

# **PRESENCE: RECOGNIZING THE SELF AS A BEING AMONG BEINGS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF GABRIEL MARCEL**

## **1. Introduction**

Philosophy at the first glance is metaphysics (*proto-philosophia*); the inquiry of being. The investigation of being, as the Greek philosophers have defined, concerns of *arche* of reality.<sup>1</sup> They express a critical opinion to the domination of the theological<sup>2</sup> interpretation of realities and the anthropomorphic concept of god, and cosmogony. What they had occupied was born of a consciousness around the sense and value of human life. Metaphysics, therefore, is not merely cognitive study on being but it displays also human spiritual aspiration to go beyond lived experience. It is not just a rational-abstract reflection but it is also a formation for human attitude. Paul Gilbert, for example, states that metaphysics is an “exercise to obtain a deep understanding of human existence”.<sup>3</sup> Reflecting human life as being between other beings is one of ways to understand human existence.

Philosophical reflection of human relationship in contemporary philosophy is different from modern dominance of scientific method and its way of conceiving the world. Edmund Husserl for instance, formulates his philosophy as rigorous science, which he, then, calls phenomenology. Phenomenology is used as a method for philosophical research to rescue philosophy from endless clashes of speculative system, rhetorical flourishes, and

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<sup>1</sup> VELKLEY, Richard: Introduction, in *The Philosopher's Handbook. Essential Readings from Plato to Kant*, ed. Stanley ROSSEN, New York 2000 (Random House Reference), p.311.

<sup>2</sup> The domination of theology interpretation in this context is referring to the Orphism with their rites and doctrine that be based on cult to Dionysius. All the Greek philosophical system, except skepticism, directed to theology. See JAEGER, W., *Die Theologie der frühen griechischen Denker*, Stuttgart 1953, p.13.

<sup>3</sup> GILBERT, Paul: *La Semplicità del Principio. Introduzione alla Metafisica*, Roma 1992 (Edizione Pieme), p. i.

the appeal to unexamined prejudice and assumption.<sup>4</sup> An important element of phenomenology is intentionality, the directedness toward an object. The object of consciousness is called an intentional object that is constituted for consciousness in many ways, for instance, perception, memory, retention and pretention, signification, etc. Intentionality is fundamental structure of consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

As one of thinkers who influences the birth and development of post-modernism, Husserl intends to provide the basis for philosophy as a rigorous science (*fundamentum inconcussum*).<sup>6</sup> The basis is found in transcendental subjectivity, while the objective world is a certain interpretation of human daily experience (*Lebenswelt*), which precedes the category of objectivity and subjectivity.<sup>7</sup> However, Jean Paul Sartre, observes that Husserl makes a distinction between an object that exist and its appearance. Husserl stops at essence (*eidos*) and thereby, the essence of object cannot be achieved. The case is that 'being' is primary condition for something that appear. So, being is trans-phenomenal, if not so, we fall at an idealism which put a being on subject. It means being is identified with knowing of that thing. In his theory of intentionality, Husserl represents an alternative to the representational theory of consciousness, but it holds that reality cannot be grasped directly because it is available only through perceptions of reality that are representation of it in the mind.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> D'AMICO, Robert: Contemporary *Continental Philosophy. Dimension of Philosophy Series*, Gainesville 1999 (University of Florida, Westview Press), p.2.

<sup>5</sup> AUDI, Robert (Gen. ed.): *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, USA 1995 (Cambridge University Press), p.348.

<sup>6</sup> D'AMICO, Robert, *Op.cit.*, p.7.

<sup>7</sup> KEANEY, Richard (ed.): *Continental Philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, London and New York, 2004 (Rutledge), p.481.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, pp.482-483.

Modifying Husserl's concept of phenomenology, Heidegger asserts that consciousness is peripheral to primacy of one's existence. Human is constituted by states of awareness, included putting the question of being<sup>9</sup>. The question of being is preceded by a question of human being. It means ontology starts with "ourselves". The being whose analyses our task is always mine. Heidegger says, "The question of the "who" answer itself in terms of the "I" itself, the 'subject', the 'Self'<sup>10</sup>. We, ask such questions, thus "we" are where ontological inquiry begins. Here, Heidegger introduces a neutral term: *Dasein* (Being There) for the kind of being "we ourselves are". *Dasein* explains in one way or another, and somehow always does relate, existence (*Existenz*). *Dasein* is Being-in-the-world: *Being-with* and *Dasein-with* (*Mitsein und Mitdasein*).<sup>11</sup> So, human is a being who lies in an immediate and constant rapport with others.

Gabriel Marcel, a French contemporary thinker lays the primary focus on human being to go beyond modern perspectives offering positive and hopeful alternatives. His orientation is introducing an axiology of human being that be revealed in concrete human experience. The fundamental of the axiology is human as incarnate being (being-in-a-world-with others). Being is being together (*esse est co-esse*). The metaphysical root of Marcel's thought is the *besoin d'être*, the need that every being has for self-achievement.<sup>12</sup> Self-achievement can be understood as the aim of human existence. It marks a process of becoming of human in togetherness. The investigation of human reality in general, and

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58.

<sup>10</sup> HEIDEGGER, Martin: *Being and Time*. transl. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson. USA, Oxford UK & Cambridge 1996 (Blackwell) p.150.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>12</sup> MICELI, P. Vincent: *Ascent of Being. Gabriel Marcel's Philosophy of Communion*, New York 1965 (Desclee Company), p. xiii.

interpersonal relation are insightful. In the light of the philosophy of presence of Marcel, I would like to objectify my research in this paper.

The concrete philosophy of Marcel is a method to analyse human existence in relatedness to others. It is a philosophy in dialogue with other being, a philosophy of inter-subjective relationship. Differs from Sartre, who gives a negative meaning to the relationship of human, Marcel defines togetherness with others as ontological exigence of human. In his *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre displays that the human relationship is caused by conflict. Sartre's thought is correlated to his viewing on consciousness. Consciousness is *self-consciousness*. For Sartre self-consciousness is not identical with experience itself. The self is out there, "in the world", like "the self of another."<sup>13</sup> So, the activity of human consciousness is a "negation". One with his/her consciousness is an object in front of the other as subject. That is why he or she should defend it. Sartre thinks that in the human relationship there is an endeavour to subjugate and to make the other as object. There is no inter-subjectivity relationship, but a conflict only. He states that, "My original sin is the existence of other" or in *Closed Door*, he says that, "hell is other".<sup>14</sup>

Marcel, in contrary, reflects the inter-subjectivity of human relationship as an ontological condition for human existence. Reconstructing modern thought Marcel asserts that human original access to being is not epistemological but axiological.<sup>15</sup> The axiology is the way within which, one achieves ontological meaning in life, while ontology characterizes human axiology. Since the human ontological condition is being-in-a-world-with others, the presence is a necessary element. So, the question is, what is the meaning of the presence in

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<sup>13</sup> AUDI, Robert: *Op.cit.*, p.710.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.711.

<sup>15</sup> MARCEL, Gabriel: *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, *Op.cit.*, p.117.

the concrete philosophy of Marcel? How does it characterize human axiology to arrive at the human ontology? These questions will be systematized under this heading: *Presence: Recognizing the Self as a Being among Beings in the Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*.

The rational argument to organize this theme derived from the following structure: this work is divided into five parts. After *Introduction* in the first part I introduce some information about the author's profile, his works, his philosophy back ground and Marcel as a Christian existentialist. This data is basic to comprehending and appreciating Marcel, as we find in the second part, *Gabriel Marcel: His Lifetime and Philosophical Works*. In the third part, *Philosophy of Marcel: A General Horizon of Thought*, I introduce three points that characterize philosophy of Marcel: the concrete philosophy as point of departure on his philosophy, the meaning of concrete philosophy, and a philosophical method in which Marcel elaborates his philosophy. I proceed in the fourth part, *Presence: Human Access to Being in the Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*. Only in presence with other, Marcel believes human can achieve his/her being. That is why he persuades his readers that presence as the recognizing the self as being among beings presuppose charm, engagement, fidelity, hope and love. Since the human is imperfect, all human qualities (charm, engagement, fidelity, and love) is also imperfect. So, it is necessary for human to provide a basis of his or her relationship with God, Eternal Thou. The last part is *Conclusion* to underline important aspects of Marcel philosophy.

## **2. Gabriel Marcel: His Lifetime and Philosophical Works**

### **2.1. The Lifetime of Gabriel Marcel**

Gabriel Marcel is well-known as a musician, dramatist, and one of the most significant Catholic philosophers of twentieth century. He is characterized as a “Christian existentialist”, a label even he rejected.<sup>16</sup> He was born in Paris on December 7<sup>th</sup> 1889. As an only child in an upper-middle-class family, Marcel grew up in bitter loneliness and became areligious, even though he came from a religious family.<sup>17</sup> His mother, Laure was from a Jewish family and his father, Henri was from a Catholic family, but they did not practice their religion.<sup>18</sup> That is likely why Marcel grew up indifferent to religious life. Henri was a French diplomat to Sweden and director of the national library and museum there. From his father, Marcel inherited a talent for art and a love of culture. It influenced him to live and work as dramatist, musician and philosopher.

In 1893, when Marcel was not quite four years old, his mother Laure passed away. This left an indelible impression on Marcel. As expressed in his autobiography: “I have a little visual memory of her; but during my lifetime she is always present and mysteriously is with me”.<sup>19</sup> The suffering from the loss of his mother caused him to ponder the existential question: *que deviennt les morts?* What happens with the death of a human being? Two years after his mother passed away, his father Henri married his aunt. Under his aunt, he got the best formal education, but loathed the structure of a classroom.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Marcel rejects the “Christian existentialist” label to avoid the same applying to Jean Paul Sartre. See. MARCEL, Gabriel: *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, transl. JOLIN, Stephen and McCORMICK, Peter. Evanston 1973 (North-western University Press), p. xxi-xxxii.

<sup>17</sup> MICELI, Vincent: *Ascent to Being. Gabriel Marcel's Philosophy of Communion*. New York 1995 (Desclee Company), p.11.

<sup>18</sup> MARCEL, Gabriel: *The Existential Background of Human Dignity*, Cambridge 1963 (Harvard University Press), p.23.

<sup>19</sup> MARCEL, Gabriel: An Essay in Autobiography, in: *The Philosophy of Existence*, New York 1969 (Freeport), p.83.

<sup>20</sup> MARCEL, Gabriel: *The Existential Background of Human Dignity*, *Op.cit.*, p.24.

