



Intersubjectivity and Meaning in the Thought of Gabriel Marcel: A Personalist Ontology against Contemporary Nihilism

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Abstract

This article examines how the philosophical thought of Gabriel Marcel can contribute to the advent of meaning in the contemporary world [1]. Amid the profound and radical transformations that contemporary society has suffered throughout the 20th and into the 21st century, it is essential to seek the possibility for contemporary man to find a meaning capable of orienting his praxis in the courageous and explicit affirmation of the originality and primacy of the Person and the essential intersubjectivity that constitutes it [1]. Following an analysis of Denis de Rougemont's distinction between eros and agape [1], e as recentes perspectivas que reavaliam a dialética entre o desejo e a doação na ontologia relacional [3,4], this study explores Marcel's concrete ontology [1,5], overcoming traditional metaphysics through incarnate transcendence, dialogical fidelity [6], and the transformation of the other into an absolute Thou rather than a functional object [5,7].

Introduction

Love, Metaphysics, and Sanitizing the Contemporary Crisis of Meaning

The quest to anchor human praxis in the originality and primacy of the Person represents one of the most urgent philosophical tasks of our era [1,8]. Modern society has increasingly fallen into systemic objectification, technological reductionism, and the dominance of "having" over "being" [5,8]. To understand the roots of this crisis, Denis de Rougemont's work provides a crucial framework by distinguishing between two primary configurations of love [2]:

- Eros: Characteristic of classical Greek, Hindu, Japanese, and Chinese civilizations, driven by a self-centered lack, suffering, and a fatal attraction to death [2].
- Agape: Rooted in the Arabic, Judaic, and Christian traditions,

manifesting as a dowering fullness and heterocentric communion [2].

Contemporaneamente, a filosofia do amor tem sublinhado que a tensão entre eros e ágape não deve ser vista como uma rutura absoluta, mas sim como uma dinâmica de transfiguração onde o impulso humano de busca (eros) encontra na generosidade incondicional (ágape) a sua realização ontológica plena [4]. Além disso, a centralidade da pessoa humana exige hoje uma resistência ética contra os processos de despersonalização digital e económica, reconfigurando a alteridade através de uma ética da vulnerabilidade partilhada [3].

Classical metaphysics, heavily influenced by Platonic dualism, often devalued the sensible world and the body, treating the body as a tomb for the soul and reducing the "Other" to a mere utilitarian

stepping stone [1,9]. In contemporary times, this metaphysical nihilism manifests globally through hyper-competitiveness and the erosion of authentic human relations [8,10].

Gabriel Marcel's Concrete Ontology and Incarnate Transcendence

Gabriel Marcel's philosophy emerges as a radical resistance against abstraction and the spirit of system [1,5]. Rejecting the traditional dualism between a prison-like immanence and a distant transcendence, Marcel inaugurates a concrete and intersubjective ontology [5,6]. The foundational pillars of this framework include:

- **Being vs. Having:** To exist is not merely to manipulate objects, but to participate actively in a metaproblematic mystery [5].
- **The Body as Primary Reference:** Having a body means being originally exposed to the world and to others, embodiment being the condition for all intersubjectivity [1,5].
- **Secondary Reflection:** It allows the recovery of hourglass-like lost unity through a non-dissolving approach to mystery [5,6].

The Technocratic Threat and the Reduction of the Person

In an age dominated by technique and mass bureaucracy, human beings risk losing their unique countenance [1,8]. The technocratic state and mass society reduce the individual to a mere functionary and an impersonal file card [5]. Ontological care cedes place to mechanical efficiency, transforming the Other into a constant threat to the self-idolatrous ego [7,9]. The subject-object paradigm annuls genuine spiritual exchange, replacing living dialogue with strictly instrumental realities [5,8].

Intersubjectivity as Love and Fidelity

Against the totalitarian pressures of the system, Marcel posits that intersubjectivity identified with Love constitutes the radical antidote [1,5]. Love refuses to treat the fellow human as an object, recognizing them in the dignity of a unique Thou [5,7]. Fundamental aspects of this relational dynamic include:

- **Heterocentrism:** Personal reality is originally decentered toward the Other through availability and self-giving [1,5].
- **Dialogical Existence:** The "We" (Nous) is formed through ontological communication and mutual invocation under the

guarantee of an absolute Thou [5,6].

- **Incarnate Works:** Family, fidelity, and paternity are rescued from chance to assert themselves as symbolic events bearing meaning [1,5].

Conclusion

Gabriel Marcel's personalist ontology offers a decisive contribution to overcoming the spiritual desolation of the contemporary world [1,10]. By dismantling technical reductionism and nihilism, the author restores the density of human relations through the primacy of love and incarnate transcendence [1,5]. Thus, the intersubjective "We" establishes the terrain where Hope rises against the Absurd, opening the path to the authentic advent of meaning [5,10].

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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