

THE INTERSUBJECTIVE HEART

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Let us identify a theme in the works of Gabriel Marcel and then give our variation of it. At this time, what we see and what it means to us is that Being is plenitude. Spiritual communion is grounded in the fullness of being. Intersubjectivity then is open to different degrees of depth.

Our attempt will be to amplify the theme of intersubjectivity and to show that intersubjectivity is the intersubjective heart that is the ground of being. Further, the intersubjective heart is not only primary to being but to interpersonal relations.

What Marcel calls spiritual availability¹ is fundamental for such relationships. This is entering into one another's lives through different disposabilities.² Disposability is the condition for the possibility of an openness to the other. Not only can we permeate one another but also there is a sympathetic resonance that moves beyond those involved.

For Marcel, the experience of interpersonal communion is grounded in the qualities of fidelity, hope and love. Participation then is the immediate communion through different dispoabilities, through the mutual openness³ of one another's promise to the other.

Participation is for Marcel, the bond between beings that is intersubjectivity.⁴ Participation is not to be understood simply as an act but as an entering into, it speaks to a mode of being whereby one's receptivity is an invitation to the other and one's promise to be available for the other throws light upon the meaning of personal existence.

The intersubjective heart is a bond of *Inbetweenness*⁵ that includes those involved. It is a psychological and spiritual continuum of self-knowledge and knowledge of the other. The influence of this experience brings one to the possibility of self-transcendence through spiritual affinities of being-together-authentically. It is not by dwelling upon the self but through being-with another from which knowledge of oneself arises. The worlds of the participants blend and yet highlight the salient characteristics of one another in their mutually affirming stance. They enrich one another through their differences in communal affinities that sanctify or consecrate the moment. There is a unity in, across and through the moment to re-create

itself. In this way it is to call into being a relationship that is pledged to be creative.

This experience announces a living through change, to being present in a different way than before. There is an upsurge of the lived feeling that radiates outward toward future experience. This also affects one's past in that it is seen in a new light. There is a restfulness, a coming home to one's own place after having been away. One has to go away to come back. There is a settling in, an awareness of one's own ground, a feeling of belonging not only to oneself and to the other but also to the world. The freeing quality of being released from the burden of self-consciousness moves one toward being what is rather than what should be. This way of being is beyond mere functionality, what the other means to me, what one can do for me or what one might do to me, rather it resounds with passion in our becoming.

A common objection to the passionate, the idealistic and the exalted are to say that these are unintelligible ways of describing experience. This objection is usually raised when emphasis is placed upon the positive aspects, indicating that the negative, the painful, the ordinary or the mediocre have been omitted. Perhaps this is why these phenomena are referred to as flighty. So often the purely functional precedes the emptiness of life and any attempt to restore the faculty of wonder is met with disdain, jealousy or doubt and looked upon in grimacing disgust. Life in a world centered on function is, for Marcel, liable to despair, it is empty and rings hollow.⁶

Passion has become something to be dealt with in a way that makes it a problem. It sticks out as a thorn in the side of the mediocre and the "levelled down" worlds of despair, disappointment and anxiety. Is the anxious being so fearful of self-sacrifice because of a lack of passion upon which or out of which affirmation of existence may emerge? The phenomenon of the intersubjective heart faces this same abyss, a fear of being yet it shines forth in the world of colorless mediocrity as a beam from the lighthouse upon a dark and stormy sea.

There is an enduring quality present in the intersubjective heart, it rings of truth, of authenticity, of hope and emerges from love. It is becoming in the face of the unknown. We bear witness to this becoming with communal affinities which breakthrough to being. The intersubjective heart then belongs primordially to the dimension of authentic existence. Existence is established as already-there, regardless of technological dehumanization or autonomous and self-sufficient ideals. One is already with the other. No one is outside of this being-with. Intersubjectivity is primary to being. To be is to be-with.

