



## THE SUPREMACY OF BEING OVER HAVING IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF GABRIEL MARCEL

Michael Wekesa

### Abstract

*This thesis is an attempt to put into application the philosophical knowledge that I have acquired from studies, for the purpose of transforming the society, founded on a proper and viable theory of respect for human dignity. It goes without saying that in our search for knowledge we really obtain a lot from different philosophical viewpoints, yet philosophy has hardly issues to the concrete situation of the people but has in most of the cases remained in theory. With sincerity of hope and purpose, a good analysis of Gabriel Marcel's Philosophy of Being and Having can be a good instrument in promoting the human worth or dignity, simply because there can hardly be such a worth where human beings are exploited and treated as means to achieving ends rather than ends in themselves. After considering most of the existing philosophies that talk about human dignity, I discovered that Marcel's thought fitted very well with regards to how humans ought to treat each other with respect and dignity. Just as existentialist thinkers maintain that existence precedes essence. I therefore took up the fact that 'being' is superior to 'having'. In a way, this could be a foundation of a universal theory founded on that human beings are in themselves. Most of the theories in place have not shown very clearly how the respect for fundamental principles of human life, for instance, relationships, availability, communion and others. This has mostly led to disastrous consequences of exploiting fellow humans. The present thesis proceeds from the concept of man according to Gabriel Marcel with regard to being and having and both are shown to have a mutual relationship yet "being" is superior to "having". His argument is that human beings must be rated with the worth due to them, as ends in themselves. Other things or possessions should be seen as enhancing this worth of being human, hence, they get to be the end that people seek, which is happiness. They do not bring happiness in themselves but when used well, they promote human dignity.*

### Introduction

Confronted with two concepts that took center stage in Gabriel Marcel's Philosophy, that is, *Being* and *Having*, one may be tempted to think that the meaning of the two words have the same importance because of having the same commonalities and intimate relationship towards each other. The two concepts however, are not synonymous. "Being" means the 'whatness' of a thing, that which a thing is in itself or that which makes a thing to be what it is and not anything else. "Having," on the other hand, connotes the act of possessing something else, apart from or in

addition to itself. It does not constitute what a being is but in one way or the other add something to what that being has.

In principle, what we have are things (or what can be compared to things, precisely in so far as this comparison is possible). I can only have, in the strict sense of the word, something whose existence is, up to a certain point, independent of me.<sup>1</sup> In practical life, people's sense of worth often seems premised on what they have. "In fact, the general trend of life on the natural level is to identify one's self with what one has and here the ontological category (that is being) tends to be blotted out".<sup>2</sup> However, the ontological priority in all having belongs to the human subject of having, I precede what I have, "What I have is added to me"<sup>3</sup>. So, an attitude that chiefly premises the worth of a human subject on having falsely reduces the core of being human to what one has. Such a point of view implies that when one does not have anything, he or she is worthy nothing. The critical issue in discussing being and having is that, "We are tempted to think that no longer having anything is truly the same as no longer being anything"<sup>4</sup>.

### **A Critique of Some Arguments for the Precedence of Having Over Being**

Various attitudes cause the materialism of man. One of those attitudes is having. Marcel finds easier to explain the having together for our understanding but more stress on having attitude. Both being and having are attitudes. Being is what I am. Whatever is part and parcel of me, or whatever cannot be separated from what I am is identified with being. For example, marcel would say, "I am my hope," I am my body," and so on. Having on the other hand, is something external to us. In other words, what we have are things or what can be compared to things in so far as this comparison is possible. I can only have something whose existence is independent of me. What I have is not part of me. It is just added to me; I can even be without it; either it is property or a quality for that matter. What I have, I can dispose of. And this should make it clear that I cannot "have," for example, another person.

Being and having are part and parcel of life. Every reality around man falls under the distinction of what he has (having) and what he is (being).<sup>5</sup> We relate to other things and persons differently in these modes. Man as being cannot live without having. For a man to live in this world, he is in dire need of material things (havings). As man involves himself in having, he slowly forgets being, the parallel attitude of having. Marcel starts the phenomenological study of having first by applying the having to feeling. <sup>6</sup>Feeling can be reduced to something that we have. for example, if I have cold or fever, I say, "I have." here I identify feelings with havings. I do not say, "I am cold or I am fever," but rather, "I have cold and I have fever."

Marcel explains further having in terms of the human body. I can treat my body as having as well as being. My body, in so far as I consider it as having, becomes an object to me; I say, "I

---

<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 155.

<sup>2</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 84.

<sup>3</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 84.

<sup>4</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 84.

<sup>5</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having; An Existentialist Diary*, 155.

<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 155.

have my body”, and in so far as I consider it as being, it becomes my being and I call myself,” I am my body”. I will be inadequate if I use either of these descriptions alone. I can look at my body in a disassociated manner a see it as an object or as an instrument. However, in doing so, I distance myself from it in order to grasp it qua object, qua something I have. When I do that, it ceases to be “my” body. Idealism and rationalism considered the body as object because they thought what was real, was only the “I”, the thinking “I” and the body was only matter or object. I cannot simply dispose of my body. According to Marcel, the impossibility of disposability of the body consists in the metaphysical understanding of non-disposability of the body<sup>7</sup>. Body has the dimension of non-disposability because it is a mystery.