Marcel continued his studies at the Lycée Carnot, where he was interested in philosophy. He then attended Sorbonne University. He obtained an *agrégation de philosophie* from Sorbonne University in 1910, when he was 20 years old.<sup>21</sup> During his study at the Sorbonne, Marcel was interested in Hegelian, as he held, "That the most truly real could not by any means be what is most immediate, but on the contrary, the most truly real is the fruit of a dialectic, the crowning completion of an edifice of thought"<sup>22</sup>. He was also enthused by the German-constructed philosophical system, even though that was not for long. Later, he taught in several *lycée*: Vendôme (1911-1912), Paris (1915-1918), Sens (1919-1922).

Shortly after Marcel began his academic career in philosophy, World War I broke out. During this time, he served as a volunteer at the French Red Cross organization. Surrounded by many victims and people who had lost their family, Marcel discovered the "drama of human existence".<sup>23</sup> While the volunteer job involved treating people impersonally or as an object, rather than as a subject, it also led Marcel to start embracing spiritual life and to look at humans as persons in a spirit of faith. He also found time to meditate over the fate of humans. He felt that God and men inspired him to embrace a more spiritual world. He, then, justified the act of faith in his own mind. He started to think of the possibility of the internal human structure of faith and the human desire to ascend to spiritual life.<sup>24</sup> However, this spiritual hunger was not kept for a long. After World War I, in 1919, he married Jacqueline Boegner, a professor of the *Schola Cantorum*. It was a good marriage.

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<sup>21</sup> MICELI, Vincent: *Op.cit.*, p.1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

They adopted a son, Jean Marie, and lived in Paris where Marcel worked at a publishing house and concentrated on his work as critic and dramatist <sup>25</sup>.

After a period of work as a critic and dramatist, Marcel's hunger for an experience of transcendence emerged, particularly when he reviewed Mauriac's *Dieu et Mammon* and read the words, "But, after all, why are you not one of us?"<sup>26</sup> He recognized this experience as God's invitation to open his free will to the commitment of faith. A few days later, on March 5<sup>th</sup> 1929, he wrote on his journal:

I have no more doubts. This morning's happiness is miraculous. For the first time I have clearly experienced grace. A terrible thing to say, but it is so. I am hemmed in at last day by Christianity-in, fathoms deep. Happy to be so! But I will write no more. And yet, I feel a kind of need to write. Feel I am steepening childishly this is indeed a birth. Everything is different. Now, too, I can see my way through my improvisations. A new metaphor, the inverse of the other-a world which was there, entirely present, and at last I can touch it.<sup>27</sup>

On March 23<sup>th</sup> 1929, Marcel was baptized and became Catholic. Marcel died on October 3<sup>th</sup> 1973, about 84 years old.

## 2.2. The Philosophical Works of Gabriel Marcel

During World War II Marcel taught at a secondary school in Paris. It was in these years that he became engaged as a playwright, philosopher, and literary critic. As for his literary works, Marcel published more than 30 plays in total. A decidedly unsystematic thinker, it is difficult to categorize his works in large part because the main Marcelian themes are so interconnected. Marcel's career as a thinker can be seen during his studies and particularly in his writings: *Les idées métaphysiques de Coleridge dans leurs rapports avec*

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<sup>25</sup> Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP): <http://www.iep.utm.edu/marcel>: access on 21 March 2016.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> MARCEL, Gabriel: *Being and Having*, *Op.cit.*, p.15. See also MICELI, Vincent. *Op.cit.*, p.6.



*la philosophie de Schelling (The Metaphysical Ideas of Coleridge in Their Relations with the Philosophy of Schelling, 1907)* for his diploma in high school; *Fragments philosophiques (Philosophical Fragments 1909-1914)*, and articles *Les conditions dialectiques de la philosophie de l'intuition* and *La métaphysique de Royce* that were published in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* in 1912 and 1918, and the first part of *Journal métaphysique (1914-1923)*.<sup>28</sup>

Marcel's important philosophical works and plays address a variety of themes: personhood, human existence, mystery and problem, presence, hope, love, human relationship. Here, I only mention some of Marcel's principal works on philosophy.<sup>29</sup>

1. *Journal métaphysique, (Metaphysical Journal)*, which, originally, was daily philosophical notes. It consists of two parts: the first written in 1913-1914, the second from 1915 to 1923. It is published in 1927 and dedicated to Hocking and Bergson.<sup>30</sup>
2. *Être et avoir (Being and Having)*, which is published in 1935. It is Marcel treatise on existential views. He bears on some difficulty metaphysical issues such as being and ownership, the body and fidelity, problem and mystery.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> MELCHIORE, Virgilio, (Dir.): *Encyclopaedia Filosofica*, vol. VII, Milano 2006 (Fondazione Centro Studi Filosofici Di Galarate Bompiani), p.6993. For another information, see also: GIACON, Carlo (dir.), *Enciclopedia Filosofica*. vol. III, Venezia-Roma 1957, (Centro di Studi Filosofici di Galarate, Istituto Per La Collaborazione Culturale), p.304.

<sup>29</sup> The classification of Marcel's principal works in six main works as I mention here, is following the *Encyclopaedia Filosofica*, a centre of philosophical study, published by Istituto Per La Collaborazione Culturale, Venezia, Roma. See note 6.

<sup>30</sup> MARCEL, Gabriel: *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond, Op.cit.*, p.xxxii. See also <http://www.gallimard.fr/Catalogue/GALLIMARD/Bibliotheque-des-Idees/Journal-metaphysique>. Access on January 10th 2017.

<sup>31</sup> GIACON, Carlo (Dir.), *Enciclopedia Filosofica*, vol. III, *Op.cit.*, p.304.

3. *Du refus à l'invocation: Essai de philosophie concrete, (From Rejection to the Invocation: Essay of Concrete Philosophy)* which published in 1940. It is a description of concrete philosophy.<sup>32</sup>
4. *Homo Viator* (in English translation, *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*), published in 1944, is a work of a prodigious personal insight on the itinerant man that reinforces human pilgrimages in the world while constructing a hopeful life; and the possible phenomenology of the relationship between myself and others.<sup>33</sup>
5. *Le mystère de l'être (The Mystery of Being)* was published in two volumes. The first, *Reflection and Mystery*, published in 1951, is a collection of Marcel's Gifford Lectures given at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, between 1945-1950. The second, *Faith and Reality*, was published in 1952. The Mystery of Being is an excellent survey of Marcel thought and his style of philosophy.<sup>34</sup>
6. *L'homme problématique (Problematic Man)*, published in 1955, is dedicated to the question of man.<sup>35</sup> This work then brings us to another of his works, *Problem and Mystery*, in which Marcel distinguished two models of human reflection on being, primary and secondary reflection. In this second reflection, Marcel speaks of presence.

In identifying Marcel's principal works, it does not mean that his other important works should be ignored. Since he was an unsystematic thinker, many of his other works are found in other forms, such as drama and music. These works may be listed as follows: *Position et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique (1933)*, *La métaphysique de Royce*

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<sup>32</sup> MARCEL, Gabriel: *Dal Rifiuto all'invocazione. Saggio di filosofia concreta*, Traduzione di Laura Paoletti a cura di Pietro Prinni, Roma 1976 (Citta Nuova), p.40.

<sup>33</sup> TREANOR, Brian (ed.): *Aspect of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel and Contemporary Debate*. New York 2006 (Fordham University Press), p.54.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> MELCHIORE, Virgilio (dir.): *Enciclopedia Filosofica., Op.cit.*, p.6993.

(1945) or *Royce's Metaphysics*, (1956), where Marcel analyzed the work of the American philosopher Josiah Royce, especially his ethics and theory of loyalty; *Les hommes contre l'humain* (1951) or *Man Against Mass Society* (1952); *Le déclin de la sagesse* (1954) or *The Decline of Wisdom* (1954); *Présence et immortalité* (1959); *La dignité humaine* (1964); *Paix sur terre* (1965). In his later years, Marcel became a vocal political thinker and played a crucial role in organizing and advocating the international moral movement of the 1960s.

Marcel's philosophy may be found in his various writings-in his autobiographical journal, as well as in his essays on music, drama, and philosophy - which all together form a unity under his authorship. Analyzing his works, we see that he was an existential philosopher who developed a philosophy based on human reality with specialized reflection on human value, ethics, and orientation to the transcendent aspect of life. All these can be seen clearly across his works.

### 2.3. Gabriel Marcel as a "Christian Existentialist"

Existentialism as a modern philosophical movement in twentieth-century literature and philosophy, stresses the importance of personal experience and responsibility. It demands that people are entirely free and therefore responsible for what they make of themselves. Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky in the nineteenth century, and Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel in twentieth century, are some well-known existentialists. However, in general, they refused to be grouped together into existentialism as a thought system. Karl Jaspers, for example, thought that the existentialism label gave the impression that it is a doctrine (an -ism) among others. Precisely because of its non-doctrinal

or non-systematic approach, Jaspers preferred to call it ‘existential philosophy’ (*Existenzphilosophie*) instead of ‘existentialism’.<sup>36</sup>

As an unsystematic thinker, Gabriel Marcel also rejected any system in philosophy.

In the introduction to *The Existential Background of Human Dignity*, he said:

I could not have done so without betraying a certain fundamental intention which has asserted itself more and more explicitly in my writings, ever since I understood that I could not and would not bring forth a system that would perhaps be doomed to dry up rapidly like so many others.<sup>37</sup>

To his mind, a philosophical system is limited. Any system is unable to express freely the human mind. Moreover, it is difficult to integrate particular and unique human experiences in a universal and necessary system.

At the first, Marcel accepted with the term “Christian Existentialist” to characterize his thought, but later he rejected it. The term “Christian” in the Christian existentialist is not appropriate because his thought is not only Christian but universal. He approved the term “neo-socratism” (Socratic Christian) to characterize his philosophy because it symbolizes human inquiry into real things in daily life, as Socrates did with his students.<sup>38</sup>

Marcel’s existentialist inquiry started when he got involved as a critic and dramatist, particularly when he reviewed Mauriac’s *Dieu et Mammon* and read the question, “Why are you not one of us?” This question influenced him to convert to Catholicism in 1929 at the age of 39. However, Marcel already wrote an article entitled *Existence et objectivité* in 1925. Before the existentialism of Kierkegaard was known in French or before Heidegger and

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<sup>36</sup> The word “existence” in Jaspers’ philosophy is influenced by Schelling, who used the term *Existentialphilosophie* to contrast “essence” with “existence”. Essence is ideal while existence is real.

<sup>37</sup> MARCEL, Gabriel: *The Existential Background of Human Dignity*, *Op.cit.*, p.4.

<sup>38</sup> BERTENS, K. *Sejarah Filsafat Kontemporer* (Contemporary of Philosophy History), Jakarta 2002 (Gramedia), pp.64-65.

Jaspers wrote their works on existentialism, Marcel had already written about existence. In this article, Marcel described existence as concrete situation in the world. It is an unconscious condition, the pre-reflective awareness. To find meaning in life, one should move from existence to Being<sup>39</sup>. Being is understood by Marcel as human consciousness of being with others.

