Some Further Considerations:

With reference to this answer of Marcel we may note the following:

(A) The predicament considered in this example is a personal predicament, which is not involved in the economic activity either of the individual or of the society. It has nothing to do directly with the industrialisation of the society, though it may have to do with it indirectly. In so far as this is so, the approach leaves out the most important factor in the industrialised society. Into the implications of this limitation we shall not go here.

(B) At the same time, it has been possible for us to bring out, with the help of illustrations, the features
which constitute mechanisation, functionalisation and bureaucratisation of human life. Indeed, it is not at all easy to establish that the features of freedom, wholeness and individuality are embodied in the illustrations before us. Still, we may claim that these features are there in our cases. For example, since the pastor considers his wife, her daughter and Michael Sandier and so on, as mere means for keeping the external decorum of his moral and religious life, rather than individual persons in themselves, we can say that he actually considers them as non-free, functional and impersonal entities in a group of people. But this claim could also be questioned. Yet, whatever alternative one might think of, it will have to be one which would involve dealing with the predicament in which the pastor and his wife find themselves.

(C) This example enables us to distinguish between what one might call the immediate and the long-term answer. For instance, we can identify the immediate answer of the pastor with reference to the problem of his wife's adulterous involvement as his act of apparent love and forgiveness; and then, the long-term answer as the fact that his forgiveness is really not of a moral and religious character. The example also enables us to realise that what might be adequate from one point of view for a short term, may not turn out to be all right from the same point of view in the long run.
IV. The Answer according to Descartes:

Descartes' problem was to attain logically certain knowledge about the Reality. And he finds the answer to this problem, first by attaining certain knowledge about his own existence and his nature as a thinking being, with the help of "intelectual intuition" and "theoretical deduction". This certain knowledge of his own existence and its nature enables him to develop his thought. In fact, as we saw, it is only the beginning, or more specially the first principle or solution, of his philosophy, on the basis of which his whole system is built up. So, as the next step, what Descartes does is to see how this solution can be related to a system as a whole. Hence, making use of the logically certain knowledge of one's own existence and its nature, he proves the criterion of truth (i.e., clarity and distinctness), which, in turn, helps him to prove the existence of God and of the material world, the constitutive elements of man and of the material world, and so on. Thus, Descartes' solution to the problem of one's own existence and its nature is oriented to, and culminates in, the build-up of a rational system of philosophy in which God becomes supreme. And, in so far as his system is a reasoned structure, he claims that he can face the theoretical challenges from science.
and mathematics against philosophy, religion and the religious way of living. Descartes actually contends that science exists by the courtesy of God and not vice versa, for in his rational system God is supreme.

Here also, as in Marcel, one may distinguish between the immediate or narrow answer and the comprehensive or the long-term answer. The immediate answer one has is "Cogito, ergo sum", which establishes the certain existence of oneself and the nature of the self as a thinking thing. The more comprehensive answer is the entire system, because the certainty of the answer with reference to one's own existence and the nature is itself further strengthened by the system as a whole. We shall refer to this later.

V. The Different Characteristics of the Answers:

From the answers, one can see how Marcel claims that his answer is practical, concrete, personal, existential; and Descartes' as theoretical, abstract, impersonal, non-existential. Since we have already seen them when setting forth the characteristics of the question, the thought and the method, we would discuss it here only verybriefly.

(A) Marcel's Answer is Concrete, Personal and Existential:

Marcel's philosophical solution is a concrete one in the first instance, in the sense that it is practical,
because it is worked out through the actual living or the very transformation of the concrete person concerned rather than through a logical deduction. And then, Marcel's is a concrete solution in the sense of being total. And this, again, can be understood in two ways. First, Marcel's solution is concrete in the sense that his is a solution to the total man rather than to the rational, volitional, perceptual aspect of the concrete man, because it demands the metamorphosis of the whole man. Secondly, his is a concrete solution in the sense that it is to be worked out not only with reference to persons, issues, places and so on, but with reference to the totality of the situations in which the concerned individual lives in his practical life. That is why Marcel insists that the problem of participation cannot be solved once and for all by an individual person, since it will be recurring in his life. And Marcel's is a personal solution since it is a specific solution worked out by a specific individual with reference to his own specific situations by way of transforming his own person. Hence it will be quite different from that of other's solutions. And lastly, since Marcel's solution is worked out through the transformation of one's own actual life with reference to specific situations, it will determine the kind of man who is tackling it or who is
living it. Hence the existential character of Marcel's answer to the philosophical question!

