

THE MYSTERY OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY

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One striking aspect of the deeply philosophical and spiritual dimensions of Gabriel Marcel's work is that his writings illustrate the meaning to be conveyed by describing everyday human situations. This immediately appeals to the life experiences of us all. Whether in drama, prose, music, the metaphysical or spiritual realm, Marcel describes real people who live, work, love, suffer, celebrate and die. Spirit, as we understand it, comes alive in human persons. This is what we call *Inbetweenness*. Marcel refers to this as the mystery of intersubjectivity—where spirit manifests in the lives of the human family. This may well be one of Marcel's greatest and lasting gifts to humanity. It seems *appropos* on this auspicious occasion dedicated to the life and memory of Marcel, to dwell for a few moments with this most wonderful and creative mystery.

In *The Mystery of Being: I*, Marcel makes an important distinction, a *le motif* that reappears throughout his work. Distinguishing between the relationship of things and people he says, "relationships between things are external, relationships between people are internal."¹ *Inbetweenness*, intersubjectivity, is lived internally. It is also given expression by human action and thereby carried into concrete existence. Through human action, the quality of life and conditions of the world *can* be changed. Through human endeavor, the initiating spirit becomes embodied in action. Actions arising from and imbued with the transformative power of the spirit most fully and poignantly shape and give form to the direction and unfolding of our shared human reality.

Marcel illustrates the spiritual dimension of interhuman relating, the touching and intertwining of spirit, by choosing to describe, in depth, the father-son relationship. Universally, the qualities of spiritual intimacy are most frequently found in relationships shared within the immediate family. This is where one would first look for experiences of *Inbetweenness*, for the depth of relating, the qualities of truly "living together," situations of being *with* one another. It is here where the deepest nature of one's own person is typically rooted. Relationships in this context are where personal existence is most deeply shared and interflowing. This way of relating creates a living, spiritual field of intersubjectivity. The persons whose living together flows together to establish a field of intersubjectivity discover the qualities of humanness. Caring, compassion and loving are fully present. It is, at the same time, creative and sustaining.

Marcel's insight into this fundamental nature of authentic interhuman relating, at least to us, is extremely significant to the contemporary world. It is the ground upon which it is possible to establish an expanding circle of relationships that go beyond the familial to include members of a "chosen family." Is it not possible that this field of intersubjectivity, this *Inbetweenness*, could be amplified to embrace the heart and spirit, eventually, of the entire family of humankind?

The embodiment of Marcel's theory of intersubjectivity provides an opening onto this creative realm of human potential and reality. In his writing Marcel repeatedly refused to flee from the concrete situations found in everyday life and resort to the typically highly abstract jargon of metaphysics, regardless of how metaphysical, philosophical or spiritual the topic. One result of this is that these concepts became accessible and were present in full view. Examples demonstrate essential points with practical events in the day-to-day events of life.

This may be an idealistic viewpoint when the world today itself is threatened with strife, war, violence and extreme human degradation, suffering and death. But this viewpoint also sounds a note of hope by providing a vision for the future and appealing to the highest nature of human existence. It is also one that can be real, alive and transformative and it offers an opportunity for transcendence. Human beings are dreamers, as was Marcel. But his dreams for humankind were both idealistic and practical, the best of both worlds. His work and his being were like an interchanging point of flow in an hourglass where the sands of time flow into the mound of the past, his presence transforming the mound of historical human reality as it passed through his being. So it was for Marcel, a point of interflow, where spirit flowed into existence and into the world through human action, touching, transforming and illuminating *grace*.

Nothing on earth is as creative, dynamic and enlivening as two persons whose spirits touch and intermingle. It happens everyday. Marcel saw it. He lived it and he described it for all to see through his prolific writings about everyday life drama sculpted from the raw material of human existence. In his music, writing and most touchingly, by example in his life and spirit, humility and transcendence met and lived in this life. Yes the mystery will always be "there"—*Inbetweenness*. The spirit embodied, the mystery of intersubjectivity, lives and has its being in the *Inbetweenness* of us all.

An encounter is unthinkable if one insists on separating the meeting. It is rather a participation as Marcel would say a "having-a-part-in" as well as "being-a-part-of." This is for us upon the fundamental resonant ground of *Inbetweenness*. *Inbetweenness* is not a dividing point between persons but it

is movement and vibration *to, fro, away and back again*. A wave of interpenetration, one wave passes into another without a break.

Notes

- 1) Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being I: Reflection and Mystery* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1960), p. 222.