
UNIT 3 THEISTIC EXISTENTIALISTS

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to present one type of existentialists who are strong believers in God. As against the popular belief that existentialists are generally atheists, this unit will show that faith in God is the central theme in their thought. It is not that God is just given a place in their philosophy, but rather their philosophy would not have been possible without God. Before we look into the theistic existentialists, we begin with a short introductory reflection on existentialism. It will help the students to situate Kierkegaard and Marcel better. The first existentialist we consider is Kierkegaard, who is rightly regarded as the Father of Existentialism. His philosophy of existence is held together by the central notion in his thought, namely, *choice*. The growth in choice is disclosed by the three stages of existence, the culmination of which is the leap of faith. Thus Kierkegaard has taken philosophy away from the clutches of reason. The other theistic existentialist that we will be considering is Gabriel Marcel. His thought is a philosophical reflection of Christian theology. His philosophy, after having made a distinction between the traditional and the existential approach of philosophizing, passes through the inter-subjective relation and culminates itself in the transcendental relation to the Absolute Thou, God. Consideration of these two theistic thinkers is intended to give a religious solidity to the searching minds of the students.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Existentialism got developed in the 20th century in continental Europe. Although it is primarily a philosophical movement, we can find its 'roots' and 'branches' (basis and influence) in various fields. Traditional philosophy did not bother about the problem of concrete existence, like death, love, despair, body, finitude, anxiety, hope, etc. Man became more and more aware of his naked existence, and he could not get away to an ideal and abstract realm. In such a situation Existentialism made its appearance not as a stroke of chance but of necessity. The luxury of philosophizing was not limited to the few arm-chair philosophers; existentialism brought philosophy to the appeal of the ordinary man. Existentialism is an elusive notion, escaping all definitions. It is not a system of philosophy, rather a way of philosophizing. It is a type of philosophizing that looks into human existence,

calling the individuals to an awareness of their existence in its essential freedom. Existentialism, instead of retreating to a realm of eternal truths, hugs close to the terrain of ordinary living.

No rigid classification of existentialists is possible. All the same, historians, in spite of the fact that some of the existentialists cannot be placed in any of these two groups, divide the existentialists into two groups: theistic existentialists who admit the existence of God in their philosophy, and atheistic existentialists who deny the existence of God. Although existentialism traces its origins to the strongly theistic Christian polemics of Kierkegaard—what it means to be a Christian—the atheistic stance of Sartre and Camus has become more popular, and existentialism got identified mostly with their philosophy. We shall consider from each group two representative thinkers; and in this Unit we focus our attention on the philosophies of Kierkegaard and Marcel.

3.2 KIERKEGAARD'S PHILOSOPHY

The Background: Personal Life and Western Tradition

Soren Kierkegaard was born in Copenhagen in 1813 in a wealthy family of extreme religious views. He was physically frail and melancholic in temperament. A gloomy atmosphere of religiosity prevailed in the house. A philosophically important event in his life was a love affair he had with Regina Olsen. Although they were engaged, he experienced the difficulty of making a choice for her as his life-partner. He was not sure whether he, with his temperament, would be able to live with her as a family; and thus he experienced the struggle of decision. Kierkegaard also experienced gossip from the society, which made him withdraw more to himself away from the society. In his mature years he turned to Religion, different from the existing stereotyped and rationalistic one. He lived a lonely life, died a lonely death in 1855. Some of the important works of his are the following: *Either/or*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Concept of Dread*, *Stages on Life's Way*, etc.

Kierkegaard's personal life and his philosophy cannot be separated. His philosophical problem arose from some of the touching experiences of his life. Thus his philosophy is a reflection and universalization based on his personal experience. The struggle of choice, the call to be an individual, the need to be distanced from the anonymous crowd, the yearning for a genuine Religion and God of personal commitment and choice, etc., are some of the personally experienced themes that prominently reflected in his philosophy. Thus in his philosophical thoughts, one who speaks is the 'actor', rather than the 'spectator'. He calls himself a subjective thinker rather than an objective theorist. His philosophy is incidental to his main purpose, namely, the search as to what it means to be a human being? What it means to be a Christian? The questions are presented in the form of alternatives for his choice, rather than for an intellectual solution. Thus his philosophy is very much centred on choice or decision.

