

GABRIEL MARCEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF "THE OTHER:" A MEANS TO BEING HUMAN.

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**Abstract:** It is believed that, 'unity is power.' Unfortunately, we are gradually losing interest in each other. Presence and availability to the other is very much challenged by the modernity, new life styles and the advancement of science and technology. Electronic gadgets distance us from encountering and being available to those around us. Think of many people walking with earphones listening to different audios and videos or playing videogames in places where they could encounter the new other. This leads to the individualistic life, whereby, due to lack of an experience with 'the other,' one does not see the value of the other and assumes that life can go on without the other. It is others who make us visible and important in whatever we do. We are able to focus on whatever we are doing because we know that; there is the other person who is somewhere, either waiting for my service or waiting for me to fail and replace me. So without the other, most of our doings are meaningless. To make this louder, one can just imagine, how could life be, if he was alone in the whole universe. Life is to be lived in the society where healthy relationship between the self and 'the other' is of great value. This article is a call for us to live related with others amidst all the challenges that may hinder or discourage our human relations. There is power in unity and communion than in self-hood. In order for us to claim that we are in a particular human interaction with the other, our relation should not be superficial but intrinsic to the level of 'communion.' This communion must be leavened by meaningful presence, availability and communication. Meaningful presence is more than being there physically, it is also spiritual. Availability goes deeper to disposability of oneself to the other. Communication is not only in understanding the symbolic meaning of the words but understanding the human condition of a person. One relates well with the self when he or she is able to relate well with the other. This is Gabriel Marcel's call through his philosophy of 'the other' as it is discussed in this article.

**Keywords:** 'the other,' Gabriel Marcel, communion, presence, availability, communication, being human, community.

### Introduction

The philosophy of Gabriel Marcel mostly revolves around the whole concept of existential inter-subjectivity. His approach on this does not only end up on the external interactions of one person with the other. It is not enough to meet the other and be with him or her physically. One needs to transcend from the corporeal other to the spiritual other so that the two selves can be able to commune, communicate beyond the meaning of the used language, and be available for the other with a meaningful presence. This article seeks to propose that; as long as human beings have to relate well with other human beings, Marcelian philosophy of 'the other' is a commendable way for us to be human. This comes to re awaken in people the need for the other in our life after we have also experienced the corona virus social restrictions which made us believe that we can as well live in isolation.

### The Essence of Communion

In many overcrowded cities, one can still find people who suffer from the fearful isolation and seclusion. Marcel calls the lives of these people which are characterized by a spirit of continual boredom as 'the antithesis of love.' This negative symptom on the authentic nature of man makes Marcel affirm that; 'men are made for communion.' It is negative symptom because, although one can easily find the other to commune with in the crowd, the crowd itself is not needed for participation<sup>1</sup> or communion as such, due to its nature of having a too general sense of

<sup>1</sup> Vincent P. Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being: Gabriel Marcel's Philosophy of Communion* (New York: Deslee Company, 1965), 33-34.

consciousness. This contributes to the claim that, “some of the loneliest souls in the world are the celebrities who are mobbed wherever they go.”<sup>2</sup> The ephemeral contact of these celebrities with the crowd is always external, and hence, there is a very low possibility for them to have the quality participation and communion which has impact. Soren Kierkegaard in his philosophy, discourages the crowd absolutely. He does not leave a room at all for any kind or nature of the group as he says; “a crowd in its very concept is the untruth, by reason of the fact that it renders the individual completely impenitent and irresponsible, or at least weakens his sense of responsibility by reducing it to a fraction.”<sup>3</sup> However, not all groups or crowds are of the nature that is described to be in contact with the celebrities. Consider, the family, the church congregation, the friends’ companionship, and the colleagues. These are all groups, that according to Kierkegaard, they are ‘crowds’ and hence ‘untruth’. But in these kind of groups, one can have a good communion with the members for decades such that; they are able to know each other, to feel each other and participate in each other’s life. On the other hand, this cannot happen within the brief contact of the celebrity and his or her supporters when they meet in performances.