Due to his Catholicism and the influence of Søren Kierkegaard on his philosophy, Marcel is generally considered a “Christian existentialist”. He offers a bridge between the atheistic existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and the theism of Søren Kierkegaard. As a proponent of existentialism and phenomenology, he argued for the rejection of philosophical systems that claimed that abstract truths were of primary importance. In Marcel’s view, philosophy needed to emphasize lived experience: a phenomenological approach. He started to connect his philosophical beliefs to his faith and focused on human relationship to understand existence and God. We see this in several of his works, such as *Being and Having* (1935), *Homo Viator* (1944), *The Mystery of Being* (1952), *Present and Immortality* (1952).

Marcel’s important philosophical contributions to existentialism can be seen in his philosophical method (from existence to being) which will be explained more in part three. Another existentialist characteristic can be found in such themes as freedom, creative fidelity, exigence, hope, family, and presence. These were the topics that Marcel considered in his “concrete” philosophy approach.

### **3. Philosophy of Marcel: A General Horizon of Thought**

#### **3.1. Concrete Philosophy and Its point of Departure**

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23. See also SWEETMAN, B: *Op.cit.*, p. 186.

Marcel is usually known as a *concrete philosopher*. This term, rather than imprisoning him in some sort of an “ism”, manifests the unique character of his philosophical studies. According to R. Matera, Marcel early writings already showed concern for sensory experiences. At the International Congress in Vienna (1968), he indicated how important it is to make a philosophical investigation by analyzing the phenomenology of human experience.<sup>40</sup> He even was aware that it was not easy to reply to questions such as: what does it mean to philosophize concretely?

### 3.1.1. Volunteer at the *French Red Cross* Organization

During World War I (1914-1918), Marcel served in a non-combatant position. He was able to engage in intellectual pursuits and enjoyed success as a playwright, literary critic, and concert pianist. He worked as a volunteer in the French Red Cross and in dealing with the many victims of war, he struggled against the depersonalized questionnaires, the superficial arrangements of putting the victims and relatives into a list<sup>41</sup>. His involvement in the French Red Cross changed his life and his way of thinking. Philosophy should not occupy itself merely with abstract questions. Human beings should be treated as subjects and not units of data that can be easily manipulated.

In collecting information on file cards, Marcel came to see the real though invisible presence of persons, and to share in the agony of their grieving relatives. This new concern motivated him to dedicate himself not only to his own spiritual life but also to challenging the conventional naturalistic and materialistic tendencies of contemporary philosophy, indicating a realm beyond ordinary sense experience.<sup>42</sup> Questions he addressed to victims

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<sup>40</sup> MATERA, R: *La Fenomenologia dell'Esperienza*, Roma 2001, (PUG), p. 627.

<sup>41</sup> MARCEL, G: *The Existential Background of Human Dignity*, *Op.cit.*, pp.36-37.

<sup>42</sup> MICELI, Vincent P. SJ: *Op.cit.*, p.4-5.

and their families about name, age, place of residence, situation, experience, feeling, etc. brought him to discover the common ground underlying all answers and questions. The connection between questions and answers indicates two aspects: first, what one understands about *reality* or *nature* when he or she speaks with the other; and second, how dialogue between two human beings is possible.<sup>43</sup> This is one of the starting points that led Marcel to concentrate on human relationships.

### 3.1.2. The Broken World (*Le monde cassé*)

*Le monde cassé* (the broken world) is an expression that Marcel used to describe the modern human reality such as social functions in society as being teachers, doctors, musicians, politicians, etc. In *Man Against Mass Society*, Marcel described the change in the human way of thinking where human beings are more independent and inclined to refuse all kind of dependence on God. They are idolaters for themselves and alienated.<sup>44</sup> This modern condition is described in *Le monde cassé*, a play written in 1930. Taking the situation in Paris in the early 1930s<sup>45</sup> as its background, Marcel presents the main character of Christiane Chesnay, who was neat, successful, self-gratifying, but non-judgmental regarding the marital infidelities of others. She strongly scolded her husband, Lawrence, for castigating her best friend, Danise, because of her overt infidelity. Marcel points how the main character was transformed by a new hope and experienced a *metanoia*.<sup>46</sup>

The philosophical and spiritual messages of this drama consist of purity and genuine hope despite the confused situation. Hoping to be freed from shackles of this situation is

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<sup>43</sup> MARCEL, G: *The Existential Background of Human Dignity*, *Op.cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>44</sup> ANDERSON, T.C: *Op.cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>45</sup> Paris in the early 1930s was a society which had lost its meaningful sense of life by living in the emptiness of pleasure and sexual libertinism.

<sup>46</sup> MICHAUD, Thomas A: Gabriel Marcel's Catholic Dramaturgy, in: *Journal Renaissance: Essays on Values Literature*, vol.LV, n°. 3 Milwaukee, Spring 2003 (Marquette University), pp. 229-240, here: p.235-236.

another way of preparing for a new life. Hope is the process of the actualization of human potency. It is like a “lighting” that enlightens one to exist. Hope is not an abstract formula. It goes beyond the human experience as data.

The “Broken World” may be taken as a description of the general situation of human beings today. The post-moderns identify themselves through their social functions. Human beings are identified through their cards in the file, their functions, tasks, and places and activities. Having a good job and a good result are more important than personal relationships. The tendency to value others based on their social functions signify the objectification of human subjects. Since the human is treated as an object, he or she becomes alienated. According to Marcel, the human being is placed in this broken world.<sup>47</sup> As he describes it:

It is a world given over to fatigue. It is a world being eaten away by a parasitic mode of thinking which plausibly justifies all the evils it is perpetrating upon man. Every injustice is justified because it is done in the name and for the benefit of the masses. An idolatry of masses is the *idée fixe* of our generation. Man, cannot be considered safe, nor human unless he is lost in the anonymity of the masses<sup>48</sup>.

In *The Mystery of Being*, Marcel describes the broken world as a divided world there is no heart for others. People are living in “a world at war with itself, and this state of world war is being pushed too far and it runs the risk of ending in a world-suicide”.<sup>49</sup> The spirit of technology<sup>50</sup> is destroying the world and creating a broken world of sorrow.

### 3.1.3. The *Cogito* of Descartes

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<sup>47</sup> MARCEL, G: *The Existential Background of Human Dignity*, *Op.cit.*, p. 158.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> MARCEL, G: *The Mystery of Being*, vol. I *Reflection and Mystery* (Gifford Lectures, 1949-1950), English transl. by G.S. Fraser, Great Britain 1950 (The Harvill Press, LTD), p. 23.

<sup>50</sup> ANDERSON, T. C: *Op.cit.*, pp. 20-21.



Descartes started his philosophy by introducing a question: Is a certain method available as a foundation for doing a philosophical reflection? Replying to this question, in *Discourse on Method* (1637) and *Meditation on First Philosophy* (1641), he introduced the *dubium metodicum*<sup>51</sup> as a systematic process of determining which beliefs could be convincingly held as truth. It is a way of putting all beliefs, ideas, thoughts and matters in doubt to find a solid foundation and unshakable truth (*fundamentum certum et inconcussum veritatis*). The certainty is started by doubting everything. He, for instance, doubts if the principles of mathematic and the metaphysical view of material and spiritual worlds are not deceit like an evil genius (*genius malignus*). Or are we cheated when we imagine something? Heavens, air, colors, shapes and all eternal things as nothing but the bedeviling hoaxes of our dreams.<sup>52</sup> So, what foundation do we hold on to? Descartes believes that it is I who am doubting, and this is not a deceit. In the *Meditation II: On the Nature of the Human Mind*, he writes:

But I have persuaded myself that there is absolutely nothing in the world: no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies. Is it then the case that I too do not exist? But doubtless I did exist, if I persuaded myself of something. But there is something deceiver or other who is supremely powerful and supremely sly and who is always deliberately deceiving me. Then too there is no doubt that I exist, if he is deceiving me. And let him do his best at deception, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I everything has been most carefully weighed, it must finally be established that this pronouncement “I am, I exist” is necessarily true every time I utter it or conceive it in my mind.<sup>53</sup>

Descartes indicates *cogito* as an absolute certainty, as pure reason (ideal I). *Cogito* is a solid truth, because I understand it clearly and distinctively. Using *cogito* Descartes introduced a

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<sup>51</sup> Cartesian doubt is also known as Cartesian skepticism, methodic doubt. It is a systematical process of being skeptical about the truth of one's belief in order to determine which beliefs he could be certain were true.

<sup>52</sup> DESCARTES, René: *Meditations, Objections and Replies*. transl. and ed. ARIEW, Roger and CRESS, Donald, Indianapolis 2006 (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.), p.12.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

process of denying reality to get a valid truth. The criterion of the truth is not in the object but it is the subject. It comes from a clear and distinctive idea (*idea clara et distincta*). It is *clara* because it is self-evident and it is *distincta* because it is pure idea or reason. However, it is not only *cogito* that exists. So, how can Descartes explain the *idea clara et distincta* in front of other realities? In fact, the I who exist is not merely my thought but also my body, that can be touched, that can feel the other thing outside of me.

Descartes argues in *Meditation I* that human ordinary experience of the world could not provide such a guaranteed foundation on which all other knowledge can be based. This argument comes from the fact that one is often disappointed, because what he/she has been taught are merely prejudices, and because our senses are often false. To prove that what we think we know is truly correct, he recommends to adopt a method that can avoid error by tracing back our knowledge to a firm foundation of indubitable beliefs.<sup>54</sup>

Marcel disagrees with Descartes' *cogito*. Descartes' approach overlooks the realms of concepts.<sup>55</sup> Descartes' philosophical mind is concerned to discover whether sciences could be based on principles without doubt logically rather than psychologically. In his conversation with Paul Ricœur, Marcel pointed out the fault of Descartes, "the indubitable character of existence", a character that is prior to any determination or to any intellectual act whatsoever. In Marcel's view, it is necessary to make an examination.<sup>56</sup> All ideas cannot be separated from the participation of the subject in a living concrete situation.

### 3.1.4. The *Absolute I* of Hegel

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<sup>54</sup> DESCARTES, René: *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. Fourth Edition, transl . CRESS, Donald A: Indianapolis/Cambridge 1998 (Hacket Publishing company). p.62.

<sup>55</sup> SWEETMAN, Brendan: Marcel and Phenomenology: Can Literature Help Philosophy? in: *Journal Renascence: Essays on Values Literature*, vol.LV, n°.3 Spring 2003. Milwaukee, 2003 (Marquette University, 2003), pp. 179-192, here p.180.