Kierkegaard found that both western philosophy and Christian Religion were engaged in making life easy and comfortable by abstract thinking and superficial living, as both were centred on reason. Kierkegaard did not want religion and philosophy to be matters to be intellectually known, but to be lived personally by a choice. Just as Socrates who disturbed the conscience of the Athenians by making them aware of their ignorance through his questioning approach,

Kierkegaard found it his duty to disturb the easy conscience of an age that was smug in the conviction of its own material progress and intellectual enlightenment. He would be the modern Christian 'gadfly' who would make people think regarding their individual Christian existence. In opposition to Hegel who was the main spokesman for the universal and the rational, Kierkegaard stood for his exaltation of the individual existence.

Existence: the Whence and the Whither of Philosophizing

Philosophy has to start with existence which is not to be proved from reason, and thus it is the whence of philosophizing. Thinking has to begin from existence, since it is a response to the irruption of existence in our subjectivity. Hence, unlike Descartes, he holds that 'one exists and thinks' as a single personal entity. Existence is an indubitable truth. It is the attainment of self-possession in the self-directed life of the individual. To exist is not merely to be or to live. It is in choosing one's true self that one exists. Those who persist through life do not necessarily exist; they drift along without becoming individuals. Thus existence has to be won by choice. It means thus to become an individual.

The philosophy of Kierkegaard emphasizes the importance of the individual. His excessive emphasis on individuality is negatively influenced by Hegel's excessive universalism. Man has the tendency to escape in the 'crowd', just as Adam under evil conscience tried to hide himself among the trees. Man today is lost in the crowd, and are at a loss without the crowd. Kierkegaard wants to deliver the human being from the crowd and make him aware of himself as the centre of responsibilities. When one sinks into the crowd, one becomes demoralized by evading responsibilities. It is only by a choice that man can deliver himself from the crowd, and become an individual. Man truly can exist only insofar as he becomes an individual. Kierkegaard challenges man to this end. Looking at the whole of his philosophy, we notice that we have to start philosophizing from existence; and we have to move towards existence, insofar as his philosophy is nothing but keeping on growing in our existence. Thus existence is not only the whence, but the whither of philosophizing as well.

The Three Stages of Existence

The three stages of existence, that Kierkegaard speaks of, had its basis in his life. By his personal choice he moved from a life of sensuality to ethical integrity, and thence to a life of religious commitment. That was the picture of the journey of his life. Hegel's dialectics and Kierkegaard's three stages have similarities and dissimilarities. Both speak of a movement through three stages. But they are very much different. According to Hegel, the process takes place in the universal (humanity), for Kierkegaard it takes place in the individual. In the former case the movement takes place necessarily and logically (dialectical process), in the latter, by a personal choice. If one does not make a choice one will continue to remain in the same stage. Once a choice is made for the higher stage, the dethroned stage does not disappear fully; according to Kierkegaard, the lower can be incorporated into the higher.

The first stage is called the *Aesthetic Stage* (The Stage of the lone individual). This stage is characterized by an attitude in which one has no continuity or commitment in one's life. It is called the *Don Juan* stage, which includes not merely a life of sensuality, but an attitude of not wanting anything 'fixed', and of

desiring to taste all experiences. The man of this stage wants to sample the nectar from every flower. The man in this stage is governed by sense-impulse and emotion; he hates all that limits his field of choice. There is no constancy in his life, as he lives for the moment. There is nothing for him to cling or relate himself to: neither to God nor to other people, nor again to the past or to the future. Thus it is a stage of the lone individual.

The next stage is *Ethical Stage* (the stage of the individual and society). This stage is marked by some constancy and consistency since man in this stage makes a choice for a determinate moral standard. He turns away from the lure and glamour of aesthetic stage, and decides to 'settle down' in life with its obligations. The presence of the other or the society has an influence on him. The shapeless individualism is changed, and he is able to relate himself to the past and the future, as a result of which there is a continuity in his life. By being ethical, one misses the category of the 'exceptional': i.e., being a 'saint' or a 'sinner'. Holding fast to a moral standard, one is protected from deviating to be a sinner and to be a saint. Socrates is given as an example for the 'ethical man'. In this stage my individual fancies are subordinated to the social and the legal. Life gets a rootedness and a shape. It is rightly called the stage of the individual and the society.