My body in so far as it is my body, my body in so far as it has the character, in itself so mysterious, which we are expressing here by saying it is something I possess, something that belongs to me<sup>8</sup>.

But the objection is that we can dispose of the body by committing suicide.<sup>9</sup> Marcel says that one can dispose of the body in the sense that he can no longer have power to dispose of it again. This is called absolute disposal. These absolute disposals, therefore, in reality putting the body out of use. In other words, it is called total annihilation of the body<sup>10</sup>.

Body is that instrument through which I interact with the world. Every instrument is an artificial means of extending, developing or reinforcing a pre-existing power, which the possessor has. My is my body just, in so far as I consider it, as attached not detached. It is not an object, rather I am my body. When we consider our body as having or as an instrument, we run the risk of being caught up in an infinite regress<sup>11</sup>. The use of any instrument is to increase the powers of body or to extend the body itself. In so far as we consider the body as an instrument, we are tempted to think of the use of the body as extended power of some other bodies like mental, astral bodies and so on. And these mental and astral bodies become instruments that extend the powers of the third kind of body. And again, the third kind of body becomes an instrument to extend the powers of some other body and that it goes on to infinity and that is what we call infinite regress of human bodies.

It can be further explained by the following example from the religious disciplines called Reiki. The discipline of Reiki speaks about aura bodies which exist around the physical bodies. They are interrelated. And they affect each other and the person’s feelings, emotions, thinking, behaviour and health and son<sup>12</sup>.if one body is affected, it affected, it affects the rest of the bodies. Each body is there to protect the other bodies. Why we mention this is to make us aware that there are people who talk about immune able bodies and their rigorous efforts to increase the

---

<sup>7</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having; An Existentialist Diary*, 157.

<sup>8</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being: Reflection and Mystery. Vol.I*, 92.

<sup>9</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having; An Existentialist Diary*, 156-157.

<sup>10</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being: Reflection and Mystery. Vol.I*, 92.

<sup>11</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being: Reflection and Mystery. Vol.I*, p. 100. Gabriel Marcel, creative fidelity, trans. Robert Rosthal (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 18-19.

<sup>12</sup> “Aura colour meanings” at <http://www.reiki-for-holistic-health.com/auracolormeanings.html>, 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2021

power of the instrument in itself<sup>13</sup>. Marcel sees the human being as a unity of body and soul. Man becomes simple only when he is seen as unity, composed of body and soul. To stress this simplicity of man, Marcel uses the term incarnated being. Man is an incarnated being. The word “incarnation” applies solely and exclusively to the situation of a being who appears to himself or herself to be linked fundamentally and not accidentally to his or her body<sup>14</sup>.

### **Having and Hope**

There is a whole dimension of reality other than that of having, that is, the dimension of having. Here the basic emphasis in attitude and assessment is on who I am rather than what I have. In such a circumstance then, what I have is truly recognized as contingent on what I am. Depending on having as a way of validating self-worth and a way of life disillusion and deludes, shatters the process and experience of conversion and hope, which argue the prioritizing of being over having. To live in the having mode is fundamentally to live by possessing and owning, that is, to live by extrinsic and egoistic values. Most people as a matter of fact, live in the having mode. The vast majority of people as far as we see, are destined to remain entangled in the inextricable meshes of having<sup>15</sup>.

In fact, only those beings who are entirely free from the shackles of ownership in all its forms are able to know the divine light-heartedness of life in hope<sup>16</sup>. Having can regulate hope to almost vanishing point:

If however feebly, we remain penetrated by hope, it can only be through the cracks and openings which are to be found in the armour of having which covers us; the armour of our possessions, our attainments, our experiences and our virtues, perhaps even more than our vices<sup>17</sup>.

Egocentrism, arises because people reduce relationships to forms of having that are directed to satisfying self needs or interests. Under such circumstances, we would not be far from the truth of the proposition that, to have can certainly mean and even chiefly mean to have for one's self to keep for one's self or to hide<sup>18</sup>. Having can furthermore be related to desire in some sense.

### **Having and Desire (Covetousness)**

It is very important to notice that having already exist, in a most profound sense, in desire or covetousness. Marcel says:

Having already exists in a most profound way. To desire is in a manner to have without having. That is way there is a kind of suffering or burning which is essential part of desire. It is really the expression of a sort of contradiction; it expresses the friction inseparable from an untenable position<sup>19</sup>.

---

<sup>13</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being: Reflection and Mystery. Vol.I*, 99-100.

<sup>14</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being: Reflection and Mystery. Vol.I*, 101.

<sup>15</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 61.

<sup>16</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 61.

<sup>17</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 64.

<sup>18</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and having*, 160.

<sup>19</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and having*, 162.

Consequently, covetous desire is characteristically ambiguous and conflictual. At the same time, it is important to recognize that in the current consideration, it is not per se which is problematic rather, it is desire as covetousness or the tendency of desire to be so. Such a desire is by definition egocentric; it tends towards position<sup>20</sup>.