Marcel advocates the metaphysics of being that is contrary to that of Rene Descartes. His is “a metaphysics of ‘we are’ as opposed to a metaphysics of *I think*.”<sup>4</sup> In this metaphysics, the ‘I’ should engage itself into a greater context than itself, which is the context of the communion with the other. The reason is, “the more my existence expands to welcome and admit others, the narrower becomes the gap that separates my existence from being: the more, in other words, I am.”<sup>5</sup> There should not be a gap between what one is and his or her existence. The same tie which binds me to others gives me to myself also. The ‘we are’ philosophy of being flows necessarily from the fact that the self exists with others. Marcel goes down to the Latin etymological meaning of the word ‘exist’ to insist on the sense of communion from it as he asserts; “the Latin prefix ‘ex’ meaning; out, outwards, out from in ‘exist’ has the greatest importance. I exist, that is as much as to say: I have something to make myself known and recognized both by others and by myself, even if I wear borrowed plumes.”<sup>6</sup> It is in these meanings of the Latin prefix ‘ex’ that we learn to go out of ourselves. We learn to live the ‘metaphysics of hospitality’ in which Marcel wishes to have the bond of loving respect between; the knower and the known, the ill and the well, the secure and the unprotected.<sup>7</sup> The bond that will create a communion of persons bridging all the differences is what is being propagated.

The metaphysical sense of communion is imposed in us just like the way we were not consulted about; “coming into this world, the time, country, family, social milieu where we find ourselves, and physical structure.”<sup>8</sup> This is, according to Marcel the existential situation, that we become conscious of through experience of our outside world. Heidegger and Sartre call this ‘the facticity’ of our being, such that; practically, we are born already related most closely to our fellow human beings with whom we can easily commune. Max Scheler could even extend it back saying that; “the community is implicit in the creature of flesh and blood by reason of his very origin in the mother’s womb.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, before his or her birth, a human person lives in the very first community with his or her own mother while still in the womb. He or she remains growing in the communion with his or her nuclear family both biologically and spiritually, when they are together in proximity even when they are not. Unlike many living creatures which disconnect themselves from their ‘mothers’ and live independent life from birth, human beings remain dependent to their mothers for long because of the special communion nature in them. Likewise, we are meant to be dependent on each other through out our life. Communion with the other helps us to complement each other and live better life as human beings.

### Humanity as a Family

Marcel, who is himself the man of communion and a distinguished champion of the human person kept fighting against the ‘reification’ of this human person who is a member of the human family.<sup>10</sup> In his theatrical work, *The Broken World*, the emphasis was made to propagate that, the mechanized and devitalized world referred to in that

<sup>2</sup> Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being*, 34.

<sup>3</sup> Soren Kierkegaard. *The Point of View: On My Work as an Author*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), 114.

<sup>4</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being II: Faith & Reality. Gateway Edition* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1960), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Marcel, *The Mystery of Being II*, 37.

<sup>6</sup> Marcel, *The Mystery of Being I*, 91.

<sup>7</sup> Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being*, 39-40.

<sup>8</sup> Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being*, 46.

<sup>9</sup> William Kelly and Andrew Tallon. *Readings in the Philosophy of Man*, (New York: Mcgraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), 125.

<sup>10</sup> Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being*, 33.

work, should not in any way continue treating man as a machine.<sup>11</sup> Machines neither relate nor form a family, instead, when assembled or put together can only form an organization, a system or a connection. There is a mysterious bond in the family that cannot be found in any other non-human system. Aristotle made it clear that, “human beings most of all other creatures, have a natural friendship for each other; that is why we praise friends of humanity.”<sup>12</sup> It is this special friendship or relationship that yields us to the bigger human family. This is only possible for a man, a person whose being consists in “his status of being a subject, that is, a free, conscious being, a being who is, unlike the dormant things around him, sensitively and intellectually awake. Moreover, to be a person is to be with.”<sup>13</sup> What mostly creates and qualifies a group of people or creatures to be a family is the ability and capacity to relate well with others as subjects and not as objects.

To be ‘with’ has a special dimension for human being and it is also accompanied by the dynamic drive for transcendence. It involves the self-commitment of the human person to both, the dialogue with all the creatures in the universe as he or she searches for the truth and “to a mutual self-donation with his fellow men for the attainment of the community of love,”<sup>14</sup> which is the human family. To be human or a human person then, is never automatic because, “to be sure, man is born a person, but he may not comfortably remain forever in the fetal stages of being a person.”<sup>15</sup> One can be born a man in the sense of genus, but for him or her to be human, or to be a human person more commitments and efforts have to be done voluntarily or involuntarily as one can also be affected by the surrounding environment including the others. Being human is not found in self-withdrawal or self-isolation from the society, but in the intersubjective participation and communion with the other to form a human family, whose members are integrally embedded in the experienced human milieu.<sup>16</sup>

