

BOOK REVIEW

Fulya Bayraktar, *Baglanma Hürriyeti: Bir Gabriel Marcel Okumasi [Freedom of Engagement: A Reading on Gabriel Marcel]* (Ankara: Aktif Dusunce Yayinlari, 2014), 149pp.

In this work, Prof. Dr. Fulya Bayraktar examines the concepts of engagement and freedom in the context of Gabriel Marcel's philosophy, with particular emphasis on providing an analysis of "the broken world" that she believes we are living in today. The book is a version of her doctoral dissertation, and its language is Turkish.

Bayraktar, who is a professor at the University of Hacı Bayram Veli, is one of the representative scholars of Marcel's philosophy in Turkey, where she has contributed greatly to spreading interest in his philosophy. This study consists of six chapters: (1) Introduction, (2) About Marcel, (3) Key Concepts of Marcel's Philosophy, (4) The Ethical Meaning of Engagement, (5) The Expansions of Engagement, and (6) Conclusion. The first three chapters draw a general framework of Marcel's philosophy, while the last three focus on engagement, one of the key concepts in Marcel's philosophy.

The Foreword to the book is by Professor Kenan Gursoy, former Turkish Ambassador to the Vatican. A modern thinker and existential philosopher in Turkey, Gursoy was Professor Bayraktar's academic advisor. Gursoy notes in the Foreword the historical development of Western philosophy and its handicaps, and also the place and importance of existential philosophies in the tradition of Western philosophy, and goes on to clarify the place of Marcel's philosophy within existential philosophy. According to Professor Gursoy, Marcel offers critical analyses concerning existential crises that people face in the twentieth (and now twenty first) century. He indicates that there are important features which make this book unique, especially in its treatment of the concepts of engagement and freedom as "complementary concepts" (p. xv), and not separate ideas. The second original aspect of the book is that it draws attention to the links between Turkish cultural viewpoints, Islamic mysticism and Marcel's thought.

Professor Bayraktar indicates in the Preface that the main purpose of her study is to examine the meaning of the concept of engagement in Marcel's philosophy, and to discover the relationship between engagement and freedom. She describes the concept of engagement as "engaging with a value, a self of another person and God" (p. xxi). She then turns to the concept of existence and she argues that Marcel puts forward not only a new conceptualization of existence, but also "a new and authentic understanding of human and religious life" (p. xix). Besides that, she implies that his philosophy presents "a new view of society, in which values are reconstructed" (p. xx). For Professor Bayraktar, engagement plays a critical role in the context of this new perspective on religious life and society because "the act of engagement is not only the starting point, but also the end point of Marcel's philosophy" (p. xix). At the same time, it "is both the starting point and an end point of ethical life" (p. xxi).

In the "Introduction," Professor Bayraktar makes an assessment of existential philosophies in terms of their viewpoints about God. She discusses the negative results of unhealthy I-Thou relationships and addresses the significance of the idea of coming to know

oneself. Additionally, in this chapter, she defines engagement as an “intention” and indicates that this intention reaches its height with the engagement between I and the Absolute Thou. From this perspective, engagement is “an act of faith” (p. 6) and also “a metaphysical-ontological-ethical self-project” (p. 5).

In the chapter, “About Marcel,” Professor Bayraktar gives a brief life story of Marcel, and then presents the general framework of his work. She describes Marcel’s philosophy as “an exploration and dialogue philosophy” (p. 13) and his plays as “observation-investigation plays” (p. 16). She states that Marcel approaches the individual “in the context of the human relationship network” (p. 14) which involves one’s “concrete experiences” (p. 14). She also suggests that Marcel seeks an answer for a few central questions in each step of his philosophy and his works, questions such as, “Who am I?”, “Who is the other?” and “How should I establish a relationship with the other?”