<sup>56</sup> MARCEL, G: *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, *Op.cit.*, p .226

Hegel's philosophy is well known as the core of German idealism. Idealism as presented by Hegel is the construction of a rational/logical system upon the world and history. So, what is actual is rational. Reality is brought into mind. He rejected the claim of empiricists, for instance, John Locke, who stated that an object, which forms the content of a human mental idea, comes first then the subject. Hegel, on the contrary, asserted that concepts have priority over objects and mental ideas. The concept is "immanent" in things and in their characters. It is the inner principle of things. Thereby, the structure of reality is determined by the concept.<sup>57</sup> In Hegel's view, idea is the unity of concept and object. It is real and unlimited in virtue of the correspondence of the concept and the object within. When Hegel asserts that the concept is immanent in things, he distinguishes the meaning of "abstract" and "concrete" from ordinary meaning. 'Abstract' is something we experience here and now. 'Concrete' is the correlation experiences of the object. To think concretely means to think generally, seeing the circumstances of the thing or event and how they correlate to each other. Abstract knowledge comes from the senses, and concrete knowledge comes from the cognitive aspect. The aim of philosophy is to help one think concretely. To philosophize means to know the correlation of everything, of reality as whole. Philosophy encourages one to achieve the scientific knowledge of truth. Since truth is not a *hic et nunc* fact or result of an abstraction process, but a dynamic process (in becoming), that continues, so it needs a reason (*Vernunft*) to grasp it. Hegel distinguishes between *Verstand* (mind)<sup>58</sup> and *Vernunft* (reason), the two human epistemological capacities with different functions. If

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<sup>57</sup> WARTENBERG, Thomas E: Hegel Idealism: The Logic of Conceptuality, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. BEISER, Frederick C, Cambridge, 1999 (Cambridge University Press), pp.102-129, here pp.102-103.

<sup>58</sup> Hegel does not use "mind" but "Geist", which does not exactly correspond to the English word "mind" and which has in fact no single equivalent in English translation. For information on the meaning of "Geist" in the philosophy of mind in Hegel, see M.J. Inwood: *A Commentary on Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, New York 2007 (Clarendon Press-Oxford), p. xiv.

*Verstand* identifies and gives a definition of something based on a certain system of thought (logic, distinct and clear), *Vernunft*, rather than exercising a duty of identification, sees something in its correlation to reality as whole.<sup>59</sup>

Hegel claims that the universe can be comprehended (*Vernünftig*), because it is formed by rational activity (*Vernunft*). Even though intellect forms all reality, however, it is not being aware of itself yet. To be conscious of itself, the intellect needs to wander until it achieves full awareness. Hegel calls this wandering process of the intellect, as self-consciousness with the absolute (das Absolute), spirit (*Geist*) or the consciousness which is conscious of itself (*das sich wissende Wissen*). For Hegel, the Absolute is pure Thought,<sup>60</sup> but the self-consciousness of the intellect is a historical process. Only in a historic dialectic does a human being arrive at consciousness of himself. So, Hegel's idealism is historic and logical. Reality is comprehended as the human logical construction of the world. Hegel believes that reality is a dynamic perfection of rationality, a becoming reality; and speculative logic is the only method that can understand the becoming reality.<sup>61</sup>

As a young man, Marcel was interested in Hegel's idealism. In 1909 at the Sorbonne University, Marcel stated that, "The most truly real could not by any means be what is most immediate, but on the contrary, the most truly real is fruit of a dialectic, the crowning completion of an edifice of thought".<sup>62</sup> However, he later changed his mind. The Hegelian philosophical system created for him a difficulty on how to pass from absolute to concrete thing. Hegel's concept of *absolute I* cannot be transferred to the *concrete I*. In his idealism,

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> COPLESTON, Frederick S.J: *A History of Philosophy*, vol. VII. Fichte to Nietzsche. London 1968 (Burns and Oates Limited), p.189.

<sup>61</sup> Hegel presented three moments of the dialectic process in becoming reality: thesis (*an sich sein*), antithesis (*ausser sich sein*), and synthesis (*ansich und für sich sein*).

<sup>62</sup> MICELI, Vincent P. SJ: *Op.cit.*, p. 2.

Hegel thinks that the unique reality is mind (reason, idea), and this mind is absolute. The absolute thing is an untouchable substance because it is eternity. The question is, how does Hegel understand reality which appears to us? Hegel insists that all appearance realities, including human beings, are manifestations of the absolute spirit. The absolute spirit appears itself in the reality of the human and of culture. So, the individual is also an appearance of the absolute thing. The individual is one with the thing. If so, the human remains as an object.

Hegel's concept of absolute thing is too abstract. Marcel could not understand how a philosopher can philosophize without entering reality. Presence in the real world is a way to discover truth, because all reality has its own truth and this truth can be held if someone is present. To develop his philosophy, Marcel started with description rather than "abstract definition and dialectical argumentation". He said:

Instead of beginning with abstract definitions and dialectical argumentation that are sure to discourage my audience, I prefer to start with a sort of global and intuitive characterization of person for whom any sense of being or the ontological is lacking, or who more exactly have lost all consciousness of having had any such dimension to their lives.<sup>63</sup>

Starting his philosophical investigation with "a sort of global and intuitive characterization of person", Marcel describes an "experiential thinking"<sup>64</sup> as the kind of knowing that can be accomplished by any person with a concrete experience of intersubjective presence, the knowing with which philosophical reflection on being should begin.

### 3.2. The Concrete Philosophy and Its Meaning

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<sup>63</sup> TERESA, I. Reed: Aspect of Marcel's Essays, in: *Journal Renaissance. Essays on Value in Literature*. vol. LV, n°3 Spring 2003. ed. ED BLOCK, Jr. Milwaukee 2003 (Marquette University), pp. 211-227, here p. 211.

<sup>64</sup> MARCEL, G: *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, *Op.cit.*, p. 289.

Moving from the real situation, Marcel founded a model of concrete philosophy. In his essay, “Concrete Approaches to Investigating the Ontological Mystery”, he explains that he avoided abstract definitions and dialectical argumentations in his philosophy to help his audience understand him. That is why he preferred to start with a description (a sort of global and intuitive characterization of persons).<sup>65</sup> Marcel avoided the structure of philosophical argumentation to develop his concrete philosophy:

...from the beginning, my researches were explicitly directed towards what might be called the concrete examination of the individual and of the transcendence, as opposed to all idealism based on the impersonal or the immanent. We should double mark, immediately afterwards, the valuable impetus given to me in my quest by experiences of the tragic element in universal drama, successively brought home to me in my private life and, of course, in the tremendous event which laid waste or maimed our existence from the year 1914.<sup>66</sup>

What did Marcel mean by concrete philosophy? First, concrete philosophy was his reaction to any systematization in philosophy. He saw there was a tendency among philosophers to leave philosophy for the sake of the history of philosophy. When facing a problem, they tended to give up and to trace the problem to its historical roots. They emerged with treatises on an entity which has evolved in a certain way. Marcel felt that a philosopher should know and learn history (of philosophy) because history prepares philosophy.<sup>67</sup> The philosopher should understand the history of philosophy critically. A philosopher cannot be a slave of science. He should be free from any preconception or prejudice. To be a slave of the history of philosophy is not to be a philosopher. Every authentic philosopher has his or her own road.<sup>68</sup> Knowledge of history and experience can free one from the slavery of a

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<sup>65</sup> REED, I. Teresa: Aspect of Marcel Essays, in: *Journal Renaissance. Essays on Values in Literature*, vol LV, No.3 Spring 2003, Milwaukee, 2003 (Marquette University), pp. 211-228, here p. 211.

<sup>66</sup> MARCEL, G: *Homo Viator*, *Op.cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.94.

<sup>68</sup> ANDERSON, T.C: *Op.cit.*, p.15.

conventional structure or system. In *The Existential Background of Human Dignity*, Marcel describes the other characteristic of the philosopher as an “unknown land or a walker in a new neighborhood who does not have a precise object in mind”.<sup>69</sup> A philosopher, as Marcel explains in *Creative Fidelity*, should be like “preschool children who wander about, and are receptive to everything they encounter because their experience of reality is fresh and alive, not encrusted over by dead habits”.<sup>70</sup>

In rejecting any system in philosophy, Marcel wished to describe his philosophy as an “aid to discovery”, a quest, “a search for or investigation into the essence of spiritual reality”.<sup>71</sup> His philosophical investigation is more concrete in that it can be constructed only in a play.<sup>72</sup> Marcel’s philosophical method departs from daily experiences, then to thought and then back to life again. He rejected the path of idealism in his search for created presence. He preferred instead the path of philosophical independence through a more concrete approach.

Secondly, concrete philosophy is about philosophizing on the here and now (*hic et nunc*). It means inquiry into human daily life. As a subject who is being in a situation (*l’Etre au-monde*), being human means being incarnated (*l’Etre incarné*) in his/her inter-subjective relationships.<sup>73</sup> Philosophy, which is chiefly based on speculative reason, is impersonal and it could avoid the human problem. It is the presence of someone (who) and not something (what) that makes sense of life. The real question of metaphysics is not *what is being* but *who is there*.<sup>74</sup> For Marcel, comprehending the presence of someone (who is there) helps us

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> ANDERSON, T. C: *Op.cit.*, p.14.

<sup>72</sup> MARCEL, G: *Dal Rifuito all’invocazione*, *Op.cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>73</sup> GALAGHER, K: *Op.cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p.119.

to recognize that the term “concrete” is an approach to supra-sensual experience. A deep and wide reflection of the human being as a ‘mystery being’ can be approached through love, hope and fidelity. A concrete being has an attractive power that demands me to leave my egoism and approach the other as a subject and not as an object.<sup>75</sup>

### 3.3. From Existence to Being: A Philosophical Method

To avoid using a system in his philosophy, Marcel called his philosophy as philosophical search.<sup>76</sup> It is an effort to find something lost. The search begins from ‘here’, a term which refers to a method in Marcel’s philosophy. He starts from a concrete thing, from something real, that is *here*, close to us. “Here I refer to something each of us may have experienced well this side of exploration as we understand it”.<sup>77</sup> If Marcel states that philosophy is a search that departs from the “here it is”, the searching needs a certain method, a way of how to experience and understand our reality. Marcel method is rooted in the concrete. He starts from life to thought and then down from thought to life again, to throw more light upon life.<sup>78</sup> Marcel explained this process of exaltation in three phases: admiration, reflection, exploration.

#### 3.3.1. Admiration

The experience of wonderment<sup>79</sup> is a preliminary point of Greek Philosophy. Wonderment at reality gives birth to the question. Philosophy in the first place is not a

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.120.