In the human family, “there are no self-centred monads, gateless and windowless, sealed off from participation in physical and psychological communion.”<sup>17</sup> Every individual then is naturally implicated in the very mystery of sociality. This natural tendency to the society has to be nurtured by the individual self because, he or she has freedom and will, to choose to or not to give in, his or her life by participating in the human family. One’s readiness will be seen not by words and promises but, by one’s sense of belonging and one’s disposability to other members of this human family. When I, as an individual stand out and tell someone that ‘I belong to you’ this means according to Marcel;

I am opening an unlimited credit account in your name, you can do what you want with me, I give myself to you. This does not mean: I am your slave; on the contrary, I freely put myself in your hands; the best use I can make of my freedom is to place it in your hands; it is as though I freely substituted your freedom for my own; or paradoxically, it is by that very substitution that I realize my freedom.<sup>18</sup>

The sense of belonging then, comes with the personal availability and disposability to what the human family lives. This at the basis calls for the freedom and readiness of the particular self. However, this does not in any way make the self-donating individual useless or cheap just because he or she is available to the other. When one is giving oneself to others, it is not expected that he or she gives oneself as a burden to the human family, instead he or she should give oneself as a gift to others. As a gift, a human person needs to first of all have oneself as a gift in awareness, so that he or she can learn to present oneself to others as a gift. The expression ‘I belong to myself’ then, also means, “I am responsible for myself, I have custody over myself or I am a trustee of myself.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the ‘I belong to you’ in the human family and in communion does not mean that; the particular self is a sort of possession that one has as an object. It implies welcoming the other to participate in one’s journey of life. To participate should be, to get involved as a human being, not as an apparatus, or an idea that one can think of,

<sup>11</sup> Marcel, *The Mystery of Being I*, 27.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics: Second Edition*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999), 119.

<sup>13</sup> Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being*, 33.

<sup>14</sup> Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being*, 34.

<sup>15</sup> Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being*, 34.

<sup>16</sup> Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being*, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being*, 46.

<sup>18</sup> Gabriel Marcel. *Creative Fidelity*, trans. Robert Rosthal (New York: The Noonday Press, 1964), 40.

<sup>19</sup> Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 42

manipulate and dispose at their will. When the other is welcomed in our lives as an idea, there is a danger that; “this idea can become a substitute for the real person, a shadow to which I shall come to refer my acts and word.”<sup>20</sup>

### Building a community

Life is dynamic and, in its dynamism, the human person remains swinging with the intensity of how he or she relates with others. To be able to build a community of love, each self is necessitated to have a full dedication and self-donation to the others. On the contrary, “the one who chooses himself necessarily rejects the possibility of transcendence and moves towards self-destruction and the community of hate”<sup>21</sup> that will not be able to last.

However, before one gets to the realization and to the commitments in the communion life, he or she has to first of all build up the self, such that, “the first conquest must be of one’s own inner life through meditation.”<sup>22</sup> In this way, man has to learn how to involve oneself, discipline oneself, value oneself and engage oneself before entering into the communion with others. Through this, one will be able to know the value of the other and be able to put himself or herself in the other’s shoes. Failure to this, one can become a member of a community but a good parasite and a burden to the community. Unfortunately, this formation into building the community is done unconsciously by the milieu in which one finds oneself or where one is exposed to, from the day someone was born. Even with this misfortune, “timely seclusion can be the first thrust toward communion; inward communion can give an awareness of the state of the community without.”<sup>23</sup> Through inward communion, one learns; to love better, to care better, to give meaningful presence and reliable availability when is in the communion with others. This is the reason to why Marcel gives high importance to reflection especially secondary reflection.

It is important to have reflection on what is happening to both oneself and the others because, at the basis of everything in the community, “spiritually and personally each person is unique, incapable of being divided, nor substituted for.”<sup>24</sup> This is again the reason why Marcel made a good distinction between a problem and a mystery where by “a problem is something which I meet, which I find complete before me, but which I can therefore lay siege to and reduce. But a mystery is something in which I myself am involved.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, even when one is in the community, the mysterious part of his or her being will require him to go back to himself individually and get involved in it. However, even in these mysteries of life that require personal involvement in them, the other in one’s communion and community will be there to give company through their meaningful presence and availability. Hence, since mysteries cannot be solved like the problems, the other will play a greater part to help the individual who is undergoing it, to accept and live with it happily. Contrary, if there is no one at all to help this person undergoing a mysterious problem, there is a high chance of this person giving up on life and even committing suicide. This is to say, in whatever case, there is a need to be with the other who can be there in our journey of life through both problems and mysteries.