(B) Descartes' Answer is Abstract, Impersonal and Non-existential:

In tune with the criteria set by Marcel to level the criticisms against the solutions of systematic philosophy, as a whole, we have to characterise Descartes' solution as abstract, impersonal and non-existent in character. As in the case of Marcel, there are two ways of characterising Descartes' solution as abstract. Descartes' solution is abstract in the sense that it is a theoretical solution, because it is logically proved by deductions from certain theoretical premises, the truths of which are the results of rational intuitions. Furthermore, since his is an attempt to present a philosophical system more or less like a mathematical system, an endeavour is made to present the various conclusions about man, the world, God and so on, as part of a system. Such an account by itself is only a theoretical account, for he is discussing only theoretical concepts rather than actual living issues. And then, Descartes' solution is abstract in the sense of partial. And this can be further understood in two ways. First, Descartes' solution is abstract in the sense that it is
rational rather than a solution for the whole person, because Descartes judges the truth of a philosophical solution by its coherence with a rational model. Hence, it fails to draw our attention to the differentiated, specific modes or activities of the concrete human being; for, the self chooses, doubts, loves, reasons, commits itself, hates, etc. Secondly, Descartes' solution is abstract in the sense that it is a solution once and for all, irrespective of the changes both in the person concerned and in his situation. And Descartes' solution is an impersonal one since it is a solution for anybody and everybody, a solution universally applicable - a 'solution-in-general', for, whoever has the problem of the certainty of his own existence and nature, he will have the same solution, since Descartes' solution is worked out on the basis of its coherence with a rational system as an exclusive criterion rather than on the basis of one's own priorities. And lastly, Descartes' is a non-existential solution since it does not determine the existence of the person concerned, as it is not developed through the actual life of an individual in a specific situation.

Since the irrelevance and impropriety of Marcel's characterisation of his and Descartes' answers as practical,
concrete, personal, existential and theoretical, abstract, impersonal and non-existent respectively were shown already in the last two chapters, we do not repeat ourselves here unnecessarily. The only point we want to make here is that, viewed in this line of distinctions, one could show that both Marcel's and Descartes' answers can also be characterised as theoretical and practical, abstract and concrete, impersonal and personal, non-existential and existential. And this we can do, as we did in the case of the question, the thought and the method, by considering the respective answers in relation to the context of the problem, the purpose of philosophisation, the possible effects of this philosophisation on the person concerned, and the theoretical arguments advanced to justify the respective answers, and so on.

B

SOME IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ANSWERS

I. The Narrow and the Wider Sense of the Answer and their Inter-relationship:

The immediate and the long-term answers with reference to Marcel's and Descartes' philosophies are related. Because what happens later may totally alter our understanding of
what has happened in the past. And, of course, what has happened in the past is relevant to our understanding of what happens later. Thus, in the larger whole the parts mutually determine each other and the whole, and certainly the whole determines the parts.

(A) Marcel:

In the case of Marcel's answer, let us illustrate this point through the story of the pastor and his wife. The immediate answer, i.e., the pastor's forgiveness of his wife, was first assumed as an act of moral and religious character, an act of love and fidelity. But its real nature was brought out by Marcel by reference to the later developments of his life. At the same time, the immediate answer is relevant to our understanding of what happens later, because it is that which confirms the idea that there is a consistent attempt on the part of the pastor to cover up his selfishness with an apparent altruistic garb. Hence, the mutual relationship between the answers in the narrower and the wider sense. But the whole here is to be understood as the whole life of the individual.

(B) Descartes:

What we have said in the case of Marcel holds good in the case of Descartes. With reference to his
answer to the problem of one's own existence and its nature, in one sense, we have the answer to the problem. But in another sense, that is not so. As we have seen, this is made the basis of further development, through the criteria of truth, the propositions satisfying these criteria and the deduction therefrom. We need not go into the account once again. We can think of the whole system as the conclusion of the problem raised about man, because it is in the system that man is seen in relation to the rest of the reality, and thus in his complete nature.

What is the relationship between the conclusion in the narrow and the wider sense? The narrow and the wider conclusions are mutually related, and support each other. The fact that the system can be reasonably constructed supports the conclusion in the narrow sense. In fact, the parts and the whole mutually support and strengthen each other. But, unlike in the case of Marcel, the whole here is an intellectual or a theoretical system.

II. The Relationship between Thought and the Answer:

(A) Marcel:

In giving an account of Marcel's problem, method and answer, we have given it in a narrative form. But it
must be remembered that our acceptance of an answer is not dependent on the nature of the discourse — it is not a matter of logical necessity. As a matter of fact, the answer has to be in the actual living. In so far, we have not got a real case, we have to have an imaginative rendering of the case, and that is what Marcel does. Only in so far as this is representative of actual cases can we accept an answer as an answer.