<sup>76</sup> MARCEL, G: *The Existential Background of Human Dignity*, *Op.cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8

<sup>78</sup> TREANOR, Brian (ed.): *Op.cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>79</sup> In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle says: “It is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize”. See *Metaphysic*, A, 2, 982b 11-21. St. Thomas Aquinas translated the Greek word *thaumazein* (wonder at/astonish at) into the Latin *admirari*, which means to regard with wonder. In the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas writes: *philosophi ex admiratione sunt moti ad inquirendum veritatem* (wonder inspires philosophers to seek after the truth). See *ST. 1a 2ae, q.41, a.4, ad.5*.



thinking activity, but an activity to lift an experience up to thought. Wonder can be referred to the sense of sight. One's attention is caught by something, one fixes one's gaze upon it and undertakes to grasp it well. Yet wonder implies the intervention of intellect in the process of knowing. Wonder emerges only in a person who is a "prey to reality". The wonder of reality will be actualized in formulating any question. To philosophize then in the first place is an activity to lift up our experience to the level of thought. Therefore, it is important to direct our attention toward our own life experiences.

Marcel distinguishes wonder from curiosity. From Marcel's perspective, the Greek word *thaumazein* lies on the borderline between wonderment and admiration. The wonderment of reality is never ended by any explanation. It goes beyond any description. Wonder, he says:

is not concerned with the explicable as such. In wonder the presence of things takes root in us and reality assumes a meaning for us which cannot be reductively assimilated to any sort of process of explanation. In this perspective man must appear to himself as an exile for whom there can be no settled abode (something which would not be true if explanation could be exhaustive even in principle).<sup>80</sup>

Wonder represents a more spontaneous and subtle relation with reality. It is a direct and intimate contact with reality to receive all that is present and at the same time to be attentive to all the problems which reality reveals to the human subject. In this context, wonder is an openness to reality. When a boy stands in the dark, he experiences that he cannot see anything. This experience makes him raise certain questions such as why is it dark? Where does the dark come from? How long does it go on? Philosophical inquiry starts with an existential experience and it makes you wonder about it.

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<sup>80</sup> MARCEL, G: Introduction to Inward Morning, in: *Philosophy Today*, 4, n°.4/4, 1960, p.265.

### 3.3.2. Reflection

With admiration, philosophy has not begun yet. A philosopher should move from admiration to reflection. Reflection is a movement from sensation (*la sentire*) to action (*l'agire*). In this phase, the subject tries to collect and unite all fragments of life experience in a new consciousness to arrive at human intimacy of being. For this purpose, Marcel distinguishes primary and secondary reflection.

Primary reflection tends to objectify being and the human subject. It surveys object from outside. Primary reflection can be found in many of the Cartesian dualisms where knower and known, mind and nature, self and other are placed opposite to each other. The characteristic of primary reflection is abstract. It is an analytical reflection. The subject who thinks is not an individual but he or she is a thinker *qua* mind (*bewusstsein überhaupt*).<sup>81</sup> That is why primary reflection is correlated to the world of problems and not to mystery. So, Marcel had to move another level of reflection called secondary reflection.

Secondary reflection is more concrete, individual and heuristic. It does not correlate to object but to presence. In the secondary reflection, the object is approached with an admiration as a unique being, and not as specimen, and the other as revelation of the absolute. The human is a mystery and not a problem.<sup>82</sup> The problem is before me, but the mystery

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<sup>81</sup> DESMOND, William: *Philosophies of Religion*. Marcel, Jaspers, Levinas, in : *Continental Philosophy in The 20th Century*. ed. KEARNEY, Richard. London and New York 1994 (Routledge), pp. 131-174, here p. 135.

<sup>82</sup> To understand problem and mystery, it is necessary to go back to the root of these words in Greek. The 'problem' comes from the Greek work *pro* (*προ*) and *ballein* (*βαλλέιν*). It means "throw in front of us". It is which is there, so distinct and separated from me. It is like object (*Gegenstand* in German). If the scholastic meant "object" as "whatever is real", Marcel understood object as the portion of the real which is *devant*, before the subject, separated from him and quite impersonal. See. MICELI, Vincent., *Op.cit.*, p.67.

cannot be grasped from the outside of me.<sup>83</sup> Mystery denotes the dimension in which a thinker takes up a radically new stance with respect to being. Mystery cannot be objectified. It does not mean that mystery is something unknowable. It is something in which I myself am involved, therefore it can only be thought of as a sphere/dimension where the distinction between subject and object, between what is in me and what is before me, loses its meaning and its initial validity.<sup>84</sup> My being is involved within it. “A mystery is something in which I find myself caught up, and whose essence does not exist before me in its totality. Even though in this area, the distinction between in me and before me is losing its meaning”.<sup>85</sup> The realm of mystery includes being in the situation of the subject, the unity of the body and mind, the nature of sensation, and what Marcel calls the “concrete approaches” of love, hope and faith.<sup>86</sup> The secondary reflection is therefore dialogic and not dialectic.<sup>87</sup>

The main difference between these two reflections lies in the approach. If primary reflection focuses on the problem and its approach is logical, objective and theoretical, secondary reflection focuses on the mystery of Being in which the human subject participates. That is why it is a dialogic approach. Secondary reflection does not put reality as an object. In the light of the second reflection, Marcel affirms that participation is valid in speaking of presence.

### 3.3.3. Exploration

According to Roger Troisfontaines, Marcel’s understanding of the human being as subject who “is being in in the world” (*être au-monde*) is similar to Heidegger’s concept of

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<sup>83</sup> MARCEL, G: *Being and Having*, transl. FARRER, Katherine: Boston 1951 (Bacon Press), p.100.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.117.

<sup>85</sup> MARCEL, G: *Being and Having. Op.cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>86</sup> SWEETMAN, B: *Op.cit.*, p.182

<sup>87</sup> MARCEL, G: *Mystery of Being*, vol.1. *Op.cit.*, p. 133.

human as *in-der welt-sein*. This notion urges one to be part of his/her realities. The participation with human reality as a peculiarity of secondary reflection is manifested in exploration as the third phase of Marcel's concrete philosophical method. An exploration of reality signifies open to the concrete reality. In this phase, the philosopher receives reality freely and does not have to be a mere spectator. In the third phase, I recognize that I take part in "Being". I accept freely my reality where I am, including myself.

The three phases are the three concrete ways in Marcel's philosophical method. All of them are like a journey from real life to thought and a return to life with a new dimension of consciousness, which is totally different from the situation before he/she left himself/herself and joined the others.

#### **4. Presence: Human Access to Being in the Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel**

Marcel develops the notion of presence for the first time in his essay *On the Ontological Mystery*.<sup>88</sup> Presence is a theme that plays a key role in Marcel's concrete metaphysics and ethics. It denotes something rather different and more comprehensive than the fact of just being there: "to be quite exact one should not actually say that an object is present".<sup>89</sup> In this part, I present Marcel's understanding of presence in human relationship and how it manifests human access to being. For this purpose, it is necessary to have the comprehensive type of relationship that human beings have, the conditions that urge them, and the metaphysical value of human presence.

##### **4.1. Objective Relationship**

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<sup>88</sup> MARCEL, G: *Metaphysical Journal*, transl. Bernard WALL, Chicago 1952 (Henry Regnery Company), p.317.

<sup>89</sup> MARCEL, G: *Homo Viator*, *Op.cit.*, p. 15.

Marcel reflected on human relationship as an essential fact. The human being exists consciously with the other in the world. The other is *allos* (other between others), the other person, or can be an inhuman reality. Marcel distinguished two kinds of human relationships: the objective relationship and the subjective relationship.

In *Homo Viator (the Ego and its Relation to Other)*, Marcel describes a child who picks a flower, brings it to his mother and said, “Look, I picked this”. The phrase “Look, I picked this”, with the strong intonation as giving an announcement, in Marcel’s analysis, demonstrates the recognition of the child. “I who am present here, I who am with you now, picked the flower and no other.” The child points himself out for admiration and gratitude but at the same time he draws his mother to receive a special tribute. The presence that is expressed by the child represents the nature of the human ego which Marcel called “I produce myself”.<sup>90</sup> This expression proves human consciousness of himself but his ego needs the recognition of the other. I need the other to affirm my existence. The statement “I produce myself” indicate a possession and, therefore, it can be used for my interest as my will. The other can use it only by my permission. The other example can be found in *Les Points sur les i (Dot the I’s)*.<sup>91</sup> Marcel introduces a relationship between Anatole Girondin who married Felicia, but there is also Irma who is Anatole’s mistress who lives with them. This situation makes Felicia denies that she is Anatole’s wife. She always feels that she lives alone. Anatole is not there for Felicia. The sentence “Anatole is not there”, in Seeger’s analysis, is comprehended as “presence”. It is a rational analysis which describes the alienated feeling of Felicia as Anatole’s wife, the feeling of isolation that expresses the pain of absence of the beloved person. They live together but they are not present to each other. The absence of the

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>91</sup> SLAGERS, Rosa; *Les Points sur les i., Op.cit.*,p.22.

other (Anatole) then indicates that he has no trust in Felicia, his wife. Anatole, in Marcel's language, is not a *toi* (thou) but a *lui* (he). The concept of presence is connected to availability (*disponibilité*).<sup>92</sup>

An existential relationship cannot be intermediated by an objective relationship. Any manner of treating the human being impersonally is a kind of objectivity. That is why Marcel criticized Descartes' *cogito*, Hegel's absolute idealism, materialism, technocracy, modern philosophy's spirit of abstraction, and functional relationships which he called *the broken world*. Marcel explained that abstraction as a method of mental operation in human activity is normal and necessary. We need it to get an integral knowledge and understanding of reality. Conceptual knowledge needs constant re-rooting and re-watering in the soil of concrete experience. However, he reminded us that the problem of the spirit of abstraction is its inclination to separate the concrete from abstract thinking. The human being cannot be abstracted.<sup>93</sup> All forms of objectification are ways of treating human beings impersonally. When someone is treated as an object, there is always the possibility that he or she would be manipulated or reduced. Only objects can be reduced.

Differing from scholastic philosophy which understands "object" in whatever is real, Marcel explained "object" as something flung in my way, something placed before me, facing me (*Gegenstand*), in my path.<sup>94</sup> In the *Metaphysical Journal*, he explains object as "something separated from me in some manner or other, which does not participate in my

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>94</sup> MICELI, Vincent: *Op.cit.*, p.66. See also MARCEL, G: *Mystery of Being*, vol. I, *Op.cit.*, p.57.

intimacy”.<sup>95</sup> Object is “signified only by that portion of the real which is deviant, before the subject, separated from him and quite impersonal”.<sup>96</sup>

In an objective relationship, one treats the other as he/she/it. One looks at the other or relate to the other in an indirect way. Calling the other “she”/ “he”/ “it” means that the person or thing of whom I speak is not physically present in front of me. There is a distance between the other and I. The other becomes an object of my talking, my abstraction, my explanation, or my argumentation. I can only speak of them and not speak with them. The other is bordered on my insight, my thought or my words when I speak of them. The *I-she/he/it* relationship is a fragmentary relationship. I am not part of him/her/it. I do not experience the other as a person but as a “case”, not as a mystery but as a problem. A case will disappear when one discovers the problem solved. Marcel recommended intersubjective relationship as an exigency to access being.