In the next chapter, Bayraktar focuses on the key concepts in Marcel’s thought of “having,” “being,” “problem,” “mystery,” “primary and secondary reflection,” “existence,” “engagement,” “I-Thou, I-It, I-Eternal You relationships,” “being ready” and “being present.” She suggests that it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of the notion of existence in Marcel’s philosophy because he conceptualizes existence as a “co-existence,” and argues that “Actually, the only thing that I can know is my existential experience. And I experience this in my relationship with the other” (p. 24). Professor Bayraktar then turns in the next chapter to ethical issues related to engagement. She argues that the question “Who am I?” in Marcel’s thought necessarily contains another question, “What should be the ethical rules of engagement?” Thus, for Marcel, existence means being an ethical person. So, we cannot ignore the relationship between engagement and ethics.

In the chapter titled “The Expansions of Engagement,” Professor Bayraktar firstly addresses the concept of Homo Viator and other related metaphors like “road” and “journey” in an attempt to clarify their meaning. According to her, people who want to understand Marcel’s existentialism need to understand the meanings of these metaphors. We need to appreciate, for example, that in Marcel’s philosophy “existence is a journey” towards the “self,” towards “you” and towards the “Absolute Thou” (p.100). Being a traveler is the key feature of being human; indeed, existence is nothing more than this journey. Besides that, “the road is a path carrying people to an undiscovered yet magical place” (p. 100) and “people are travelers of a call and call-response journey” (p. 97). A person can find the meaning of his/her own existence in a call coming from another person. In other words, a person needs another person to realize him/herself. “The aim of this journey is to reach God” (p. 100) and the I-Thou relationship (with another) is a first step in seeking or coming to this I-Absolute Thou relationship. According to Professor Bayraktar, these points have parallels with Islamic mysticism because in this tradition, people come from God and desire to return back to God. Moreover, a Sufi is a “homo viator” and his/her experiences of love, faith, fidelity and hope are essential for the mystical journey.

Professor Bayraktar then focuses on themes such as human nature, science, technology, society and religion and their relationships with each other. Applying the metaphor of “the broken world” from Marcel’s play *Le Monde Cassé*, she analyzes the current problems in the world. This analysis is important because it clarifies why modern people feel lonely although they are often involved in close relationships. For Professor Bayraktar, one of the most important reasons why these problems arise is that “having” or “possessing” becomes more important than “being.” People begin to treat each other as if they are objects or as a means to an end, not subjects, and also to place the profession, status and income level of others above their personalities. She illustrates these points with real life examples. According to Professor Bayraktar, another problematic situation in the modern world is seeing God as an entity that can be comprehended by the human mind. She argues

that God and our relationship with God cannot be comprehended by normal reasoning. This relationship is somewhat mystical, involving the highest level of engagement and the keystone of this relationship is faith. People discover the ultimate meaning of their existence in their relationship with God. Professor Bayraktar emphasizes in conclusion that engagement and dependency are different concepts and that real freedom is only possible through an act of engagement, not through an act of dependency.

This book is an important contribution to Marcel scholarship and is well worth careful study. The relationship between engagement and freedom is well described in the light of Marcel's existentialism, and readers are invited to make an existential journey by considering answers to challenging questions, such as "What is the difference between obedience and fidelity?", "Is there any difference between being loyal to other people and being loyal to God?", "What is the contribution of Marcel's philosophy to the process of discovering the self?", "What does becoming a person mean in Marcel's existentialism?", "What is the relationship between engagement, being ready and being present?", "What is the ethical meaning of engagement?" Additionally, Professor Bayraktar draws readers' attention to the similarities and differences among the ideas of famous writers, thinkers and philosophers who were often in dialogue and debate with Marcel and his ideas, such as Albert Camus, Jean Paul Sartre, Martin Buber, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and thus, she provides a broader perspective of key themes and concepts. The language of the book is quite accessible, and so it is suitable for the general educated reader, as well as for philosophy students and teachers, and lay people preoccupied with problems in the modern world.

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