Being with the other, goes deeper to the demands of participation in the other’s life. Furthermore, participation can be understood in the two levels; “the level of personal communion and the level of corporeality. Just as the enclosing spatial universe finds me as corporeal existent, so the enclosing universe of inter-subjectivity finds me as spiritual existent.”<sup>26</sup> If one tries to consider oneself out of these participations, he or she either becomes, nothing at all or becomes just a pure potential to them. Therefore, one exists indebted to all the two.<sup>27</sup> This means that, someone can claim to participate in the life of the other and in the community life if and only if he or she is able to participate in both levels; as a spiritual being and as a corporeal being. At the spiritual level, we expect an individual to be thinking with the other, feeling with the other, admiring the other, loving the other, having both empathy and sympathy to others. At the corporeal level, an individual is expected to be present in others’ life, to communicate effectively, to act, to do and fulfil his or her responsibilities. When one is only good in corporeal level of participation, he or she can only end up in the danger of being superficial in his or her dealings with the other. His

<sup>20</sup> Gabriel Marcel. *Homo Viator: Introduction to A Metaphysics of Hope*, trans. Emma Craufurd (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951), 17-18.

<sup>21</sup> Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being*, 176.

<sup>22</sup> Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being*, 177.

<sup>23</sup> Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being*, 177.

<sup>24</sup> Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being*, 178.

<sup>25</sup> Marcel, *The Mystery of Being I*, 211.

<sup>26</sup> Kenneth T Gallagher. *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1962), 28.

<sup>27</sup> Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 28.

or her communication will only end up being passing of the mere information without understanding each other. While, if one is only good in spiritual level of participation, he or she is also in danger of being too abstract, obscure and not being able to express his or her participation because, no one will be able to read the mind and soul of the other for them to feel the participation of the other in their lives.

The existence of the community of the selves cannot be possible if; “there is no mutuality of presences, there is no mutuality of communication and there is no mutuality of communion.”<sup>28</sup> There should be a mutual and reciprocated flow of feelings, communication, presence and availability. Moreover, both the community and communion are having the same basic elements in them such that, “wherever the ‘we two’ does not succeed in materializing, there can be no ‘we people.’”<sup>29</sup> Although the individual persons are the ones forming the community, they themselves remain ontologically independent of the whole community. Also, since they existed before the community, they cannot be absorbed into it just like the way body parts are absorbed in our physical body, instead, they ontologically outrank the communities that they form.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the understanding of this community is contrary to the understanding of Kierkegaard’s crowd such that, this community does not swallow up the individuals, does not make them inauthentic and does not reduce their responsibility into fractions. It rather, makes them more responsible and accountable to themselves and to the other or the community to which they have committed themselves.

Notably, the understanding of the community as per this article can be into two ways; firstly, it means the community in which we find ourselves naturally without our choices and voluntariness, for example; our families, our nationalities, our tribes and the universal human family which is the largest community. Secondly, it means the communities that we ourselves choose to form voluntarily and with a purpose as we live in the society, for example, marriage couples, friendships and political parties among others. Even then, in both cases, the members of the respective communities are human beings who deserve same consideration and reciprocation of love, presence, availability and human treatment. Moreover, the analysis of these two meanings of the community substantiate the fact that, there is no human being who does not live in a community, for he will at least be in the community of the nuclear family and the global human community. Therefore, to be human is to be with others in the community.

### Being Human

One of the things that Marcel avoids throughout his philosophy is ‘reification’ of a person. He does not only avoid it, but also warns us not to treat the other as a mere concrete object because, that diminishes person’s mysterious fullness. A human person can be described as;

Infinitely more than all that goes into his make-up, than all the characteristics that attempt to list him. Human personality escapes human comprehension. Though the person lives an emotional, intellectual and volitional life all in one, he infinitely transcends these activities. Man’s unity is such that he can in his transient life perform actions that achieve things outside of himself.<sup>31</sup>

This ability to project his own life into the creative works and things that are distinct from himself, do reveal his openness and capacity to transcend. This transcendence through his curiosity gets him out of himself and helps him to be involved in both the other people and his creator who is the absolute Thou. This is possible because of his ability to perform various acts of communication and communion. When someone cannot transcend beyond oneself, the danger is, “we may even become partners, associates, but we stop short of becoming full presences and persons to one another,”<sup>32</sup> this is a failure to being human. We may fall short of these because it is transcendence that necessitates the feelings of love or hate which only belong to human beings. Then, even one’s presence to the other is being reduced to that of a table to the chair and one’s communication is reduced to only exchange of information that can be done even by a non-human being. This is not a way of being human. The kind of communication which is only about exchange of information is what Marcel calls “communication without communion: unreal communication, in a word.”<sup>33</sup> This communication lacks human feelings, there is only

<sup>28</sup> Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being*, 179

<sup>29</sup> Emmanuel Mounier, *Existentialist Philosophers*, 80.