The final stage that Kierkegaard speaks of is the *Religious Stage* (the stage of the individual before God). From one's commitment to the impersonal law, man takes a leap to a personal Absolute. Only in this stage the sense of *sin* makes its presence. A wrong behaviour is not merely a violation of law; rather it is expressive of man's option against God. Man attains the genuine selfhood as he makes a leap of faith, a leap into the dark. In this leap as long as one believes, one is carried along; as long as one despairs one sinks. The more man accepts his weakness, the stronger will be the presence of God in him. The leap of faith—the choice to move away from the ethical stage—cuts across the *ethical* demands, as it is evident in the case of Abraham's preparedness to sacrifice his son at God's demand. Only one who has been faithful to the ethical laws can transcend them in the religious stage. This stage is characterized by essential suffering, fear and trembling, guilt and dread. It is the stage of the individual before God.

The Philosophy of Leap: Faith and Truth

Kierkegaard's is a philosophy of choice or leap, the structure of which remains basically the same. But it can be best explained in relation to man's leap to the Absolute. The central problem in Kierkegaard's philosophy has been the question as to how to be a Christian. Thus he reflected on the relationship between God and man. The existence of God is an indubitable fact for him. As God is infinite, there is an impassable gulf between God and man who is finite. Bridging this gulf is not possible with rational systems, but only with a leap of faith—not with a theory of knowledge, but with an act of commitment or choice. Such a leap is a self commitment to the 'objective uncertainty', a leap into the unknown. Man is as though sitting on a precipice, with an attraction and repulsion to take the leap—*repulsion* because of the objective uncertainty, and *attraction* because of the subjective certainty. He is in a situation of dread, wherein attraction and repulsion, sympathy and antipathy, are interwoven. Dread is the struggle of choice, the alarming possibility of freedom! Faith as the leap links the objective uncertainty and subjective certainty. Such a leap is a venture, a challenge, which I have to struggle to make. Faith is both a gift and a choice; a gift, as man is given the

capacity to make the choice; a choice, as it has to be appropriated by oneself.

The truth to which I commit myself by a leap of faith is not same as the objective truth of creed or belief, as Religion is not a system of intellectual propositions to which a believer assents. We ordinarily speak of 'objective truth', the knowledge of which is highly impersonal. For example, $2 + 2 = 4$. Once I know it, I know it; I do not have to make it my own constantly. Kierkegaard doesn't deny the validity of such truths. But he gives priority to the existential truth or truth as subjectivity. It is that on which I stake my whole being. It is so important for me; still I can doubt it. If I accept it, I do so with a passionate self commitment. I make a choice for it. It is in a sense *my* truth. I have to renew such truth constantly to make it my own. To hold to such a truth is a venture, which chooses an objective uncertainty. I make a choice for the existential truths, and I have to maintain them as it were over a fathomless sea by the passionate appropriation of the objectively uncertain. Thus, Kierkegaard reiterates the centrality of 'choice' in faith and truth, in religion and life.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) How is Kierkegaard's life related to his philosophy?

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2) The role of 'existence' in Kierkegaard's philosophy?

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3) Dwell on the three stages of existence.

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3.3 MARCEL'S PHILOSOPHY

Among the theistic existentialists, Gabriel Marcel occupies an important place. Just as in the case of Kierkegaard, so also Marcel's life and experience played a significant role in the birth and growth of his philosophy.

Experiential Background to His Philosophy

Gabriel Marcel was born in 1889 in a Catholic family; his mother died when he was just four years old. Thereafter he was brought up by his aunt, who became his step-mother. He experienced an a-religious attitude in the family. After his secondary schooling, he was awarded a fellowship in philosophy by Sorbonne-university. He taught philosophy in different places. During the First World War, he served as a Red-Cross official. In the second half of his life, he began to move closer to religion, especially Catholicism. Thereafter his life was a journey of thought and commitment. Some of the important works of his are the following: *Metaphysical Journal*, *The Mystery of Being*, *Being and Having*, *Homo Viator*, etc. In 1973 Gabriel Marcel died at the age of eighty-three.

Certain experiences in his life stand out in contributing towards his thought: (1) the difference of temperament made him realize that some of the incompatibilities of life cannot be reconciled by intellectual formulae. People cannot be regimented into a group, without consideration of their uniqueness. 2) The spiritual aridity at home set him forth on a spiritual quest that culminated in his faith in God. He did not inherit a religion of passionate commitment, and this absence set him forth towards a genuine religion. 3) His mother's early death made him develop a phenomenology of *presence* from his experience of physical absence of his mother. 4) His experience at the war-field took him away from abstract dialectics to anxious meditations on life and being. He started reflecting on life and death, personal relations and encounters, pain and suffering. In the light of these experiences, he looked at the prevalent academic life, which he found to be very dissatisfying, since it has been stifling all creativity. Thus he began his own philosophical reflection.