#### 4.2. Intersubjective Relationship

In contrast to the *I - he/she/it* relationship which sees the other as object, an available person in an interpersonal relationship looks at the other as “thou”. The *I-Thou* relationship is direct relationship in which one sees the other as a subject, as a person. I experience the other as mystery, as a very particular being. The presence of the other is a vocation that urges me to leave myself to go to him or her. In this way, one treats the other not as an object but more as an *imago Dei*. The person is unique in his/her action, living, and being, a mediated being incarnated in the other.

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.67.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950) said that the human being is a spirit, but not in the abstract Hegelian sense. The human being is an incarnated spirit, a union of body and spirit. The notion of spirit in the human can be understood as a complex of the same thought (*nous*), soul and vivid spirit that constitute foundation of the existence of the human body.<sup>97</sup> The person is only for the human. Only human beings possess consciousness. The term “person” does not merely indicate the peculiar characteristic that differentiates it from the other (*in-dividere*), but it is more his/her awareness to be open with the other. Mounier explained that the human being is a person since he or she has an existence. Human existence is incarnated as a mode of being personal. So, the body is not an object between the other object but it is closer to the other. The human being exists subjectively and corporeally. Like Marcel, Mounier made clear the sense of the person as a vocation. He said: “The person is established as a response to an appeal.<sup>98</sup>, and a response to an appeal then characterized the persona in Christian perspective. To Mounier, presence in Christian perspective is presence in se. It is a response.<sup>99</sup> Both Marcel and Mounier gave an existential aspect to the person in a relationship, in a vocation. The person is always in communication. Being a person means being in relationship.

Martin Buber in *I-Thou* said that the human being, his or her world, his or her attitude, is twofold which is in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words when he or she speaks. The first primary word is the combination of *I-Thou* and the other primary word is *I-she/he/it*. The primary words do not signify things. They signify intimate relation. However, he distinguishes between the primary word *I-Thou* and the primary word

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<sup>97</sup> MOUNIER, Emmanuel: *Il Personalismo*, transl. CARDIN, Aldo. Roma 1964 (Ave Minima Editrice), p.26.

<sup>98</sup> MOUNIER, E: *Personalismo e Christinesimo*, transl. LAMMACHIA, Ada. Bari 1997 (Ecumenica Editrice), p.23.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p.56.



*I-It*. The primary word *I-It* can never be spoken with the whole being. The primary word *I-Thou* can only be spoken with the whole being.<sup>100</sup> In this way, Buber emphasised the other character of human relationship which is “mutuality” (*Gegenseitigkeit*). I do not reduce the other into an object. I do not see the other as a thing. I cannot use the other to satisfy my need and desire.

The fundamental involvement of the human being in the world is a mystery, not because it is unknowable but because it cannot be fully captured. The realm of mystery, for Marcel, is a realm where the distinction between subject and object breaks down.<sup>101</sup> When I look at the other as “thou” at the same time arises also a recognition of the freedom of the other. The other becomes part of my being who cannot be treated as I want. Calling the other “thou” is a ‘presence for’ and is not a ‘presence because of.’ It is a presence where I treat the other as a source to penetrate his or her nature and to discover his or her freedom in our relationship. When I make the other “thou”, I am creating a unity between us. I and thou become us. I experience the other and treat him or her as subject. I only become a given person to myself through the other to whom I am a given person. Only in this way can the “I” and the “thou” co-exist as co-presence in communion. Furthermore, this interpersonal relationship can develop to constitute a veritable *co-esse*, a stable communion of inter-subjectivity, or an interpersonal bond of love.

#### 4.3. The Presence: Recognizing the Self as a Being among Beings

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<sup>100</sup> BUBER, Martin; *I and Thou*, transl. GREGOR, Ronald.S. II edition. London-New York 2004 (Continuum), p. 11. See also BUBER, Martin: *Il Principio del dialogo*, 2004. p. 63

<sup>101</sup> MARCEL, G: *Being and Having*, transl. Katharine Farrer, Glasgow, Westminster Decre Press, 1949, p.117.

The investigation of Marcel's concrete philosophy enables us to find the dimensions of presence that manifest human consciousness with the other. Presence is recognized as the self as a Being among beings. To understand it Marcel explains presence as mystery and explores three avenues of intersubjective activities (the man of encounter, of charm, and of engagement), and the manifestation of presence in three of the most intensely and spiritually character of human being - fidelity, hope and love.

#### 4.3.1. Presence as Mystery

The term "presence" is commonly used to indicate a "here-ness", to know whether a subject is "here". "Presence" is one of Marcel's keywords in explaining human existence. Although it figured prominently in his philosophical vocabulary, Marcel admitted that it was impossible to give a rigorous definition of it. He preferred to evoke its meaning through shared experiences. In *Mystery of Existence*, he distinguished the meaning of existence and being to reflect human presence for the other. Existence is a direct experience that precedes human consciousness. It is a pre-reflexive consciousness. As a subject, I have consciousness but I do not realize what it means in my world. Just in the encounter with the other, I realize my being. To get more sense of life, one needs to leave his or her pre-reflexive phase and enter the consciousness phase. It means that one leaves his or her existence and goes to being.<sup>102</sup> So, being is my consciousness of being with the other, the awareness of being needed by others. Presence is absolutely a condition for being with the other. But presence for the other is a mystery, because presence can transcend the objective physical fact of being with each other. Presence is concerned with recognizing the self as a being-among-beings, and acknowledging the relevance of others' experiences as a being. What does it mean?

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<sup>102</sup> BERTENS.K: *Op.cit.*, p.66.

First, presence is not understood in an objective sense. It is not presence alongside the other in the same place and at the same time. Two people who are sitting in close physical proximity on a train for travel might not be present to each other. Or two patients who are together in a waiting room to see a doctor might not be present to each other even though they are talking about their children. Presence is not an incidental meeting. It is an experience that goes beyond the categories of space and time. Citing Marcel, Treanor said, "Presence lies beyond the grasp of any possible prehension".<sup>103</sup> Two people who are far away can experience the presence of each other. So, presence is defined as mystery when the presence of the other really recognizes me that I am renewed. His or her presence makes me feel fuller than when I am alone.

Second, the presence means participation. The renewed presence leads us to recognize that presence in Marcel as participation. Marcel said, "Presence is the hallmark of the intersubjective which illustrates the way in which presence is connected to participation".<sup>104</sup> "I am not first and fundamentally *homo spectator* but rather *homo particeps*"<sup>105</sup> said Marcel. The term participation is understood as 'the kind of natural split that seems to take place the moment I say, I am'.<sup>106</sup> Participation affirms human presence to treat the other in his or her situation and not as what I want. It is merely in participation do we understand and feel the nuance of presence. So, participation means experiencing the atmosphere of presence in interpersonal relationships.

Third, presence is taken place in term of being and not in term of having. The presence establishes a spiritual bond which makes a person feel united with the other

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<sup>103</sup> TREANOR, Brian., *Op. cit.*, p.68.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p.69.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

interpersonally and not merely close physically. The bond with the other is the mark of presence. It is presupposed that the presence in not be understood as possessive. For Marcel, human relationship with a presence cannot take places in term of having, but in term of being. ‘Having’ is referred to something that we have (possessive). It is only an object can be had. And something that we have could be manipulated. The presence of the other is not something that we have but it is something that we are<sup>107</sup>.

#### 4.3.2. *The Man of Encounter*

Human relationship, in simple terms, can be seen in human interactions whenever we meet each other. Those who known each other well would show a special gesture that expresses intimacy - a hug or a kiss - when greeting each other. Those who meet each other for the first time would probably just look at each, smile or shake hands. Encounter others is unavoidable in life. People meet other people every day everywhere - on the streets, in buses, in work places, etc.

In *I-he/she/it* relationships, the other is treated according to his or her function (teacher, doctor, police, etc.). Such relationships end once a need is fulfilled, or when the time is up. There is no continuation of the relationship. A student is treated as a student when she or he is in classroom, in front of a teacher. A student’s status as a student ends when the student graduates or leaves school. One is a passenger while on a bus, but once he or she gets off, he or she ceases to be a passenger. Marcel was not talking about such temporary meetings. He understood presence as the I experiencing the other as “thou”, and this sort of experience of the other goes beyond space and time. How does it happen? To him, in every encounter, the one who enters into a living communion with others, presents himself or

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p.71.

herself as “thou”. In such encounters, one shares truth and love with the other. He crosses over the other and engages “with” the other in an enduring act of free and total commitment.<sup>108</sup> Marcel explained that the moment someone is present to me, that someone renews my life by his or her presence. He or she makes me be more than when I am alone. A presence that creates a spiritual bond creates a bond of relationship that cannot be separated even by death.

#### 4.3.3. *Charm*

Charm is a consideration of quality in building a relationship with the other. A person of charm is a person who is unconstrained in his or her behaviour. The other is given the chance to express his or her being, to expand his or her horizon. The man of charm possesses the quality of remaining alive in others, and so when he or she is no longer physically present, he or she remains. The quality of charm brings to the a certain feeling of intimacy. To Marcel’s words “I only become a complete individual through the infinite credit which I grant to other individual”.<sup>109</sup> Miceli adds that, “Charm is the soul of the infinitely gratuitous act that generously extends this credit”.<sup>110</sup>

To understand the process of how a charming person creates a ‘thou’ relationship, Miceli tells a story about two men who are travelling by train. The first one is sitting next to the second one. There was nothing spoken between them for a while. Eventually, their glances met, and after a nod and a smile, they started to communicate with each other. They moved from small talk (weather, hobby, destination, food, etc) to a bigger, more serious conversation. It turned out that both knew the Corelli family in Milan. “You, too, know the

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<sup>108</sup> MICELI, V: *Op.cit.*,p.111.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p.113.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

Corellis” expressed the mutual discovery that changed their situation from a “someone out there” exchange to a “thou” conversation. The mutual discovery that both knew the Corellis, brought both to the realization that they are one with each other.<sup>111</sup>

Miceli explained that the capacity to open ourselves to the other is the measure of the “thou” in human relationships. “Openness” refers to the capacity to “cease drawing a circle around myself, a circle outside of which the other person never becomes more than an idea which is merely a disintegrated, disjointed and diminished “him”.<sup>112</sup> It means that, to achieve a “thou” communication, one has to set aside all egoistic attitudes and preconceptions, and look at the other with new admiration. I look at the other as “someone” that I have here and now. In front of this “someone”, I, at same time, become “another one” for him or her. I lose myself, I am aware that I am no longer what I was before. I become conscious of what others think of me. I and thou become we, and we are together creating an intimacy of authentic and transcendent co-presence of love.<sup>113</sup>

#### 4.3.4. *Engagement*

Engagement is a consequence for those who appeal to vocation and invocation to be with others. It is an attitude that follows an openness to “someone” and to be “thou” for others. Marcel highlighted certain characteristics of the engagement person.<sup>114</sup> First, she or he is strong-willed and convinced that he or she can actively change adverse conditions. Marcel required here the capacity to put in brackets one’s personal will to assume personal responsibility for the other. Second, the engagement person is committed to work for morally

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p.114.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*,p.117.

good causes and against morally evil endeavours. Third, the engagement person is able to take responsibility for the consequences of his/her actions.