<sup>30</sup> Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being*, 183.

<sup>31</sup> Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being*, 179.

<sup>32</sup> Miceli, S.J. *Ascent to Being*, 181.

<sup>33</sup> Marcel, *The Mystery of Being I*, 205.



understanding of the information, without the understanding of the person who gives information, which is the most important part of communication to human beings.

Marcel is really interested in the authentic ontological communion in which, “the other is given to me as a thou, as a non-objectifiable presence. This ontological communion is sanctioned by a creative response of our freedom, and is the direct route to transcendence.”<sup>34</sup> Our relation with others in most cases, precedes our own liberty. We only start to reject others as we grow older because of some personal interests and may be the way one was raised up in individualistic environment. When is still very young, a human being has a sense of human togetherness that attracts him or her to form a community, a childhood community where children gather together and playact as a family and as a society, building mud houses and toy objects, just to fulfil the communion urge in them. As this child grows to be a teenager, he is pushed intrinsically to realize one’s autonomy and to help oneself discover better his or her identity as a human being and as a member of the society. This phase of analysis can be called communication.<sup>35</sup> The going back to a new phase of togetherness is accomplished in communion by one’s own freedom such that, “I may if I wish, immerse myself in the privileged special-ness which the stage of communication uncovers, and refuse to surrender to communion.”<sup>36</sup> However, even this kind of egotism is achieved when one is able to recognize the other. The other becomes a mirror where the self will be able to read the image of his or her own worth as a human being.

A human being is able to be affected by even the person who is hardly present in one’s own life in a manner that Marcel propagates. Consider the “faces that hurry by me on the street, the dismal fellow-travelers in the subway, the stereotyped co-workers with whom I engage in perfunctory and tedious conversation, their very ‘being-there’ is hardly to be distinguished from an absence.”<sup>37</sup> A human being who is around us but is not able to give us due attention, and meaningful presence which is leavened by communication with communion, cannot be considered absent although he or she is not truly present in our life. That is why Marcel and Buber as well distinguish these two people with different words; on one side, a ‘thou’ for the person who is truly present in Marcelian understanding, while a ‘he or she’ for the person who is just there with me. After these two, there is an ‘it’ which is for the non-human objects.

Notably, “the person whom I stop in the street to ask directions to the park is much more to me than an animated signpost”<sup>38</sup> but not as deep and close to me as the one with whom one can share his or her life journey. This does not, however, make us treat this man in the street as a mere he or she. We should rather use this as a new encounter opportunity with the new ‘other’ who has to become a thou in a few moments. To the ‘he,’ ‘she’ and it, there is only communication without communion. However, it is not very possible that one is able to relate perfectly in a deep manner to everybody in the world, therefore, “it is enough that it reaches the condition asymptotically for Marcel’s point to be made.”<sup>39</sup> It is a journey that one has to keep taking every day with everybody he meets in one’s everydayness.

When we meet a stranger by chance and begin a conversation may be “about weather, travelling conditions, and the like: even while we respond to each other in a kind of dialogue, he remains for all that a ‘someone’ to me, ‘that fellow over there.’”<sup>40</sup> We may then learn many things about each other just like the way one fills the biographical questionnaire. We will be able to go beyond the zone of exterior communication when we have discovered a “profound tie between us,”<sup>41</sup> and what we share in common. This will vivify our spirits to a human communion. Unfortunately, our human minds have learnt to take for granted and to bracket out a lot of things that we commonly share as human beings, for instance, our human nature and our common home which is the earth. This delays our connection to communion. When we meet the new other in our life, we are supposed to be excited and to feel the way people do when they meet their country people outside and far from their own country, even if they have never met before and they live very far from each other back in their home country.

<sup>34</sup> Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 22.

<sup>35</sup> Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 23.

<sup>36</sup> Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 23.

<sup>37</sup> Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 23-24.

<sup>38</sup> Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 24.

<sup>39</sup> Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 24.

<sup>40</sup> Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 24.

<sup>41</sup> Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 24.

Why should we all not be in the same liveliness when we meet the new other, knowing that, the territorial boundaries that we have are just made for administrative purposes? We all share the same earth, the same land and the air that we breath. We must learn to appreciate the fact that, as human beings, we share a lot with other human beings all over the world. This reality is supposed to bring us together and be present for each other as we define and improve our existence. This is a demand because, “he who, having been shaped as an actual person by the presence of others, withdraws from the living tissue of communion, to that extent ceases to be an actual person.”<sup>42</sup> Otherwise, to live and to think habitually without having the reference to communion is to reduce oneself to a mere epistemological subject.