Covetous desire implies an anticipated appropriation together with a consciousness of a need hitherto unsuspected and even non-existent, which this appropriation ought to fill<sup>21</sup>. In the present enquiry, desire refers to something external to myself which I would like to possess. Covetousness easily misunderstands and distorts human desires so that for instance, the desire for friendship becomes possessive and the desire for recognition becomes egomaniacal or erotic. One way through which covetousness distorts desire is obsession: "It is essential to covetousness that it may become obsessional, which means that it tends to occupy the whole field of consciousness to such a point that other preoccupations are as it were temporarily annulled"<sup>22</sup>

When covetousness clouds human mind then distorts desire, it generates and fosters misconception as a person becomes more preoccupied with its fulfilment than anything else. Once one has devoted oneself to the end distorted desire, they often appear to be authentic and rightful. For instance, a person preoccupied with fulfilment of his erotic desire for sex may neglect the value of marital fidelity<sup>23</sup>.

People often cling to the ends of covetousness even to the point of desperation because they obsessively and mistakenly believe that if they fail to acquire what they covet, they lose what they have. Erroneously fear that they will lose their worth as well. "There is an absolute balance between covetousness and the pain I feel at the idea that I am going to lose what I have, what I thought I had, and what I have no-longer."<sup>24</sup>

Corruption, addictions, conflicts, wars, family chaos and disorder are often social manifestations and derivatives of covetousness, which spring from the ego. When it is covetousness, "Desire is essentially the act of the 'I' (The Ego). It belongs in principle to the domain of having"<sup>25</sup>. To experience desire is a health occurrence, but we need to reflect on how much covetousness through desire can come to control our lives and negate creative and life-giving expressions. When desires drive us because they have become covetous, then "Hope may either be perverted, or emptied of its content, or impoverished of its ontological references"<sup>26</sup>. We need to govern desires instead of being governed by them.

---

<sup>20</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Presence and Immortality* (Pittsburgh: Duguesne University Press, 1967), 231

<sup>21</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and having*, 162

<sup>22</sup> Gabriel Marcel, "Desire and Hope" In Nathaniel Lawrence and David O'Connor, ed., *Reading in existential Phenomenology* (Englewood Cliffs: Hentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), 279. Hereafter it will be referred to as Desire and Hope

<sup>23</sup> Gabriel Marcel, "Desire and Hope" In Nathaniel Lawrence and David O'Connor, ed., *Reading in existential Phenomenology*, 280.

<sup>24</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 162

<sup>25</sup> Gabriel Marcel, "Desire and Hope" In Nathaniel Lawrence and David O'Connor, ed., *Reading in existential Phenomenology*, 280.

<sup>26</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 94.

Finally, having is something which can be exposed but one can expose only that which in a certain manner, is or can become exterior to the self or detached to the self, as it were. What one has can always be separated from who one is. Marcel also recognizes this when he says:

Normally, or (if you prefer it) usually, I find myself confronted with things: and some of these things have a relationship with me, which is at once peculiar and mysterious. These things are not only external; it is as though there were a connecting corridor between them and me; they reach me, one might say, underground. In exact proportion as I am attached to these things (because I have them), they are seen to exercise a power over me which my attachment confers upon them, and which grows as attachment grows<sup>27</sup>

In that regard, when I predominantly live by the order of having; I often share in the insecurities, anxieties and tensions because of attachment of all kinds that devour the human subject<sup>28</sup>. A relational atmosphere, which is overwhelmed by having is frequently beset by poverty and diminishment of freedom. In such environment, many people may become not only constrained and cowed but also are frequently delivered over to indifference, rage and hospitality. When people are enslaved by the having mode of life, they habitually fail at holding their neighbour or the person in front of them in good faith or compassion. In so doing, people hinder and retard the germination of the realm of being.

### **Reconstruction of the Concept of Being in Respect to that of Having**

The realm of being is the personal and concrete that this coming subsection will examine and explain.

### **The Soul in Understanding the Authentic Self**

To begin with, the soul or the authentic enduring self does not belong to the order of having. "My soul seems least applicable, it is of everything in the world, the least comparable to a possession. Also, the soul is not an object and can by no means be regarded as an object"<sup>29</sup>In other words my soul is part of what I am. To say of the soul that it can be saved or dammed is also to grant it the exigency for fullness of life, which is the exigency for salvation. For we must never lose sight of the fact that salvation can only be found in plenitude, or fullness of life. My soul is my being, my ideal self, the fullness of that always seeks liberative ecstasies and is granted to me as a gift. Accordingly, the soul or the ideal self is the fullness of human subjectivity that guides the fundamental rhythms of our lives so that we are a psychophysically and psycho-spiritually unitary and conscious being.

The notion of the soul then refers to the human being as a permanent subject and centre of life and consciousness;" no distinction needs to be made between the order of life properly speaking, and the order of the soul"<sup>30</sup>. The soul is the ground for the ontological unity of the human being because it is permanent self that a person always is. A person's soul and person; ego, taken

---

<sup>27</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 164.

<sup>28</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 164.

<sup>29</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 164.

<sup>30</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 91

together, explain why a human being is a dynamic and, often, a tense centre of life and consciousness.” The soul is the material (necessary) condition under which alone the mind can assume a reality of itself<sup>31</sup> This means that “the soul appears to the mind as the condition not only of its realization but also of its reality<sup>32</sup>.