One example that can be used to reflect on engagement in human relationship is Marcel's reflection on fatherhood. It is not about family in the sociological sense, but in what Marcel called the "meta-sociological approach".<sup>115</sup> He spoke of presence as mystery to reflect the kind of human engagement there is with others. Anderson mentioned three reasons<sup>116</sup> why Marcel took the relationship between father and child in the family to illustrate his philosophical reflection on participation. First, merely being alive is not seen as a value that leads us to think of life as a gift. Human life is full of tragedies of all kinds: poverty, violence, deaths due to natural and man-made calamities etc. Second, there are many cases where fatherhood is the unintended result of reckless behaviour by men who refuse to accept responsibility for their actions. The third reason is that the bond between parent and child is often viewed objectively as purely biological and so tends to "lose every spiritual quality".

Marcel explains that "fatherhood" is not merely about a biological relationship, but is more about commitment. It means taking up role of a father in the family. It means being available as a father to his children. A father is expected to live out the promises he made in marriage to uphold the bond and nurture the family. Marcel recognized that marriages done within the Catholic Church are done in the name of God.<sup>117</sup> The couple enters it as an engagement and in fidelity to each other. In the exchange of marriage vows, a couple declares

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<sup>115</sup> MARCEL, G. *Mystery of Being*, vol. I. p. 17; See also ANDERSON, T.C. *Op.cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>116</sup> ANDERSON, T.C: *Op.cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>117</sup> MARCEL, G: *Homo Viator*, *Op.cit.*, p. 117

their willingness to sacrifice for each other and set aside selfish interests for the good of the other. This is not a *do ut des* promise.

A father who never takes part in his child's life denies his essence as a father. He is condemning his child to eternal damnation.<sup>118</sup> In the following quote, therefore, Marcel pleads a father in behalf of a child:

I beg you to reveal yourself to me, to make your presence for me, so that it will be possible for me to consecrate myself with a full understanding, since in my present state, I can only see you through the clouds of uncertainty which encircle me"<sup>119</sup>.

In a family, the children are the fruits of the marriage union between husband and wife. Following Catholic teaching, Marcel held that *consumatum* is the union of two persons. This union entails the responsibility to be present and to participate in the other being.

#### 4.3.5. Fidelity

Fidelity is a consequence of human engagement with the other. The success of a human being to make an engagement in an intersubjective relationship is manifested in fidelity. Fidelity expresses how deeply one puts his or her trust and hope in the other. Marcel gave an example: a friend gets seriously sick and we go to visit him in the hospital. We know well his condition, and he is aware that we know it. Sitting close to him, we promise to visit him again the following day. On the day that we promised to go back to the hospital, for some reason, we don't feel like going anymore. We know what we promised, but we simply do not feel the same way that day. The situation has changed. The feeling that moved us to promise coming back the following day is gone. It cannot be denied, though, that there was this moment when we made the promise. In Marcel's thought, we are no longer able to fulfil our promise, even if we go back to visit him. Even if nothing has changed in the situation of

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*



our friend, the feeling we had when we made the promise with him is gone, and we cannot make it come back<sup>120</sup>, and our decision to visit him again in the hospital is stained.

Marcel presents to us the nobility of standing by all the promises we make with the other in our relationships. It is like a vow coming from a joyful heart. Our presence for the other is an unconditional response to their presence for us. Here, we touch on another point of Marcel's reflection on commitment and fidelity. "Thou" exists for me and "I" exist for "thou" only in the same degree that we exist for each other. Commitment and fidelity then affirm the quality of being present for the other. The commitment to be faithful raises a new consciousness that, since one has collaborated in the creation of his or her being in communion, one never remains free to annihilate one's colloquy with the other. One cannot deny the promise that engaged them before. He or she cannot break down the bond of understanding, the tie of co-presence and mutual relationship. Fidelity impels one to be present to the other, to be for the other. I think it is logical that Marcel made a distinction between fidelity and obedience in human relationships. Patrick L.Bourgeois in his review essay on *Gabriel Marcel Today* commented that, the 'way in which fidelity and love and friendship perpetuates presence' indicates how Marcel linked his concrete approach and his engagement with human nature. Love's fidelity is linked to human being, so that being is the place of fidelity.<sup>121</sup>

Discourse on obedience commonly sees a correlation between those who occupy a structure, regulation, and the power of an organisation in a functional relationship. It is easy to find coercion or compulsion outside of me (regulation, power, vision, aim of organization,

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.264-265.

<sup>121</sup> BOURGEOIS, Patrick L. : Gabriel Marcel Today. In: *Comparative & Continental Philosophy*, vol.6. no.1, May 2014, (W.S. Meney & Son Ltd), 2014, pp.99-108, here is p.104.

etc.). A child who obeys his or her parents is probably aware that his or her nature as a child requires dependence on an adult. Likewise, a student who listens to his or her teachers probably do so for the sake of graduation. There is a “natural potency” that makes a child obey his or her parents, or a student to listen to his or her teachers. Relationships based on obedience then, produces functional relationships. When the situation changes, the quality of obedience also changes. When a child grows up and becomes independent, when a student graduates, the quality of obedience will change as well. Marcel believed that in obedience, there is an individual response to authority.<sup>122</sup> It creates conditional and artificial relationships.

On the contrary, in fidelity, an *I* spontaneously offers a presence to a *thou*, expressing an unconditional relationship. Fidelity comes out of an existential quality in human beings. The recognition of the being of the other is a “voice” that calls me to go out and meet “thou”. In fidelity, one expresses his or her original being. There are no masks, no conditions. One does not see any artificial obstacle to being present to “thou”. Marcel, as quoted by Miceli, says:

Fidelity asserts herself never more truly than when she is challenging, defying, confronting an absence, when she is triumphing over this absence and, in particular, when she is conquering that absence that present itself to us, doubles falsely, as absolute absence-the absence known as death.<sup>123</sup>

Fidelity that is built on unconditionality then enables two persons to put their hopes together.

I hope in you for us.

#### 4.3.6. Hope

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<sup>122</sup> MARCEL, G. *Homo Viator*, *Op.cit.*, p. 149.

<sup>123</sup> MICELI, V: *Op.cit.*, p.126.

In speaking of hope, one is led to a dimension of time (future) or a distance between subjects. Marcel spoke of hope as a phenomenology and as a metaphysical experience of human beings. He understood hope as a fundamental experience like an experience of faith.<sup>124</sup> When William, for example, says “I hope that James will arrive in time for lunch tomorrow and not just in the afternoon”<sup>125</sup>, he is wishing for the other (James) to be with him as soon as possible. William, already knowing that James would not return to his office, has reason to think that he (James) could catch an early train. Analysing this example, Marcel found two important elements: a wish and a certain belief.

Marcel also made a distinction between hope and desire using the expressions “I hope.....” and “I hope that.....”. The first expression is more absolute and explicit than in the second. The first affirms a principle of human hope and not stained by a wish. It expresses the fundamental character of the subject. It means that the subject (I) is not identical with I myself. The subject is oriented to the other, in whom I put my hope. So there is no egoistic aspect, because in *I hope...* I as subject do not compel my wish to the other. In other words, the reason for hope lies not in I myself but outside of me, in the other (in thou). On the contrary, in the second expression, there is that egoistic element which promotes I myself as the reason for (origin of) hope. I am the foundation of hope. I have influence and I can determine what I wish for. So, for this egoistic person, it is a wish, not a hope.<sup>126</sup> In a wish, I, as subject, am determined to do anything (coercion, manipulation) so that something happens to my satisfaction. I can use any instrument of power at my disposal to get what I

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<sup>124</sup> MARCEL, G: *Homo Viator*, *Op.cit.*, p.29

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> MARCEL, G: *Homo Viator*, *Op.cit.*, pp.32-33.

want. I put myself at the centre of all that I desire. Commenting on Marcel, Miceli characterizes hope in the following terms:

Hope is humble, is patient; hope does not rebel, is not anxious, is not high-handed, is not demanding, is not rushed nor panicked. Hope works no violence, rejects no grace, but accepts all with gratitude. Hope bears all trials and accepts them as integral parts of itself; hope considers itself as destined for absorption and transmutation into the joyful fruition of the liberty of the Absolute Thou.<sup>127</sup>

So, hope is humble and patient, and is totally oriented and centred on the other. Marcel emphasized hope in human relationships as a virtue that makes human beings reject despair. In hope, the presence of the other (thou) is the reason and the principle for my act of hoping. The other is sustained, and when I put my hope in thou, there is a future orientation that raises up the quality of patience. Hope, then, develops an optimistic attitude. An optimistic human being always opens himself to the other, and therefore he will not despair even if he does not get what he hopes for. A patient, for example, who, after hearing the diagnosis that his or her illness is terminal, still hopes for recovery and healing. This hoping, for Marcel, is hope in the realm of creative being, the hope beyond what is in certain quantifiable terms. This kind of hope makes him or her not despair.<sup>128</sup> Hope does not happen within the circle of the self. The subject of hope is he or she who needs the other. So, the formula for hope is “I hope in you for us”.<sup>129</sup> But the formula for willing is “I will, therefore I can”.<sup>130</sup>

#### 4.3. 7. Love

Presence as a commitment and a vow to grow existentially culminates in love. Love is the completeness of presence. It is the most dynamic concrete approach to human intersubjective relationship. It breaks the tension and crosses the barrier that exists between

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<sup>127</sup> MICELI, V: *Op.cit.*, p.128.

<sup>128</sup> Galagher, *Op.cit.*, p.74

<sup>129</sup> MARCEL, G: *Homo Viator*, *Op.cit.*, p.60.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50

the self and the other. In Miceli's words, "Although fidelity, hope and love are essentially one, love may be considered as the crown and climax of the interpersonal communion achieved by lovers through a whole process of concrete approaches to being"<sup>131</sup>. How may this statement be explained? I present three statements that summarize Marcel's characterization of love as the ontological datum of human human experience: love as ontological unity, love is forever, and love as the way to unite with the Absolute Thou.