Twofold Approach to Reality

Marcel, before he begins his philosophizing, looks into the two ways of looking at reality: the way reality has been looked at traditionally, and the new way that he proposes in his philosophy. This new 'way' is not exclusively of Marcel, but that which emerged with existentialism. But Marcel has given a precise expression to it, by showing the contrast with the traditional approach. First of all, he makes a distinction between the *primary* and the *secondary* reflection. The primary reflection is analytical and dissective, and it has a place in scientific research. It looks at the reality, part by part. The reflecting subject here is an 'impersonal anyone'; and here the subject-object dichotomy is maintained. The secondary reflection, on the other hand, is synthetical and recuperative; it takes a holistic approach. This has greater role to play in philosophy. Another corresponding distinction that Marcel makes is that between *problem* and *mystery*. The object of scientific knowledge is 'problem' and of philosophical reflection is 'mystery'. Problems are open to solution. Once the solution is reached, the problem is no more. For the problems I am an epistemological subject, grappling with an object as a problem. The mystery is a question in which the being of the questioner is involved. No solution is aimed at in a mystery. I cannot stand apart from the mystery; it is in me, and I am in it. The third distinction that Marcel makes is that between '*being*' and '*having*'. The mystery deals with being, and the problem with having. In 'having' the relation between the possessor and the possessed, between the 'who' and 'what' is external, and in 'being' the bond is internal, as between I and thou. My relation to 'having' is such that what I 'have' is at my

disposal, and I can dispose it off as and when I want without ceasing to be myself. It is not constitutive of my being.

Incarnation and Freedom

While clarifying the distinction between ‘being’ and ‘having’, Marcel gives two instances of ‘having’: *secret* and *body*. Secret is the pure type of having, since it is fully under my control and disposal. Body is not a *having* as normally understood, since I cannot dispose of my body and be myself. As a phenomenological existentialist, Marcel speaks of the ‘mine-character’ of body, and in this context and tone Marcel speaks of ‘incarnation’ or man as ‘incarnate’ or ‘bodily’. Body cannot be considered as an object, as *the body*, rather as *my body*—body preceded by a possessive personal pronoun. Although body is not a having, it is the prototype of all kinds of having—condition for all possessions. I can possess many things because of my bodily character. If body is not a having, is then being? No, I can neither say I *have* my body, nor can I say that I *am* my body. It has an ambivalent position of being and having. My relation to my body best expressed by the expression: I am bodily, just as I am spiritual. It is the ‘I’ that is the centre of all actions and thoughts: I am hungry, I know, I decide, I have pain. etc., instead of my body is hungry, my body has pain, my soul knows, etc. There is a constant tension between being having. Bible speaks of ‘gaining the whole world’ (having) and ‘losing one’s soul’ (being). The ‘having-centred man’ sees the others as ‘having’ (at his disposal). Man has to keep the right priority, and balance them both. The notion of incarnation has to be seen against the dualistic conception of body and soul, and that of man and world. To be bodily and to be worldly essentially belong to man. In other words, through my incarnation, I am in the world.

Marcel considers freedom, not as a condemnation, but as a grace, as an invocation to be free. The free act is creative of the personal subject; the anonymous persons do not act in freedom, and thus, they do not create themselves. It is in and through freedom that I create myself. It is a creative response to the appeal of my being. Freedom is primarily *a freedom for* the project of self-fulfilment, which is to be realized through one’s freedom for or commitment to God and others. I create myself in my committing myself to others and to God. Man has the capacity for commitment or betrayal. Freedom is not merely the choice between these two alternatives. By choosing to be committed, one fulfils and creates oneself; when one does not make a choice to be oneself, one is in captivity. Freedom is a conquest: it has to be won from the situation of captivity. The free activity is marked by both ‘receptivity’ and ‘creativity’, thrownness and possibility: in one word, ‘finite freedom’. Thus Marcel’s notion of freedom rests on an act of ‘ontological humility’—the recognition that man is a created being, and not an autonomous God.