The point of stating this here is that, in the case of Marcel's philosophy, a certain answer does work but, not because it is known to be intellectually or logically the right answer; but, rather, a certain answer works out in the actual life of an individual. Therefore, a theoretical account of it is the acceptable account. In so far as this is so, the validity of the actual life of an individual leads us to the acceptance of the validity of the thought. In other words, ultimately Marcel's solution will be judged in terms of life. It is more or less the same as to say that, in Marcel's case, once the particular solution is shown as solving the practical problem concerned, then his method of philosophy also is verified. The reason behind this specificity is that the primary question in Marcel's case is not to consider the characteristics of concept as in the case of Descartes' problem. Instead,
the primary question is to respond concretely to concrete situations. The success or failure of that response is not a matter of whether it conforms to a particular conceptual category; rather, it is a matter of what is felt by the individual. The intellectual formulation or narrative is valid only in so far as this is brought out. Furthermore, this intellectual formulation, in this case participation or anything else, does not tell us clearly what to do in any other case. The working out of the formula in any particular situation is a creative process. The formula may as such lead or mislead.

(B) Descartes:

In the case of Descartes' philosophy, every step that we take has to be logically acceptable. And in so far as they together form a system, the individual steps support the system and the system supports the individual steps. Hence, in the case of Descartes, the relationship between the thought and the conclusion is altogether different from Marcel's. Here it is the validity of the thought that determines the truth of the conclusion, and not the other way about; for the validity of the thought is independent of the acceptability or otherwise of the conclusion.
III. The Solvability of the Problem:

(A) Descartes:

Descartes can rest assured that he can solve the problem of his philosophy today or tomorrow or at least in the near future if he is competent. Or, he can be confident that he has solved his problem once and for all. For example, his proof for the existence and nature of his own self is a proof worked out once and for all. In the face of such proofs, he can claim that he has already solved the problem of his own existence and nature. He need not take into consideration the various developments of his own situation, since they have nothing to do with these proofs. To put it differently, Descartes' problem admits a solution which is worked out once and for all.

(B) Marcel:

In the case of Marcel, the person concerned cannot rest assured that he has solved the problem since his understanding of solution demands the totality of both the concrete person concerned and the situations in which he has been, is and will be existing, which, in fact, is extended to the last moment of his own life on earth. For, only on his death-bed can he say whether he
has solved the problem of 'Who am I?' with reference to himself in a genuine manner or not. Consequently Marcel's problem i.e., 'Who am I?' cannot admit a solution as if worked out once and for all in any moment of his actual life, except in the last.

IV. The Interchangeability of the Subject in tackling the Problem:

(A) Descartes:

Even though we can show that the solution of Descartes' philosophy is endowed with personal character, still we can attribute inter-changeability of the subject with reference to the solution of his problem. The same problem, for example, the problem of one's own existence and that of the nature, can be solved in the same manner by anybody other than Descartes himself. The change in the subject does not in any way affect the solution concerned, since it is worked out with reference to the theoretical considerations of the concept concerned which are universally applicable, rather than with reference to the characteristics of specific and actual situations of the specific and concrete person concerned.
(B) Marcel:

In the case of Marcel's solution, the interchangeability of the subject concerned is not applicable at all. The same problem cannot be handled in the same manner by anybody else, since each problem is supposed to be tackled by the concrete person concerned with reference to his own specific and actual situations, resulting in his personality's metamorphosis. Since the nature of the situations in which the person concerned lives, and the personal convictions as well as the priority of values he adopts will be of specific significance, distinct for each, the solution which is worked out with reference to these facts will also be of different nature in proportion to the differences with regard to both the situations and persons. Hence the interchangeability of the subject concerned is not applicable to the tackling of the problem as it is understood by Marcel.

V. Conclusion:

In conclusion, we would say that both Marcel's and Descartes' answers to their philosophical question have theoretical, abstract, impersonal and non-existential as well as a practical, concrete, personal and existential
aspects. Further, they are similar in the sense that in both cases the answers in a narrow and in a wider sense can be distinguished. And, then, in both cases, the answers in both senses mutually determine each other, and the whole; and, in turn, the whole determines the parts. But the difference in this context is that, while the whole in Marcel's case is to be understood as the whole life of the individual, the whole in Descartes' case is to be understood as an intellectual or theoretical system. Another difference between them is that, in Marcel's case it is the solution that determines the validity of his thought; whereas in Descartes' case, it is the other way about. Descartes can claim that he has worked out the answer to a problem for once and for all. In the case of Marcel, the problem occurs again and again, with every situation and every person, and demands a new effort to tackle it. And, lastly, while, in Descartes' case, interchangeability of the subject concerned is understandable, in Marcel's case it is not at all applicable.