#### 4.3.7.1. Love: I and thou become us

Marcel called love "the essential ontological datum".<sup>132</sup> It touches the being of the person, it creates the self, the presence that is ontologically inexhaustible. It is open to the being of the other and to infinity. One can never give an exhaustive account of the reasons why he or she loves her or him. Love is recognized as an invocation to the other. I invoke you to be us. The same invocation comes from thou to me. So, it is important that I myself have the readiness to respond to this invocation.

In love, I am not my part and you are not your part. In love, I and you become us. The ontological unity that is in "us" goes beyond the two persons who are accounted from one another. At the level of "us", I and thou are lifted to be a new union that cannot be separated. Thus the communion that is really communicated is "be risen". Love creates the self-presence that is ontologically inexhaustible.<sup>133</sup> The ontology of unity that is grasped in

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<sup>131</sup> MICELI, V.: *Op.cit.*, p.135.

<sup>132</sup> MARCEL, G: *Being and Having*, *Op.cit.*, p.167.

<sup>133</sup> MICELI, V: *Op.cit.*, p.135.

“us”, is a merger of two persons who are united. On the level of “us”, I and thou cannot be separated in two parts. Communion is created, a communicative togetherness. Communion, therefore, is a complete sign of presence, where the move from existence to being is accomplished.

#### 4.3.7.2. Love: You will not die

The experience of losing his mother when he was four years old generated in Marcel an existential need to be with the other. He acknowledged that the death of his mother was a desperate situation that traumatized him. He felt that life had become so uncertain that he lost his spirit for living.<sup>134</sup> It was a very crucial moment in his life. This traumatic experience raised a question and led him to a profound realization: how important and urgent it is to build a relationship with one's beloved.

Communication with the other is a natural human condition and does not result only from desperate situations. The human spirit cannot deny its natural need for the other. The natural need to be united with another, with the beloved person, moves one to be closer to the other. The ontology of love that is grasped in “us” then makes us reflect on another point in Marcel's reflection: love as an eternity. Togetherness between two or more persons in love never ends. In love, those who love each other renew each other. Not even death can stop their love for each other. Marcel says: "To say to someone, 'I love you' is to say to that person, “You...you will not die”.<sup>135</sup> Reflecting on this, Miceli explains:

In the statement “you will not die,” Marcel was saying that the presence manifested in love transcends space and time. Presence is a continuing action. With those whom we

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<sup>134</sup> PASTRELLO, M and SERRA, A: *Il Viaggio Orfico dell'anima. Gabriel Marcel e Il Rischio d'amare*, in: MARCEL, G: *Presenza e immortalità*. Biompani, Milano, 2011, p.43.

<sup>135</sup> MARCEL, G: *Mystery of Being*, vol. II, p.171.

love, there is a profound deep desire to be with them forever. In fact, we do not lose our beloved. Loss only applies to something that we possess. The human being possesses a body, which makes us think of it in objective terms. But a human being is a person, which is not the same as having body that can be objectified. Marcel did not see death as a “loss” of someone beloved to him, because he did not stop at the first reflection where the other is seen as an object. Looking at death from the perspective of the secondary reflection, one sees other side of death where presence continues in a new way. Presence is eternal. The departed beloved, the memory of his or her love and goodness, – continues to live in me as part of me. They all motivate me to live on. So, the expression “You will not die” is an absolute affirmation, an unconditional acceptance of the existence of the other. Marcel, according to Miceli, would like to show that:

Within the participation of love and communion of beloved thou is exempt the penalties of things; fate may prey upon things, it can never overtake that by which thou are a thou, a being, a plenitude in participation in being. The more I love a person as an authentic being, the more I grasp the summit of existence as indistinguishable from being.<sup>136</sup>

Marcel insisted that in celebrating the continuation of the presence of a departed beloved, we are not indulging in wishful thinking. Here we return to the difference that Marcel made between wish and hope. To wish is egoistic because it is self-referential, hence the talk about loss. In hope, on the other hand, which is focused on the other, death is not a loss in the objective sense, but merely transformation of presence of the other. In hope, in other words, we have the certainty that those who have died continue to live.

Marcel thought that it is rational for a mother whose beloved child died to hope to see her child again. The distance between a mother and her beloved child raises up a hope.

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

Hope gives birth to love. Hope and love, then, are like a fortress of human strength. The mother can say, “you are not dead my son.” The unity of love cannot be separated even by death. So, death is not an ultimate reality. But for those who deny love and the being of the other, they are in Marcel’s view dead already, even if still alive.

#### 4.3.7.3. With thou to Absolute Thou

The philosophical reflection on presence with the other bring us to the focal point of the presence of the Absolute Thou (God). In his philosophy, Marcel rarely talks about the proof of the existence of God. For him proving the existence of God is always concerned about the objectification of God. To see something as an object means to see that something as a problem, a problem to be solved. God is not a problem. When he calls God the Absolute Thou, I think Marcel is saying that God, on the one hand, is the mystery of Being that transcends all human categories. In this context, it is comparable to what Christian thought defines as attributes of God, such as almighty, great, etc. On the other hand, God as the Absolute Thou is not alienated from the human being (*Deus fascinosum tremendum est*). God can be experienced personally as in Christian revelation. For a Christian, to call God “Thou” (you) is to experience God personally, as one who talks to the other person directly. When referring to the attributes of God, the human experiences God personally, intimately. This God is like the God as “Thou” of Marcel. In all these, we find that Marcel was very strongly influenced by his Christian faith.

In calling God the Absolute Thou, Marcel was telling his readers that the “Absolute Thou” is the principle of every human *I-thou* relationship. So, instead of providing proofs for God’s existence, Marcel was concerned about the invocation that comes from the “Absolute Thou” that the human subject must respond to in faith. Since human love is



imperfect, Marcel oriented human experience with the finite thou to the source of love, the Infinite Thou. “Love at a certain point must reveal the transcendent dimension of being, of presence, of participation, of communion, of the Thou”.<sup>137</sup> In fact, this orientation towards a communion with the Absolute Thou is already found in Marcel’s expression “Thou at least shalt not die”. This expression shows Marcel’s faith and hope in the power, goodness and completion of the love of the Absolute Thou. Marcel gave assurance that human presence as an actualization of being in charm, engagement, fidelity, faith, hope and love must always be renewed, intensified and completed in the love of the Absolute Thou.

Faith, hope and love are the divine *donum* to experience the other as mystery and not as problem. Faith takes the human being into the vestibule of communion, leading him toward the heart of love. It is a witnessing for a friend at the cost of personal sacrifice. Hope binds together friends who have gone through adversity, and love as the crown and climax of human intersubjective relationship. It is love which most fruitfully makes human beings aware of the transcendence and plenitude of being. The activity of love elicits a more intensive free choice and a more ardent involvement in the presence and lived experience of others.<sup>138</sup> In love, we find the mutuality of human self-donation and it characterizes the human being as intersubjective.

## 5. Conclusion

Gabriel Marcel described his philosophical project in terms of achieving the fullness of human existence. He started from the human being and moved to the Being mediated by

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p.139.

secondary reflection. In secondary reflection one looks at others, gets close to them as a personal being who invites him or her to communicate with each other.

The philosophy of Marcel may be characterized as radical altruism, a philosophy that concretely orients us to the idea of opening our self to the other. The orientation towards the other is described by Marcel as a *polyphonique*.<sup>139</sup> It is the harmony of the sounds of music and theatre that indicates a correlation of human concrete life in diversity with others, also the plurality of I when I reflect on myself, my body, my mind and my being. Marcel's polyphony is manifested in the various aspects of his thought: the existential experience of the death of his beloved mother, the risk of loving, the love that wins over death, the presence of the other. Marcel's polyphonic thought is realized in his philosophy as a principle and practice of existential dialogue.

Marcel believes that through communication and participation, there emerges a "fact of being together" which characterizes a presence. Being is always being together. So, the presence is a *donum* and it is also unique necessary. I get my existence as a human being fully in a relation with the other. Presence, in the vocabulary of Marcel, is a mystery and not a problem. Mystery, for Marcel, does not carry the usual understanding of it as some kind of a secret which is hidden from us. He insisted that we be careful not to confuse the mysterious with the unknowable. For him, the unknowable is in fact only a limited case of the problem which cannot be actualized without contradiction. Mystery, on the contrary, is an essentially positive act of the mind, the supremely positive act in virtue of which all positivity may or perhaps be strictly defined.<sup>140</sup> When the I is present to the other, the I faces a particular being and is not the same as when the I face an object. Presence transcends the physical objective

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<sup>139</sup> MARCEL, G: *Presenza e Immortalita*, Op.Cit., p.49.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p.128. See also MARCEL, G: *Homo Viator*. Op.cit., p.68.

reality of the other being. In presence, one is concerned with recognizing the other as a being among beings and acknowledges the relevance of others' experience to the self, as a being. In the presence that Marcel elaborated in charm, fidelity, faith and love, there is an ontological exigency to actualize the fullness of being and to grasp the unity with the finite thou to attain total unity with the infinite Thou. The mark of presence is mutually binding to the other. It means the self is "given" to the other and that the gift is responsively reciprocated.

Marcel declares that in experiencing the other as "this particular one" (not as people in general) the other becomes "a self" for me and through this, both persons develop the sense of selfhood. Presence involves one person stepping forward into the independence of the other, not violating it, but calling forth co-presence and maturity of personhood. Thus, openness and availability are keys to presence and its role in personal growth. That is why Marcel proposed the model of intersubjective relation as an "ontological exigence" to explore human existence.

In the philosophy of Marcel, presence is the element that actualizes the philosophy of dialogue. The presence of the other indicates human nature oriented to be with the other. The moment of presence with the other is a great time and condition to recollect axiology resources such as openness, commitment, responsibility, faithfulness, hope and love to construct the unity of human ontology. Marcel described them in some qualification as the model of human participation in which one unites ontological exigence as being: charm which transforms, engagement which brings togetherness, fidelity which gives birth to creativity, hope which creates freedom, and love which says you will not die. Marcel considered love as the crown and climax of human interpersonal communion, a human

intersubjective relationship through which the human being takes part in the whole process of concrete approach to grasp being itself. Love is a manifestation of human participation in being and transcendence of it. When the human being is aware that his/her love is imperfect, he or she brings and places their tendency to the absolute purification of love. They reveal their needs for transcendence and for absolute being. Marcel reminded his readers that love as the crown and climax of human deep intersubjective relationship is a *donum* from the Absolute Thou. Love comes first in all human being. “Love as the *ab aeterno* ontological origin of all being in existence or this same divine love as collaborating *hic et nunc* with creative human love as ontological advance to fulfilment of all being in participation”.<sup>141</sup>

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