

UNEASINESS: AN EXISTENTIAL ASPECT OF HUMAN LIVING

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Gabriel Marcel links uneasiness with anxiety and anguish. One lives anguish more than one thinks it whereas one thinks anxiety as much as one lives it. Anguish immobilizes thinking and action whereas an anxious person seeks to abolish the anxiety by trying to do something. It is the ambivalence that is common to anguish which Marcel sees as characterizing uneasiness. It is a double possibility. Anguish and uneasiness seem to share similarities. For Marcel:

We will simply have to recognize later that it is appropriate to distinguish diverse directions or orientations, so that uneasiness, for example, can be considered at times as paralyzing or even sterilizing, at times, on the contrary, as fecund and even somehow creative.¹

Uneasiness is something one experiences not something that one has. Marcel presents a distinction between being and having:

Everything really comes down to the distinction between what we have and what we are. ...I can only *have*, in the strict sense of the word, something whose existence is, up to a certain point, independent of me.²

A distinction is made between anguish and uneasiness in that anguish is accompanied or expressed by a reaction to failure whereas uneasiness only tends toward which might be called a very concentrated state, an immobilized sense of anguish. In these instances, the person is a being who is turned inward and not outward toward an exterior reality. In this sense, says Marcel, one becomes estranged:

To alienate is to estrange. Now, the uneasy person tends indeed to be estranged even from those closest to him; between them and him there opens up a more and more impassable gap.³

The primary focus of this kind of uneasiness is distrust. Uneasiness can lead to distrustfulness, not just distrustfulness of others but a lack of trust in oneself, in one's own being. Marcel equates the sense of unworth as moving below to a feeling of oneself as being unworthy of being loved, "How could he not come to consider suspect everything which presents itself to him as the testimony of sentiments which he does not believe he can inspire."⁴

This would be an example of what Marcel calls a movement from the normal to the pathological. In the pathological, the person becomes obsessed with uneasiness, which is capable of developing in the most diverse directions, for instance, in jealousy and miserliness. Here Marcel opens the concept of uneasiness to show the example of pathology. For Marcel the trauma of uneasiness takes place in the form of humiliation:

If I say that this humiliation—or in psychoanalytic terms, this trauma—was not necessarily conscious, I mean that the child can very well not have said to himself: I am humiliated. Everything can very well have happened below—let us not say all consciousness, but reflective or simply articulate consciousness.⁵

It is the obsession that underlies uneasiness that Marcel relates to an unhealthy histological development in dis-ease. Trauma, from a psychoanalytic view, may occur very early in life and may become embodied in a particular way by the person. It would seem that an emotional component must accompany the physical situation as it is experienced. This is then carried forward and embodied as the reaction to a lived event, thereby shaping one's future as well as the slant by which one enters into dialogue with life. From a phenomenological view this may be a turning point in one's life. This could be an opportunity for expansion or it could bring about inhibition.

As an opportunity for expansion it is a transition by creating new boundaries via expression. It is in this expression that one ventures forth into the world and is in turn responsible for the creation of new self-boundaries. In the other direction, it may inhibit one's expression and elaborate the impassable gap between oneself and others. The distinction is as thus: expansion is to go forward, to move outward, to open out; inhibition is to go backward, to move inward, to close off. It is likened to the process of expansion and contraction. They are dialectical movements, the in-breathing and out-breathing, the pulsating rhythms of life.

This is speaking primarily in terms of expression whether it is inhibition (contraction) or expansion, the forward motion of expression. Uneasiness is an experience of ambivalence. An outgrowth of this uneasiness is a tendency toward or a seeking for equilibrium. It is a lack of self-satisfaction which keeps prodding one on, which continues to motivate one to keep trying, to keep moving. Marcel shows the struggle in that, "uneasiness can be regarded as co-extensive with the domain of fear and desire."⁶

Fear and desire may be seen then as boundaries for the experience of uneasiness, depending upon the situation and the horizons of one's

existence, horizons that are open to transmutation or to transcendent actions. The dialectic between need and satisfaction is our connection with our source of nourishment, support and ability to grow. The ambivalence, which is inherent in uneasiness, expresses our potential for growth, growth creates unease.

From both a philosophical and psychological view, uneasiness, as an existential aspect of human living, is understood to be quite natural. As an expression of dis-ease or anxiety it is an indication of disorder. It may be experienced as creativity and express an expansive movement toward the future or it may be experienced as a threat which results in fearfulness and shut one away from one's fullest potential for living.

Notes

- 1) Gabriel Marcel, *Problematic Man*, trans. Brian Thompson (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), p. 70.
- 2) Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, trans. Katharine Farrer (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1949), p. 155.
- 3) Marcel, *Problematic Man*, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
- 4) *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- 5) *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- 6) *Ibid.*, p. 85.