The human gift of understanding, should help us to understand also the importance of the concept of ‘disponibility’ as Marcel keeps it, since, “the disponible person is hospitable to others, the doors of his soul are ajar, has love, sympathy and admiration.”<sup>43</sup> Admiration is not underrated by Marcel because, “metaphysics is possible through communion. Inability to admire is a metaphysical fault and it is the mark of the in disponible person. Therefore, the in disponible man cannot be a metaphysician.”<sup>44</sup> Communion with the other is deeper because of its transcendence aspect. You can hardly understand the situation of the other, the feelings of the other if you cannot transcend from what you hear, from what you see and from what you know of the other person. Therefore, “it is only when we realize that communion is a primary mode of being that we understand its ineffability without doubting its ontological significance. What is primary cannot be conveyed in terms more ultimate than itself.”<sup>45</sup> This means that, every single relation of a self with the other, should be interiorized in the most profound manner as possible. A human being is constituted by his or her relations with others. The ‘We’ creates the ‘I’. This is even as open as it can be understood from the biological point of view that, the two parents pro-create a new person.

### The Ego and The Others

One of the root causes of individualism is the ego. The ego can mislead a person to feel that he or she can do anything without others, can live independently, and that he is of higher importance than others. Our ego so far has made us human beings to be proud and feel special among all other creatures on earth. When the ego is at its balanced level it is important to help us accept and love ourselves better as the best way also to learn how to accept and love others as well. More attention is given by Marcel, to when the ego is too much. He claims that; “there is, in particular, every reason to think that, the system of perpetual competition to which the individual is subjected in the world of to-day cannot fail to increase and exasperate this consciousness of the ego.”<sup>46</sup> There is a very high pressure to people that bring them to competitions in many and almost all aspects of our life. There are people who want to be like others, there are people who are trying harder to get above others and there are people who are on top and do not want to be taken down at any cost. In this kind of situation, the ego hungers for the best achievement, forgetting that, there is a room for everybody to succeed and the victory is celebrated better with others. It is then difficult to relate well with the other, when this other is the one that the ego is busy competing with.

Therefore, Marcel does not hesitate in saying that “if we want to fight effectively against individualism in its most harmful form, we must find some way of breaking free from the asphyxiating atmosphere of examinations and competition in which our young people are struggling.”<sup>47</sup> The spirit of ‘I must win’ or ‘I must be above them’ sends man back to what Thomas Hobbes, in his work *Leviathan*, refers to as the state of nature, where every man is in the constant war against every other man because of three factors; competition, glory and mistrust.<sup>48</sup> In this state, the ego will lead us to invade the other so that we can gain wealth, safety and the reputation.<sup>49</sup> War and misunderstandings come between human beings because one side or both sides think that, they are better off and deserve more than others. Consequently, this distances one from the other and drags behind the progresses of both individuals and the society at large. Competition with the other gets worse when comparison with others comes on

<sup>42</sup> Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 26.

<sup>43</sup> Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 26.

<sup>44</sup> Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 26.

<sup>45</sup> Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 28.

<sup>46</sup> Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 18.

<sup>47</sup> Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 18.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan or The Matter, Form, And Power of a Common – Wealth Ecclesiastical and Civil* (Oxford: 1873 Press, 1881), Chapter 13.

<sup>49</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*. Chapter 13.

board. Marcel discourages comparing oneself to his or her neighbor and measure one's achievement using the other as a mark. He calls us to notice the essential thing in the presented argument that;

Such a system, which makes self-consciousness or, if you prefer to call it so, self-love ten times worse, is at the same time the most depersonalizing process possible; for the thing in us which has real value cannot be judged by comparison, having no common measure with anything else.<sup>50</sup>

We previously appreciated our uniqueness and the richness of our diversities. Being with others, does not mean, being at the same level with them or being like them in the matters pertaining our secondary characteristics and qualities like what one has. Instead, it is being human that matters for us as human beings. The good news is; the latter is achievable but the former is not achievable. Therefore, whoever that tries to be like others in whatever pertaining external qualities to fulfil one's ego, will never achieve it, and this will make him or her search for what can never be found the rest of his or her life. This failure to achieve, is what will make him or her unhappy, unsatisfied and restless always. On the other hand, whoever that strives to be human by relating well with others, will be also relating more to himself as he relates to others, for Marcel says, "I establish myself as a person in so far as I really believe in the existence of others and allow this belief to influence my conduct."<sup>51</sup> The influence that they should exert on the other here is not the one with the spirit of competition. Instead, should be the influence which has the spirit of motivation and accompaniment on the other's ego. If the ego establishes the existence of an individual through the existence of others, it will be easily accepting the other with humility.

