



God, the Absolute Thou as the Ground of Intersubjectivity in the Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel

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Abstract

How to cite this paper:
Dagasen, B.G. (2021). God, the Absolute Thou as the Ground of Intersubjectivity in the Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel

Received: October 8, 2021

Accepted: October 16, 2021

Published: December 30, 2021

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The present time increasingly shows an intense polarity between science and religion. Human persons' dependency on science and technology and their assertion of autonomy upon themselves get deeper in the heart of society. Ironically, the more human persons become self-governing and self-sufficient, the more they experience a sense of loss of meaning of what it means to be human. Human persons perceived chiefly as a scientific and technological problem can only lead to alienation and isolation from others. The abolishment of the absolutes grants human persons their insistence as the definer of reality. And with science and technology as their tools, they have created a world that has lost its ontological awareness. This article argues that God, the Absolute Thou, is the ground of intersubjectivity using Marcelian philosophy. It uses both expository and correlational methods to establish the nature and significance of the reciprocal relationship between intersubjectivity and the Absolute Thou. Gabriel Marcel's existential ontology reveals human persons with the exigence of being. Central to Marcel's intersubjectivity are three inseparable pillars of love, fidelity, and hope that characterize openness, community, unconditionality, and eternity. Intrinsic to these pillars is theocentric directedness. Through Marcel's non-objective approach to God, the Absolute Thou breaks free from the presentation as an abstract entity. Thus, God can be experienced through personal involvement by way of faith, love, and hope. The study shows the centrality of God, who can fulfill the human persons' exigence of being, and only in God, the Absolute Thou can love, fidelity, and hope have their full assurance and eternal significance.

Keywords: God, Absolute Thou, Intersubjectivity, Marcel, Ground



Introduction

Richard Dawkins (2006), Oxford zoologist and renowned atheist who continuously mocks religion, asserts in his book *The God Delusion* that the notion of God is a virus in the mind that needs to be expunged. On the other hand, atheism is evidence of a freed and healthy mind. He also adds that religion is an irrational superstition while science is rational and based on evidence. Nowadays, many people are more dependent upon science and technology for answers to the problems they are facing. As columnist Trevor Thomas (2013, para.7) notes, “we get the motto of the technocrats: ‘only science can save us now.’ Whether it is global warming, stem-cell research, the beginning of life, health care, crime, homosexuality, gun control, or economic policies, the technocrats have the answers.” In their abuse of freedom and obsession for power, human persons enthrone themselves at the center of a completely human universe and subsequently proclaim themselves as the definer of values. Through the assertion of freedom and power upon themselves, human persons are confident that all things are possible and there are no limits to their material possession accumulation. An American academic historian, Howard Zinn, expresses, “people are driven, driven to accumulate, accumulate without even asking the question of will this make me happy or not” (Shadyac, 2011). Barbara Kruger’s famous slogan succinctly conveys this misguided thinking when she writes, “I shop, therefore I am.” The more human persons advance to becoming self-sufficient and self-governing, the more they experience a sense of loss of the meaning of what it means to be human. John Francis, an environmentalist, states, “I found that a lot of people were unhappy even though they seem to have everything. Even though they seem to be doing or believing that American dream” (Shadyac, 2011). V. Langmead Casserley (1956) has rightly said that in defining themselves based on what they have or possess, human persons eventually reduce themselves into an object as “functional agents, welfare units, cannon fodder, party members, anything that is abstract and definable rather than human beings” (p. 90). Moreover, human persons have become alienated or strangers to themselves, but they have also become isolated from others. Esther L. Baraceros (2012), a Filipina columnist, graphically describes:

Absorbed by the sound of their iPod or Mp3s or engrossed in building connections with somebody somewhere through their cellphones, they become oblivious to their surroundings. They regard as essential only those projected in their technological gadgets; un-essential, are those not sensed by them via their computers or cellphones... Making these people seem isolated and holed up in their comfort zones with their digital gadgets intact. Technology breeds citizens who tend to be complacent, individualistic, oblivious, or uncaring. (p. 21)

With science and technology as tools, we have created a world that has lost the awareness of the ontological. We have deprived human persons with intrinsic worth and value - mere



entities. As alluded to above, these can be readily observed nowadays: godlessness, self-centeredness, infidelity, manipulation, technological evil, hopelessness, and disfigurement of relationships. There seems to be a relationship between meaninglessness and the eradication of the concept of God. This question has provoked me for years which has subsequently led me to this study (Dagasen, 2013).

Among the philosophers who protested on the alienation of the human person in the technological age were Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Martin Buber (1878-1965), and Gabriel Marcel (1883-1973). They aimed to restore the ontological weight of human persons. They contended that the human person is not an object or function but essentially a being-with-others (Heidegger, 1962). Through *Dasein*, which means “being there” (which also means human beings or human existence), Heidegger showed that human beings are primordially being-with (*mitsein*) the world. Being-with is an essential element of *Dasein* which means for the sake of others. Being-with is a prerequisite of one’s knowledge of oneself. Being one with others in the world is fundamentally necessary for entering a relationship with others. Thus, one is essentially and inescapably with others. However, while Heidegger establishes the primordial social construct of human persons from the very start, he is confined on the level of the cognitive in pointing out that relations have been already constructed before the concrete. The rejection of the cognitive or *a priori* intersubjectivity paves the way to the search for transcendence and embodiedness of the other.