### **The Understanding of Being in Terms of Faith**

In faith the whole person is involved, faith springs from one’s whole being. Faith does not admit of the dichotomy of inner and outer, which are essential for having so that faith does not belong to the order of having<sup>33</sup>. The being that is the ground of Faith is personal or supra-personal being that overflow and integrates the conditions implied in all experiences. We must notice that the object of Faith entirely commands and transcends experience. Faith then partakes of being so that faith implies absolute commitment certainly:

In the end there must be an absolute commitment, entered upon by the whole of myself, more at least by something real in myself which could not be repudiated without repudiating the whole- and which would be addressed to the whole of Being and would be made in the presence of that whole. That is Faith<sup>34</sup>.

Put in another way, the being in whom I believe is one in whom I can place my trust, a reality capable of nourishing me, a being that I can invoke and can fall back on or count on. Faith as belief in the strong sense of the word cannot be separate from trust. Hence:

To believe in someone, is to put one’s trust(hope) in him. One can only trust a “thou,” a reality capable of fulfilling the function of a “thou,” of being invoked, of becoming something I can fall back on extrapolation, a bet, which like all bets can be lost<sup>35</sup>.

Therefore, Faith is a participation in absolute unconditionality as the transcendence of the object of faith<sup>36</sup>. In addition, faith is intimately allied with love; in fact, they are inseparable:

(...) side by side with faith, we posit love (...) love is the condition of faith (...). In reality love and faith cannot be dissociated. When faith ceases to be love it congeals into objective belief in a power that is conceived more or less physically. And love which is not faith (...) is only a sort of abstract game. Just as the divine reality corresponds to faith (...) divine perfection corresponds to love. And the union of reality and perfection in God (...) can only be grasped in function of faith and of the union of faith and love (...) <sup>37</sup>.

---

<sup>31</sup> Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, 124

<sup>32</sup> Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, 122

<sup>33</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and having*, 206

<sup>34</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and having*, 45-46

<sup>35</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 135

<sup>36</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 207

<sup>37</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, 58

Last but not least, faith, or belief in the strongest sense, “is life, a life in which joy and anguish continually jostle each other, a life which will remain to the end menaced by the only temptation against which in the last analysis we must guard ourselves, namely that of despair<sup>38</sup>”.

### The Act of Being

An act, as a confirmation and validation of the human subject, like a belief is not something one has. Thus, a function is not an act.” A function (role, task) is by its essence, something that one has, but in proportion as my function swallows me up, it becomes me, and substitutes itself for what I am”<sup>39</sup>. An act belongs to the order of being, I am present in my act. An act commits the whole human agent Marcel states:

It is in the act that the nexus whereby the person is unified with himself is realized, but it must be immediately added that the person does not exit apart from unification. A being which is not unified with himself is in the strict sense of the term alienate-and hence incapable of acting<sup>40</sup>.

“The essence of the act is to commit the agent”<sup>41</sup>, and the “more the act is mine (...) the more it is incorporated into the totality of what I am”<sup>42</sup>. Because it is part of who I am, “every action goes beyond possession, but may, after the event, be treated as a possession itself; and this virtue of certain degradation”<sup>43</sup>. In other words, what is characteristic of an act is that it can later be acclaimed by me as mine so that I acknowledge in advance that if I try to deny it, I am guilty of disownment<sup>44</sup>. At the same time, every act expresses the relative existential security of the human agent. To the extent that the acts of the agents are liberative or transcendent, to that extent is the act also indicative of advancement of the agent. Because every act is revelatory of the human subject, the act bears with it the notions of freedom and responsibility, which involve a personal reference: “It is of the essences of the act that it is non objectively verifiable or perceivable; it is not conceivable without a personal reference, a reference to an ‘It is I who (...)’”<sup>45</sup>. Accordingly, my act is more mine to the extent that it is not possible for me to turn my back on it without denying myself. Marcel says: “an act is more an act to the degree that it is impossible to repudiate it without completely denying oneself”<sup>46</sup>. My act reveals the kind of person that I am, either as becoming freer or regressing or as entrenched in unfreedom. Insofar as my act relates me deeply to the core of my person or consciousness, my act involves moral responsibility. “I claim to be a person in so far as I assume responsibility for what I do and what I say”<sup>47</sup>.” There is no act without responsibility”<sup>48</sup>. Thus, every act is qualified: it is good or bad. The closer it comes to

---

<sup>38</sup> Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 169

<sup>39</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 150.

<sup>40</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 113.

<sup>41</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 107.

<sup>42</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 109.

<sup>43</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 134.

<sup>44</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 107.

<sup>45</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 108.

<sup>46</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 109.

<sup>47</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 21.

<sup>48</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 108.



indifference, the less it is an act”<sup>49</sup>. Freedom and responsibility, which are two sides of the same coin, constitute the subject matter of the next section.

### **Freedom of Being and Responsibility for what I have**

Responsibility for an act is ascribed to a particular human being. Marcel says “my act is that of someone determinate”<sup>50</sup>. Responsibility is a bond that unites person and act. Besides, a person who is responsible for an act plans to do the act, maybe with the aid of others. Accordingly, responsibility includes the fact that an act is knowingly chosen and carried out. The act is voluntary<sup>51</sup>. The human agent of an act perceives the effects of the act in part at least<sup>52</sup>. It is the essence of the act effectively change a certain situation to which it is applied. One bears responsibility in the measure in which he or she has failed or succeeded. In effect, I am responsible in proportion to the degree to which I truly recognize and act on a situation intentionally.