Philosophy of Relation

Marcel’s is a philosophy of relation—totally different from the philosophy, propagated by Sartre, his compatriot and contemporary. While speaking of the two-directional relations, Marcel differentiates them, showing their complementarity. The two-directional relations are directed to the finite others and to the absolute other.

Relation to the Finite Other: Intersubjectivity

Marcel is known primarily for his theory of inter-subjectivity which he developed, basing himself on the theory of intentionality in phenomenology, applied to the notion of 'availability'. The act of being available is directed necessarily to other persons. The very act through which 'I am' implies an allusion to other people: an I to a thou. Although inter-subjectivity is presented as the authentic mode of existence, people have the leaning towards living an inauthentic existence of faceless anonymity, living a self-enclosed existence. In this case, the other is seen, not as a 'thou', but as an 'it'—a functionary, an instrument, an object, ... I may start my relation to the other, taking the other as a s/he; but gradually the barrier disappears, and we together form an 'us'. The relation becomes inter-subjective or I-thou relation—the relation between subjects. From The narrowness of the initial subject-object relation (I-it relation) I move to an I-thou relation or intersubjectivity, in which we become mutually available, we accept each other as subjects.

It is in the intersubjective relation that there takes place *presence* and *encounter* (meeting). Only a personal subject can be *present* to me, and we *encounter* each other. An object cannot be present to me, nor can I encounter an object. It is on the plane of secondary reflection and mystery that the other is present to me. Thus encountering and presence have deep metaphysical nuances. There is present here an unconditional *mutuality* that affects the very being of the individuals. The mutually encountering subjects are *available* to each other. Availability and unavailability (*disponibilité* and *indisponibilité*)—the typically Marcelian notions—become meaningful in the context of his explanation of inter-subjectivity. The notion of 'availability' carries with it a stance which is characterized by a readiness to respond, an openness, being at the service of the other, a welcoming, etc. Through one's 'creative fidelity'—responding to the other in a creative manner—one grows in one's inter-subjective relation.

Relation to the Absolute Other: Faith and Hope

When I enter into communion with the other, I transcend the level of 'having' (object) to that of 'being'. But here too I want to go beyond to the Absolute. My exigency for commitment, fidelity and transcendence is only partially fulfilled in human interrelationships. Hence I aspire towards a self-commitment towards the Absolute. But it is through the finite 'thous' that I can transcend to the Absolute Thou. In my existential relation to the finite thous, I become aware of my orientation to the Absolute Thou (God). Through my spiritual orientation of love and fidelity to others, we begin to participate in the Absolute Other. It is in the Absolute Thou that the universal human fraternity has attained its total actualization. All the finite thous are solidly grounded in the Absolute Thou. My openness to Being passes through the transcending of egoism in the communion with others, to a personal self-transcending to God. God is not to be proved objectively, but to be encountered as the 'absolute Thou'. It is specifically through *faith* that I relate myself to the Absolute Thou. Faith implies a personal commitment. Marcel distinguishes between personal and propositional faith: believing *in* and believing *that* respectively. Man has the freedom for commitment or betrayal of the covenant with God. Faith and freedom disclose the need for transcendence to the horizontal and thence to the vertical: through the finite thous to the absolute Thou.

Faith goes with its concomitant love and hope. A relation of commitment is a relation of inter-subjectivity and hope. The threefold gift of faith, hope and love has to be won by freedom. The evils that disable my freedom can be summed up in the category of 'death'. Death is the meeting of life *in time*, and life *beyond time*. Here Marcel introduces the notion of 'hope'. It is the active reaction against the state of captivity, exile and meaninglessness. It is directed to an absolute end, unlike desire which is directed to finite ends. Just as faith, hope too can be distinguished between 'hoping in' and 'hoping that'; the former is the genuine hope in a person. Finally in a profoundly religious tone, Marcel says that salvation is not a static state, but a continued entering into that universal community grounded in God. Marcel's philosophy thus is based on the indispensability of faith, hope and love in a concrete ontology.

Check Your Progress II

1) Has Marcel's philosophy got developed from his life-experience?

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2) Dwell on the twofold approach in philosophy.

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3) Can Marcel's philosophy be characterized as a philosophy of relation?