### Marcel with Martin Buber

There is a very big connection between the philosophy of Buber and Marcel especially on the relation with the other. Marcel brought it out very clearly, when he was invited by his friend Pastor Ruf to speak about Buber's philosophical anthropology. Buber himself appreciates the contribution of Feuerbach on the philosophical anthropology. In Feuerbach's opinion, "the individual man does not have the essence of man in himself, neither as a moral nor as a thinking being. The essence of man is only in the human community, in the unity of man with man; a unity, however, which is based on the reality of the distinction between I and Thou."<sup>52</sup> Man can then be hardly defined outside the community in which he is to live. Unfortunately, with time, the value of the community is slowly going down. In Buber's thoughts, Marcel discusses some characteristics of contemporary crisis that leads to devaluing the community life or life with the other. The first characteristic is, "the disintegration of the old, organic forms of communal life such as the family, the estates, the guilds."<sup>53</sup> These have been replaced by the current forms like trade unions which lack the feeling of confidence and the assurance in them. The other characteristic is that, "man is literally dominated by the products of his own labors as vivid in the field of technology where man is about to be manipulated by the very machines he has invented."<sup>54</sup> The development of science and technology has contributed to distancing of human persons from the others.

Artificial intelligences and modern machines have truly replaced the role of the other person to fellow human beings in many places where people go to get different services like in supermarkets, means of transport and other public places. While the producers are focusing on maximizing profit by reducing the number of employees who are to be paid, they have unknowingly alienated man from his fellow man. Shopping places used to be places where people used to meet and build a bond but currently, one can do all the shopping while in the bedroom, and get whatever that they want delivered at home. Even if one goes to shop in person to the supermarket, there is still a possibility of getting in, do the shopping, and get out of it without talking to anybody. The reason is, all the directions, prices and prescriptions are kept on posters and all the payment is done online or with the machines available. There is even no room for bargaining or asking to pay later because of somebody's life situation at a time. This is also happening in many other public service places including the Libraries. One can borrow and return the books in the library without interacting with anyone as long as he or she knows how to use the machines in place. This is one of the crisis that is almost unavoidable in the current world, but it hinders a lot the interaction of people. Husserl in his work *The Crisis of European Science* claimed that, "humanity in general essentially means being human in generatively and socially connected humanities. Furthermore, a reflection on science, represents a self-reflection of

<sup>50</sup> Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 19.

<sup>51</sup> Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 22.

<sup>52</sup> Gabriel Marcel. *Searchings* (New York: Newman Press, 1965), 78.

<sup>53</sup> Marcel, *Searchings*, 78.

<sup>54</sup> Marcel. *Searchings* 78.



modern humanity.”<sup>55</sup> The science and technology as they are of importance in our life, they should as well support our social and human life.

### The ‘We’

Marcel appreciates and supports very much Buber’s criticism of Heidegger’s thought because for Buber, “Heidegger is a secularizer whose philosophy is doomed to failure because it evolves outside of a true concept of inter-subjectivity.”<sup>56</sup> Moreover, it seems that Heidegger neither knew the true ‘Thou’ nor the true ‘We’. The following explanation of the words will help us to understand better the position that Marcel and Buber stand against Heidegger and even against Kierkegaard with his philosophy of individuality. Marcel asserts that;

The person who is the mere object of my care is not a ‘thou’ but a ‘He’ or a ‘She.’ The nameless, faceless crowd which swallows me up is not a ‘We,’ but a ‘One.’ But as there is a ‘Thou,’ so there is a genuine ‘We,’ this is a vital category for our analysis and we have to clarify it. With ‘We’ I mean a group of several, independent persons, each grown up to his own self and his self-responsibility.<sup>57</sup>

The ‘We’ that is referred to here is the one that is being characterized by the individuals’ self-hood and their self-responsibility. Its members must have a vital relation among them. The ‘Thou’ is potentially included in the ‘We’ and “only persons who are capable of truly relating to a ‘Thou’ are able to form a true ‘We’ with one another.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, a group or a crowd becomes a ‘We’ when there is a genuine connection between the particular individuals and each individual is able to personally cooperate towards the definite goal. It is not enough that people are together for them to form a ‘We,’ instead, there must be a good rapport among them. It is possible to have a group with people who have no personal relationship at all. For example, one can be in a demonstration with many people who are not even known to him or her, moving with them, singing with them, and shouting with them demanding for a common favor.