To that effect, responsibility is a bond that also unites personhood and action with a certain sense of purpose, that is, value. “I am responsible” also means that I, as a moral being cannot divorce my present actions from past, even unadventurous behaviour. My responsibility for an action also includes consequences that affect other people insofar as I intend such results, however indirectly, I tend to act deliberately when I am free.

Now freedom is not the same as free choice though responsibility in human conduct is also founded on the act of free choice. Every human free act is attended by self-consciousness, this is also to say that the act only presents its character of act to the agent who makes choice or whomever mentally adopts, through sympathy, the point of view of the agent<sup>53</sup>. The question of free choice of the agent for an act leads to the conviction of human freedom.

Freedom comes into the picture at the moment when being and existence are in fusion<sup>54</sup>. The philosophy of being is the philosophy of freedom; they cannot be separated. Being is freedom incarnating itself and becoming a real power of conferring a content on itself so as to discover and acknowledge itself for what it is, that is the ultimate value of a certain ecceity<sup>55</sup>.

However, the question about freedom has meaning only in a specific situation. “Nothing is more absurd than to treat freedom as an attribute (or possession I always have)”<sup>56</sup>. When it comes to freedom:

(...) the essential question can be formulated only in a person form and in the first person, and only from that moment where our life stretches behind us like a well-travelled landscape, reconstructing the progress-so often halting and problematic that has been ours. At that moment, (...) we can ask ourselves, “Am I conscious of having

---

<sup>49</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 108.

<sup>50</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 109.

<sup>51</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 106.

<sup>52</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 105-106.

<sup>53</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 108.

<sup>54</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, Human Dignity, 29.

<sup>55</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 26.

<sup>56</sup> Marcel, *Human Dignity*, 152.

been a free man?" Certainly, it is then that the question takes on meaning, although it is manifestly impossible to answer it by a simple yes or no<sup>57</sup>.

Hence, instead of freedom being something I always possess, "every one of us has to make himself into a free man; that within the bounds of the possible he has to take advantage of the structural conditions which makes freedom possible"<sup>58</sup>. "My freedom must be won"<sup>59</sup>. By virtue of the ego, "I am not free, I have to become free"<sup>60</sup>. By this, "it is in the midst of a situation of captivity that freedom can be born, at first in the shape of the aspiration to be free". I may be acting under the constraints and influences of obsessive desire and unconscious motives, drug and ignorance, fear, pressures and blind habits, public opinion or out of some deep-seated fear. We are free when we actuate ourselves deliberately and significantly. This actuation is what Marcel talks about when he says:

(...) it is impossible to conceive of freedom without emphasis on a whole congeries of conditions which each of us is obliged both to experience and dominate, without, however, cherishing the hope of being able to do so absolutely, whether with respect to oneself or to circumstances<sup>61</sup>.

As a deliberative realization of the human subject and living ties among person, "freedom is a conquest always partial, always precarious, always challenged"<sup>62</sup>. Freedom involves living up to the obligation that fosters the community to which one belongs and which, after all, lets one be who and what one is. I am truly free when I am free for transcendence in communion. This is because "the freest man is the most fraternal. The fraternal man is linked to his neighbor, but in such a way this tie not only does not fetter him, but also frees him from himself. The free man or woman is one who is liberated from the ego and its categories of selfishness and self-centeredness. I act freely if the meaning of my act admits of what I am able to rightfully consider the existential constituents of my person, which allows for the insertion of the freedom of others into the fabric of my existence. Because my freedom pertains to whom I am, which is the truth of my person, freedom is also intimately connected with being, which is the subject-matter of the next section.

### **Centrality of the Act of being**

As Marcel clearly saw, being can be spoken as foundation, as intrinsic value and as the inert-subjective nexus. When spoken of as foundation (that is, condition for explication) being guards all individual beings and all thoughts and experience. Being is the very foundation of reality and of intelligibility that overflows all efforts to characterize it. Being evades every attempt to pin it down. "Indeed, every question arises out of an underlying foundation which can only be being itself (...) One cannot question being since every question presupposes being as a base"<sup>63</sup>.

---

<sup>57</sup> Marcel, *Human Dignity*, 153.

<sup>58</sup> Marcel, *Human Dignity*, 146.

<sup>59</sup> Marcel, *Human Dignity*, 87.

<sup>60</sup> Marcel, *Human Dignity*, 146.

<sup>61</sup> Marcel, *Human Dignity*, 151.

<sup>62</sup> Marcel, *Human Dignity*, 146.

<sup>63</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 1973), 193.

Being as foundation is the infinite “to be” taken substantively, a foundation grounding any “this”. One’s reality and that of everything else participates fundamentally in the foundational being as an ambient reality. This participation is referred to whatever the ‘to be’ verb is used<sup>64</sup>. Being as foundation is an assurance that is unable to commit itself into evidence, which perhaps would finally have to be compared to prohibition or deprivation, since it is essentially the assurance of impossibility<sup>65</sup>. In this case, one cannot question being since every question presupposes being as a base. It is therefore impossible to determine the nature of this base or foundation<sup>66</sup>. My being as a foundation, cannot be a property at all, but instead, it is ‘to be’ that makes possible the existence of any property at all. It is that without which no property can be concerned<sup>67</sup>. Since being comprehends thought, it becomes partaken by thought itself.