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3.4 LET US SUM UP

We have considered two of the most important theistic existentialists: Kierkegaard and Marcel. Their thoughts complement each other, and this justifies the choice of these two thinkers as the theistic existentialists. Kierkegaard emphasizes the individual existence, which is to be growing towards making a leap to the Absolute. He has dwelt at length on man's relation to God, which can be built and maintained by personal choice. Kierkegaard's philosophy has made the Christians reflect on what it means to be a Christian; for the others it was an inspiration to develop their individual responsibility. Christian theology is very much indebted to the philosophy of Kierkegaard. In the existential movement almost all the themes of Kierkegaard are found, divorced from their original religious setting. Hence rightly

he is called 'the father of existentialism'. His philosophy of existence and choice poses a constant disturbance to the flock-religion and mass-life. Marcel too dwells on man's relation to God; but he has built it up in terms of Christian theological thought-pattern. The dimension of the finite-other, which hardly finds a place in Kierkegaard, is worked out elaborately by Marcel. Thus both of them complement each other. Being a 'Christian existentialist' is both the strength and the weakness of Marcel's philosophy: it is a *strength* insofar as his thought provides a philosophical basis to Christian theology in contemporary existential terms; it is a *weakness* insofar as his philosophy is almost exclusively dependent on Christian theology.

3.5 KEY WORDS

Existence	: the dynamic character of the being of the human
Leap of faith	: making a choice for the Absolute
Intersubjectivity	: relation between subject to subject
Incarnation	: the essential character of the humans as bodily

3.6 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

1) How is Kierkegaard's life related to his philosophy?

Kierkegaard's personal life and his philosophy cannot be separated. His philosophical problem arose from some of the touching experiences of his life. A philosophically important event in his life was a love affair he had with Regina Olsen. Although they were engaged, he experienced the difficulty of making a choice for her as his life-partner. Thus his philosophy is a reflection and universalization based on his personal experience. The struggle of choice, the call to be an individual, the need to be distanced from the anonymous crowd, the yearning for a genuine Religion and God of personal commitment and choice, etc., are some of the personally experienced themes that prominently reflected in his philosophy. Thus in his philosophical thoughts, one who speaks is the 'actor', rather than the 'spectator'. He calls himself a subjective thinker rather than an objective theorist. His philosophy is incidental to his main purpose, namely, the search as to what it means to be a human being? What it means to be a Christian? The questions are presented in the form of alternatives for his choice, rather than

for an intellectual solution. Thus his philosophy is very much centred on choice or decision.

2) The role of 'existence' in Kierkegaard's philosophy?

Philosophy has to start with existence which is not to be proved from reason, and thus it is the whence of philosophizing. Existence is an indubitable truth. To exist is not merely to be or to live. It is in choosing one's true self that one exists. Those who persist through life do not necessarily exist; they drift along without becoming individuals. Thus existence has to be won by choice. The philosophy of Kierkegaard emphasizes the importance of the individual. Man has the tendency to escape in the 'crowd', just as Adam under evil conscience tried to hide himself among the trees. Kierkegaard wants to deliver the human being from the crowd and make him aware of himself as the centre of responsibilities. Man truly can exist only insofar as he becomes an individual. Kierkegaard challenges man to this end. Looking at the whole of his philosophy, we notice that we have to start philosophizing from existence; and we have to move towards existence, insofar as his philosophy is nothing but keeping on growing in our existence. Thus existence is not only the whence, but the whither of philosophizing as well.

3) Dwell on the three stages of existence.

The three stages of existence, that Kierkegaard speaks of, had its basis in his life. By his personal choice he moved from a life of sensuality to ethical integrity, and thence to a life of religious commitment. The first stage is called the *Aesthetic Stage* and it is characterized by an attitude in which one has no continuity or commitment in one's life. The man in this stage is governed by sense-impulse and emotion; he hates all that limits his field of choice. The next stage is *Ethical Stage*, and it is marked by some constancy and consistency since man in this stage makes a choice for a determinate moral standard. The presence of the other or the society has an influence on him. The shapeless individualism is changed, and he is able to relate himself to the past and the future, as a result of which there is a continuity in his life. The final stage that Kierkegaard speaks of is the *Religious Stage*. From one's commitment to the impersonal law, man takes a leap to a personal Absolute. Only in this stage the sense of *sin* makes its presence. A wrong behaviour is not merely a violation of law; rather it is expressive of man's option against God. Man attains the genuine selfhood as he makes a leap of faith, a leap into the dark. The leap of faith—the choice to move away from the ethical stage—cuts across the *ethical* demands, as it is evident in the case of Abraham's preparedness to sacrifice his son. Only one who has been faithful to the ethical laws can transcend them in the religious stage.