The ‘We’ is not a collectivity of individuals in any way just to explain their plurality. Marcel claims that, “the transition to existence, which is nothing else but faith, is made in the dimension of the ‘We,’ and in this dimension alone. Outside of the ‘We’ there might be room for an idea or a thought incapable of transposing itself into existence.”<sup>59</sup> It is only the ‘We’ that is authentic which is effective. The cry of Buber is to have a human race that is being flavored and leavened by a very genuine ‘We-hood’ because, “a man cannot stay in existence unless he learns to persevere as an authentic ‘We.’”<sup>60</sup> To be alive is to be very open to the reality that we enter into such that, “one’s presence to the world is not by spatiality but it is for communion,”<sup>61</sup> whereby, “my body is given to me as a presence-in-the-world and my person is given to me as a presence-in-communion, hence, *Esse est co-esse*.”<sup>62</sup> According to Marcel, one has no right to treat oneself as either prior to or more indisputably real than the others because, one only exists within a particular fullness of experience that is not private but ‘trans-subjective.’ One has to give priority to the other because “it is of the essence of the other that one exists.”<sup>63</sup> Every one of us is able to define one’s own individual existence by separating oneself from the other.

### Conclusion

To insist on the primacy of communion over individualism does not mean that the individual self has to forget himself and its whole life for the sake of the other. Throughout the article, it has been made clear that, the crowd or the groups that swallow the individual are not in the realm of the ‘We’ because they just end up distracting the self from its life focus. These are what Kierkegaard and Heidegger are against without taking into the consideration that; there is a possibility of having a group or a crowd to the level of the ‘We,’ in which the individual self has a very big

<sup>55</sup> Edmund Husserl. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), § 6.

<sup>56</sup> Marcel. *Searchings* 79

<sup>57</sup> Marcel. *Searchings* 79.

<sup>58</sup> Marcel. *Searchings* 80.

<sup>59</sup> Marcel. *Searchings* 90.

<sup>60</sup> Marcel. *Searchings* 90.

<sup>61</sup> Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 22.

<sup>62</sup> Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 22.

<sup>63</sup> Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 22.

room for individual growth, for individual freedom, for individual responsibility and for individual autonomy. On top of all these that seem to be leaving the individual independent of the group, there is a big need for the individual to be in communion because, the self as an existent can be only defined when it is in the communion with the other. Both the essence of the self and the existence of the self are understood because there is another self which is outside the self in consideration. This is the reason why the article helps us to understand that, in all life of a human being, he or she cannot be and cannot exist as an individual self who is solely independent from the community because, he or she will have at least belonged to the global human family and to the nuclear human family which begun by the communion with his or her own mother in the womb.

Then, looking at the entire article, we can be in a position to conclude that, 'the other is another me' no matter what. The others are not mere mirrors where we see our own images, because, that is reducing them to mere objects that we use as mere means to understand ourselves. Accordingly, 'the other is another me' because, whatever that the other is, every one of us can also be, whether one wants or not. There is a very big possibility of one becoming anything that one hates of the other. If we hate and neglect the other because of their disabilities, we can as well be the same at one point of our life. If we do not relate well with the other because they are of different race from ours, we are also actually different from theirs as well and there is no superiority in that. Whatever label that we can put on the other, is just like putting it in ourselves because the other is another me. The many secondary differences that we put on others cannot invalidate the claim that 'the other is another me.' The differences between me and the other (who is another me) exist so as to perfect the human family.

We cannot define human essence by our bodies' nature because, our bodies are different for our identification from each other and environmental suitability. We cannot also define human essence by our attitudes and conducts because, these were just formed and developed from our own surrounding environment. Our human essence lies in the final cause of our ultimate cause, who is not caused in any way. In order for us to relate well with others, we must be able to transcend from the 'corporeal other' to the 'spiritual other.' It is not only the body of the other we want to relate well but his or her being human that matters most. We as human beings, should be definitely sharing this final cause from our creator. Also, since existentially, it is existence (with the other) that define our essence as human beings, then, it is enough that the other is a human being for us to relate well with them. In relating well to them, both the other and me benefit. This is because, a human being is a paradoxical being who, in the process of knowing, can be both the knower and the known. Therefore, as we relate well with others, we get to know them and also know ourselves better. Knowing the other is knowing myself because the other is another me.

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