Being is also a value. It witnesses a certain special preferential recognition which is really an act by which a value, an absolute value is conferred on something<sup>68</sup>. As an intrinsic unconditional value and plenitude, being quiets, consoles and calms. It is also inseparable from the exigency of being as the appeal of liberative spirit arising from the depths of the human subject. Being as a value and fullness is the intrinsic excellence that every human being seeks. It is an intrinsic value and unconditional eternal value, which means that is not limited or reduced by time<sup>69</sup>.

In this case, to refer to others as being is to recognize them as the intrinsic eternal value, that is, each one as a thou. The more I treat the other as a though, that is as a unique and free conscious person with whom genuine personal relationships of love, faith or hope, the more I treat the other as being, that is, as a significant end for ecstatic love and affirmations. When being is said of the other persons they accorded dignity and they evoke love and respect because they are recognized as partaking of an intrinsic external value<sup>70</sup>.

To love another being is to experience that which in us transcends the temporal and it is apparently to experience our participation in the universal communion which is being as fullness<sup>71</sup>. This sense of love also awakens people to the sense of their divine filiation or divine origin. The sense of being divine-foliated affirms a person as both finite and infinite. Admittedly, to experience another as being is to love and experience him or her as participating in a certain fullness of intrinsic [unconditional, infinite] value<sup>72</sup>. Marcel treats an orchestra performing a polyphonic work as an example of a concrete whole. In that treatment, he says that each part could only be conceived as a part of the whole, and the whole precedes the parts. In fact:

When I say that a being is granted to me as a presence [that is as a thou] or as a being, it comes out the same for he is not a being for me unless he is a presence. This means that I am unable to treat him as if he was merely placed in front of me; between him

---

<sup>64</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, 50.

<sup>65</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, 51.

<sup>66</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, 49.

<sup>67</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, Vol. 2., 20.

<sup>68</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, 54.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Ragner, *The Philosophy of Experience*, 14.

<sup>70</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, Vol. 2., 57.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Anderson, “Gabriel Marcel’s Notion of Being” in *Philosophy Today*, 44.

<sup>72</sup> Marcel, *Human Dignity*, 78.

and I then arises a relationship which in a sense, surpasses my awareness of him, he is not only before me, he is also within me, or rather, these categories are transcended<sup>73</sup>.

The intersubjective nexus means that my existence is inseparable from the existence of others. It is the ground for a precondition and a starting point for any form of human interpersonal relations. This is nothing other than the mutual openness; the mutual availability and mutual presence in which every part in the heart or mind creates a welcoming room for the other<sup>74</sup>. It is clear that a metaphysics of being is a of we are<sup>75</sup>. Being is something we are immersed and participate in together as persons. The fullness of person's experiences opens him or her to a whole community, which implies the relation of being with, of togetherness. The existence of every person is bound to the existence of others. This bond obligates people to acknowledge and recognize the dignity, interests, and presupposes others in life.

The sphere of being is one of participation and co-participation with others significantly and deliberately. It also establishes authentic love of the self. The love of self can have a true foundation only by using others as a medium, and that medium is our only safeguard against egocentric and our only assurance that it will have the character of lucidity<sup>76</sup>.

When it comes to the relationship between being and fidelity, we may note that being is the home of fidelity; to live in the light of fidelity is to grow in the direction of Being itself. That means that being is the dwelling place of fidelity<sup>77</sup>. Fidelity does not prolong presence which itself corresponds to a certain kind of grip that being has over us. It intensifies presence as a revelation of an experience and recognition of the unconditional value of persons. The dialectic of fidelity is also that of hope. What is important to recognize in all this inquiry is the fact that all instances affirming being constitute spiritual moments of conversion experience which creates novel and dynamic relationships that promise hope and freeing love. In the last analysis, conversion proclaims the ascendancy of being over having, which is the topic of the next section.

### **Being as Superior to Having**

In the first place, "The reality of sacrifice is there somehow to prove to us that being can assert its transcendence over having. There lies the deepest significance of martyrdom considered as a witness"<sup>78</sup>. The person who sacrifices his or her life dedicates life to an unconditional or intrinsic, eternal, value of which he or she partakes. He or she puts his or her life at the disposal of a higher reality which means more and is worth more than his life, he situates his being beyond life in an attachment to fuller meaning and plenitude<sup>79</sup>. Furthermore, in order to have effectively, it is necessary to be in some degree, that is to say, so be immediately for one's self as it were affected or modified"<sup>80</sup>. Being, because it transcends the ego and its clout of having,

---

<sup>73</sup> Nathan Scott, *Mirrors of man in Existentialism* (New York Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1978), 38.

<sup>74</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 21.

<sup>75</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, Vol. 2, 9.

<sup>76</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, Vol. 2, 8.

<sup>77</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 41.

<sup>78</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 84.

<sup>79</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 77.

<sup>80</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 134.

opens up richness of personal experience. In the ascendancy of being over having this world is transformed into a reservoir of liberty and joy which people can live<sup>81</sup>.