Check Your Progress II

1) Has Marcel's philosophy got developed from his life-experience?

Just as most of the existentialists, Marcel's philosophy too got developed from out of his existential experience. Certain experiences in his life stand out in contributing towards his thought: (1) the difference of temperament made him realize that some of the incompatibilities of life cannot be reconciled by intellectual formulae. People cannot be regimented into a group, without consideration of their uniqueness. 2) The spiritual aridity at home set him forth on a spiritual quest that culminated in his faith in God. He did not inherit a religion of passionate commitment, and this absence set him forth towards a genuine religion. 3) His mother's early death

made him develop a phenomenology of *presence* from his experience of physical absence of his mother. 4) His experience at the war-field took him away from abstract dialectics to anxious meditations on life and being. He started reflecting on life and death, personal relations and encounters, pain and suffering. In the light of these experiences, he looked at the prevalent academic life, which he found to be very dissatisfying, since it has been stifling all creativity. Thus he began his own philosophical reflection.

2) Dwell on the twofold approach in philosophy.

Before he begins his philosophizing, Marcel looks into the two ways of looking at reality: the way reality has been looked at traditionally, and the new way that he proposes in his philosophy. This new 'way' is not exclusively of Marcel, but that which emerged with existentialism. But Marcel has given a precise expression to it, by showing the contrast with the traditional approach. First of all, he makes a distinction between the *primary* and the *secondary* reflection. The primary reflection is analytical and dissective, and it has a place in scientific research. It looks at the reality, part by part. The reflecting subject here is an 'impersonal anyone'; and here the subject-object dichotomy is maintained. The secondary reflection, on the other hand, is synthetical and recuperative; it takes a holistic approach. This has greater role to play in philosophy. Another corresponding distinction that Marcel makes is that between *problem* and *mystery*. The object of scientific knowledge is 'problem' and of philosophical reflection is 'mystery'. Problems are open to solution. Once the solution is reached, the problem is no more. For the problems I am an epistemological subject, grappling with an object as a problem. The mystery is a question in which the being of the questioner is involved. No solution is aimed at in a mystery. I cannot stand apart from the mystery; it is in me, and I am in it. The third distinction that Marcel makes is that between '*being*' and '*having*'. The mystery deals with being, and the problem with having. In '*having*' the relation between the possessor and the possessed, between the 'who' and 'what' is external, and in '*being*' the bond is internal, as between I and thou.

3) Can Marcel's philosophy be characterized as a philosophy of relation?

Marcel's is a philosophy of relation. While speaking of the two-directional relations, Marcel differentiates them, showing their complementarity. The two-directional relations are directed to the finite others and to the absolute other. Marcel is known primarily for his theory of inter-subjectivity which he developed, basing himself on the theory of intentionality in phenomenology, applied to the notion of 'availability'. The act of being available is directed necessarily to other persons. The very act through which 'I am' implies an allusion to other people: an I to a thou. Although inter-subjectivity is presented as the authentic mode of existence, people have the leaning towards living an inauthentic existence of faceless anonymity, living a self-enclosed existence. In this case, the other is seen, not as a 'thou', but as an 'it' or a functionary. The relation becomes inter-subjective or I-thou relation—the relation between subjects. In the intersubjective relation there takes place *presence* and *encounter* (meeting). Only a personal subject can be *present* to me, and we *encounter* each other. The mutually encountering subjects are *available* to each other. Availability and unavailability (*disponibilité* and *indisponibilité*)—the typically Marcelian notions—become meaningful in the context of his explanation of inter-subjectivity.

When I enter into the communion with the other, I want to go beyond to the Absolute. My exigency for commitment, fidelity and transcendence is only partially fulfilled in human interrelationships. Hence I aspire towards a self-commitment towards the Absolute. But it is through the finite 'thous' that I can transcend to the Absolute Thou. It is in the Absolute Thou that the universal human fraternity has attained its total actualization. All the finite thous are solidly grounded in the Absolute Thou. It is through *faith* that I relate myself to the Absolute Thou. Faith implies a personal commitment. Man has the freedom for commitment or betrayal of the covenant with God. Faith and freedom disclose the need for transcendence to the horizontal and thence to the vertical: through the finite thous to the absolute Thou. Thus Marcel's philosophy is eminently a philosophy of relation.