Marcel asks how can existential participation,⁷ being called to one's own Self, be extended to the intersubjective experience of authenticity and what are the possibilities of human existence which light up these authentic modes of being? Let us shift into the thought of Martin Heidegger. If being-with-others is a primordial structure of existence then being-together-authentically is also primordial. If one can be called back to oneself by the call to conscience that comes to the self "lost" in the "they"⁸ in the everydayness of existence then with authentic encounters it also means that the other may call on this possibility. The other with whom one is involved may issue this call to conscience that is an appeal to being. The other appeals to the authentic Self. The appeal to return to the Self, to become one's possibilities, brings one back to fundamental meaning. It is an invitation to reflect upon the vital forces of life. An appeal, for Marcel, mysteriously restores us to ourselves.⁹

The other then in moments of authentic encounter, brings us back, returns us to our ownmost possibilities, calls us to that which we may possibly be and in touch with the authentic Self. This is touching heart-to-heart. The other is engrained in one's being, a spiritual partner in the creation of one's own becoming. The other's appeal is a gift, chosen to give, to issue forth being in the face of non-being.

In the touching heart-to-heart is the spiritual dimension of *Inbetweenness*. It is not between Being and Non-Being. Being and presence coincide. The intersubjective heart may be seen as an ontological possibility for being¹⁰ but does not necessarily mean that it is a constancy in experience.¹¹ It is set off against the inauthentic "levelled down" meanings created by the "they" self. The appeal to return to authenticity peels out and returns from one's taken for granted self-throwing being into question.¹² This appeal calls for reflection upon the very meaning of life, while facing the unknown, non-being, while turning toward responsibility.

Returning to the authentic is a breakthrough of mediocre existence as old and taken for granted values are given up in an act of faith, which the other has engendered in the meaning of a new name. The intersubjective heart allows one to give up, to sacrifice the burden of self-consciousness and to receive in return that which no one else can give. This giving up is a requirement for the unknown in that there are no guarantees regarding the future. In this way, the experience involves a personal risk.¹³

A life without the experience of the intersubjective heart is one of anxiety, despair and "levelled down" meanings, reveling pain and being stuck. To emerge from that pain is the unique quality of the human being. To assist another in this emergence may be described then as one of our ownmost spiritual possibilities. The intersubjective heart emerges from and returns to the depths of being, giving and receiving, available only to those

who dare to risk themselves in the face of non-being. What begins to emerge here is, for Marcel and if you please for us, the plenitude to which we aspire.¹⁴

Notes

- 1) Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, trans., intro. Robert Rosthal (New York: Noonday Press, 1970), pp. 11-37.
- 2) *Ibid.*, pp. 38-57.
- 3) Gabriel Marcel, "Some Reflections on Existentialism", *Existential Psychiatry*, 1, no. 1 (Spring 1966), p. 38.
- 4) Gabriel Marcel, *The Existential Background of Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 34.
- 5) Sunnie D. Kidd, "Music: An Intersubjective Duree", *Migrant Echo*, IX, no. 3 (September-December 1980), pp. 130-133.
- 6) Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, trans. Manya Harari (Secaucus: Citadel Press, 1973), p. 12.
- 7) Gabriel Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, trans. Bernard Wall (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1952), p. 258; pp. 314-317.
- 8) Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 153-163. Heidegger's call to conscience is viewed in relation to Marcel's interpersonal communion.
- 9) Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
- 10) Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, trans. Katharine Farrer (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1949), p. 167.
- 11) Marcel says fidelity is not a constancy it is the active perpetuation of presence. We would like to say that attempting to maintain constancy would be inauthentic. This would be to lose the sense of being as the presence of inexhaustibility.
- 12) Ingathering or recollection is, for Marcel, fundamental to philosophical thought.
- 13) Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator*, trans. Emma Crauford (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 153-154.

- 14) Marcel, *The Existential Background of Human Dignity*, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
Values are existentially incarnated yet rooted in the beyond.