In life, when I recognize the depth of who I am then my security lies in my being as intrinsic value and plenitude. The only threat to my security becomes my lack of faith in being. That being is superior to having also shows up in the fact that in being I do not need to have things in order to participate fully and creativity in life in being. I do not need to possess somebody or something in order to celebrate life, being surpasses all conditional or intrinsic justification for human act because justification goes beyond popular act.

Conversely, when having is prevailing mode in my life, then I become what I have. My identity becomes linked with what I have. It is a fact that having as much seems to have a tendency to destroy and lose itself in the very thing it began by possessing, but which now absorbs the master who thought he controlled it<sup>82</sup>. Paradoxically, while what I have may give me a sense of security, I am not necessarily easy because I can lose what I have. With “having” as a predominant mode in life, the following aching questions will rise. If I lose what I have, who am I? What will I be? What I have can be diminished or lost. So in having the anxiety to have more will always tend to control my attitude because:

(...) there is a link between qui and quid and this link is not simply an external conjunction but in so far as this quid is a thing and consequently subject to the changes and chances proper things. It may be toast or destroyed. So it becomes or is in danger of becoming the center of a kind of whirled pool fears and anxiety, thus expressing exactly the tension which is an essential part of the order of having<sup>83</sup>.

In the case where everyone wants to have, then the neighbor is a threat, a rival and a competitor who must be overcome or annihilated because a neighbor can take away or undermine the value of what I have and, hence endanger my sense of self-worth. People less gifted in talent, skills. Charm and health then became way envious of those who have more. And this insecurity can lead to destructive wizardry and intrigues, contempt and violence that undermine or impede community cohesion and service. The tragedy of having often takes the conspicuous yet worrying forms of contempt for the common good, this contempt also undermines the sense of service.

Tragically, when possession or what I have swallows me up, then the self becomes incorporated in the thing possessed, not only that, but perhaps the self is only there if possession is there too<sup>84</sup>. When I am immersed in what I have dreadful questioning faces me.

(...) what weight can what I was able to know or annex myself have, when compared with what I have not seen or assimilated.” Once again despair overcomes me, hems me in so to speak, again it is though I were a prisoner<sup>85</sup>.

---

<sup>81</sup> Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be* (London: Abacus, 1976), 92.

<sup>82</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 162.

<sup>83</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 164.

<sup>84</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 152.

<sup>85</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 71.

Meanwhile, when being has priority over having it mobilizes human efforts and resources in recreating this ambivalent world. Since what can be said of hope can be said of conversion, we may affirm of conversion then that “it always has to do with the restoration of certain living order in its integrity”<sup>86</sup>. Also a life of conversion and hope involves participation in existence “with others, reflection about others, about personal relationships about inter-subjectivity”<sup>87</sup>. This inter subjectivity involves person to person with each party recognizes the other in his/her personal otherness, all parties regarding one another not as objects (problems) but as mysteries i.e. as someone with whom he encounters and who reciprocally contributes to one’s being. It is the relationship in which a person inherits the name if he has a mutual constitution with others<sup>88</sup>.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have carried out an experiment of Marcel’s distinction between Being and Having. We are not pure instruments or possession “had” by another, since we exist and act in our own rights. And yet we are not pure being with the sense of existing without any real dependence upon other individuals. Man is the external existence who sends and appropriates things in their world he considers being and having immediately in his own reality. However, this changes throws differences to the fact that being needs to become or be made prior to having if we are to transform this world to a place of integrity, joy and liberating justice. Being is more important than having in participation to being. The priority of being over having enhances our participation and rootedness in being. By participation in being a person becomes more perspective and sensitive, loving and spiritual because of essential security of intrinsic worth.

In being, as being is inexhaustible, persons, in all their delivery and differences, are simply justified in who they are. This justification makes possible openness of persons to one another. The security of being is lasting, it allows us to be open to others and that openness is necessary for hope, for hope precisely is for all of us. In being we recognize that the worth of our persons comes not from what we have, do say from the circumstances that came our way or merely from the decision that we make, but rather from a justification that we simply are what is also the sense of the intrinsic worth of our persons. In other words, the security of being enables a person to develop the faculty of hoping. The security of being also protects persons against despair.

In being the worth of a person is over and above possession or what a person has and in the circumstances, “having tends not to be destroyed, but to be within each person “there exists an order situated at once beyond what belongs only to the realm of the subjective, understood in the psychological and re-intrinsic sense.” As a realm of that transcends the subjective the integrity of our being signifies the unconditional worth of our persons in the in the divine. Being bares on intrinsic or significant value.

---

<sup>86</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 75.

<sup>87</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, 157.

<sup>88</sup> Clyde, Pax, *An Existential approach to God: A Study of Gabriel Marcel*, 18.

© GSJ

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### PRIMARY SOURCES

#### 1.1. Books:

- Marcel, Gabriel. *Being and Having. An Existentialist Diary.* Translated by Katherine Farrer. New York: Harper Books, 1965.
- *Creative Fidelity.* Translated and introduced by Robert Rosthal. New York: CrossRoad, 1982.
- *Man Against Mass Society.* Translated from French by G. S. Fraser. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1962.
- *Men Against Humanity.* Translated by G. S. Fraser. London: The Harvill Press Limited, 1952.
- *The Problematic Man.* Translated by Brian Thompson. New York: Herder and Herder, 1967.
- *Presence and Immortality.* Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1967.
- *The Decline of Wisdom.* Translated by Virginia and Gordon Ringer. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955.
- *The Existential Background of Human Dignity.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963.
- *The Mystery of Being. Vol. 1. Reflection and Mystery.* Translated by G. S. Fraser. Chicago. Illinois: Henry Regnery Company, 1950.
- *The Mystery of Being. Vol. 2. Faith and Reality.* Lanham: University Press of America, 1983.
- *The Philosophy of Existence.* New York: Philosophical Library, 1949.
- *The Philosophy of Existentialism.* New York: Citadel Press, 1967.
- *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond.* Translated by Stephen Jolin and Peter McCormick. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

#### 1.2. Articles:



Marcel, Gabriel. "Contemporary Atheism and the Religious Mind." *Philosophy Today*. Volume 4, Number 1/4 (Spring 1960): 252-262.

----- "Philosophical Atheism." *International Philosophical Quarterly*. Volume IX (1952): 501-514.

----- "Some Reflections on Existentialism." *Philosophy Today*. Volume 8, Number 4/4 (Winter 1964): 248-257.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

Blackham, H. J. *Six Existential Thinkers*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1952.

Clyde, Pax. *An Existential approach to God: A Study of Gabriel Marcel*. The Hague: Martin Nijhoff, 1972.

Collins, James. *The Existentialists: a critical Study*. Chicago: Henry Regnery company Company, 1952.

Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. 9. Kent: Burns and Oates, 1999.

Dominic, Anton Joseph. *Self-realization and Inter-subjectivity in Gabriel Marcel*. Rome: Pontifical Urban University, 1988.

Ewijik, J.M Thomas. *Gabriel Marcel: An Introduction*. New York: Paulist Press, 1965.

Green, Marjorie. *An Introduction to existentialism*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Gallagher, T. Kenneth. *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*. Forward by Gabriel Marcel. New York: Fordham University Press, 1962.

Joseph, Dominic Anton. *Self-Realization and Inter-Subjectivity in Gabriel Marcel*. A Doctoral Dissertation. Rome: Pontifical Urban University, 1988.

Keen, Sam. *Gabriel Marcel*. Richmond Virginia: John Knox Press, 1967.

Lawrence, Nathanael and David O'Connor (ed.) *Reading in Existential Phenomenology*. Englewood Cliffs: Hentice-Hall. Inc., 1967.

Lepp, Ignace. *A Christian Philosophy of Existence*. Dublin and Melbourne: Gil and Son, 1965.

Loscoe Francis J. *Existence with God or Without God*. New York: Alba House, 1973.

Miceli, P. Vincent. *Ascent to Being. Gabriel Marcel's Philosophy of Communion*. Foreword by Gabriel Marcel. New York, Paris. Rome: Desclee Company, 1965.

Michalson, Carl. *Christianity and Existentialists*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956.

Pax, Clyde. *An Existential Approach to God. A Study of Gabriel Marcel*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972.

Reinhardt, Kurt F. *The Existentialist Revolt: The Main Theme and Phases of Existentialism*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company., 1960.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Gabriel Marcel et Karl Jasper. Philosophe de Gabriel*. Inksi: Mayidi, 1981.

Wahl, Jean. *Philosophies of Existence. An Introduction to the Basic Thought of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Jaspers, Marcel, Sartre*. Translated from French by F. M. Lory. New York: Schocker Books, 1969.

## ARTICLES

Anderson, Pedro. "Gabriel Marcel's Notion of Being." *Philosophy Today*. Volume 19, Number 1/4. (Spring): 29-49.

----- "The Experiential Path to God in Kierkegaard and Marcel." *In Philosophy Today*, Volume 26, Number 1/4 (Spring) 1982): 22-40.

Bugbee, Henry. "A Point Cor-articulation in the Life and Thought of Gabriel Marcel." *Philosophy Today*. Volume 19, Number 1/4 (Spring 1975): 61-67.

## INTERNET SOURCESs

"Gabriel Marcel" <http://www.lemoyne.edu/gms/biblio.htm#a2,5><sup>th</sup> August,2021.  
<http://www.humbuk.ac.uk/output/full2.php?id=10482>.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gabriel-Honore-Marcel>,6<sup>th</sup> August,2021

"Gabriel Marcel" <http://www.marquette.edu/phil/cvs/andersoncv.pdf>,0903HRS.  
<https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/humaff-2017-0011/html>,13<sup>th</sup> September,2021.

"Gabriel Marcel" [www.action.org/-personalism.html](http://www.action.org/-personalism.html)

"Gabriel Marcel" [www.lib.utexas.edu](http://www.lib.utexas.edu).

"Gabriel Marcel" <http://www.brainyencyclopedia.com>

"Gabriel Marcel" <http://www.edu/~philos/llp/Gabriel%20Marcel.html>  
<https://iep.utm.edu/marcel/>

<http://www.philosophytoday.org/spir2day>

<http://www.reiki-for-holistic-health.com/auracolormeanings.html>

<http://www.reiki-for-holistic-health.com/auracolormeanings.html>