In the early stage of Being and Nothingness, Jean-Paul Sartre (1956) agrees with Heidegger’s intrinsic intersubjectivity of human persons. For Sartre, human persons’ daily activities project intersubjectivity in their participatory act with other subjects in the society—“even in the absence of an encounter with concrete others” (Zahavi, 2001, p. 156). However, despite this agreement, Sartre’s criticism of Heidegger points to the latter’s failure to capture the human persons’ “original and fundamental relations to others” (Zahavi, 2001, pp. 156-158). To Sartre (1956), there is something more fundamental to the being-with of Heidegger, and that is the being-for-others. Heidegger’s being-with of *Dasein* in the intrinsic and *a priori* sense lacks flesh and blood interaction with others. Sartre’s conception of intersubjectivity is an emphasis on the concrete relations of embodied subjects. He proposes an understanding of the being-for-others in the existential dimension where a substantial encounter is possible. In their efforts to solve the objectification and alienation of the human person, Heidegger’s and Sartre’s intersubjectivity points to alienation. Heidegger projected the human subject’s relations essentially in solitudes. He is trapped in *a priori* structure of relationship with its failure to connect the cognitive constitution with concrete embodiment. As Martin Buber contends, Heidegger fails to break the barrier between the self and the other.

Moreover, Buber (1947) argues that Heidegger’s philosophical secularism abandons the realm of the religious conception of the bond between the self and the absolute, which, to Buber, is “a bond in the real mutual relation of a person with person” (p. 178). While successful in



showing the embodiment of the other, Sartre undermines genuine communion in taking conflict as the essence of intersubjectivity. In Sartre's philosophy, the Transcendent or God is excluded. In this way, human persons become the definers of themselves (Kaufman, 1956).

It seems that there is scarcely a philosopher since the last century until this present time who could provide the resources to deal fruitfully with this specific issue of the absolutes but Gabriel Marcel (1883-1973), a French Christian existentialist philosopher. Marcel proposes intersubjectivity that is based on a theocentric outlook. He takes into account human persons holistically. Human persons are being-with-others in the world, *esse est co-esse*, endowed with the capacity to transcend their condition to reach the fullness of being. His ontological participation comprises three interconnected levels: incarnate subject, subject-others relations, and the transcendent, Absolute Thou. He rescues the ontological weight of the human experience. Like Friedrich Nietzsche, Marcel acknowledges the godless condition of humanity. But unlike Nietzsche, who sees the solution in superman, Marcel sees the answer in the real Transcendent, the God who gives meaning and dignity to human existence and fullness in relationships. His search for transcendence begins from the concrete human experience, the subject's personal experience, and in the context of concrete intersubjective relations (Roberts, 1957). It is not only that Marcel affirms all that could be true in Heidegger and Sartre when fighting against solipsism and the alienation of human persons. More importantly, he also discovers deeper into the ontological weight of human reality and shows how intersubjectivity is inseparably grounded in God, the Absolute reality. The basic idea that this study sets out to explore is how the notion of intersubjectivity finds its ground in God, the Absolute Thou.

Absolute Thou Grounds Intersubjectivity in the level of the Exigence of Being

The first task is to show that God, Absolute Thou is the ground of intersubjectivity on the level of exigence of being. Absolute Thou refers to God as an absolute Person and a divine Presence who is relational and experiential. He is referred to this study as the ground of intersubjectivity. Thou refers to a free conscious person with whom one can enter into a genuine personal relationship. Intersubjectivity is openness to others. It is where one stands in a vital relationship with others, one participates in each other's being and experience, which involves a deeper union of experiences such as love, fidelity, and hope. The question of "being" reveals the multi-dimensional aspects of reality that human nature characterizes both the physical world and the spiritual or transcendental dimension wherein the exigence of being, a deep-rooted interior hunger for fullness, is met and fulfilled. Herein, Marcel rejects the separation between the physical and spiritual worlds or the individual and the universal. For Marcel, the spiritual manifests in the physical. Central to the understanding of this union of such two dimensions are human persons revealed in the realm of mystery and in being. (Mystery is an outlook toward a reality that involves the whole human person. It is the opposite of abstraction and is an experience that involves the whole human person. It is where the



dualistic view of life ceases. It reveals the realm of being where the human persons are involved in the intersubjective experience of love, fidelity, friendship, evil, and the like.)

Marcel's philosophy of existence accents human persons because it is only through them that being can be approached. Hence, being and human persons are inseparable as it is only in being that human persons are revealed. The notion of exigence of being elucidates this. For instance, the ontological or metaphysical question, "Who am I?" inextricably involves both the questioner and being. As Marcel (1956) states, "to raise the ontological problem is to raise the question of being as a whole and of oneself seen as a totality" (p. 17). The only way to approach being is through human persons who inquire about being. In this way, according to Marcel, the only deepest ontological or metaphysical question is the question "Who am I?" For Marcel, this exigence of being is an appeal to the foundation of being, the Absolute Thou who alone can answer who human persons are. Marcel (1949) elaborates, "I am led to recognize that the appeal is possible only because deep down in me there is something other than me, something further within me than I am myself—and at once the appeal changes its index" (p. 125). Here the idea of otherness in Marcel's thought emerges again. The question, "who am I" presupposes other persons and God, the Absolute Thou, as the necessary fulfillment of the former.

The otherness revealed in the ontological question elucidates further the inextricability of the physical realm and spiritual realms' inextricability. The relationship between question and answer, the exigence and fulfillment wherein each presupposes the other profoundly shows the serious need of the Absolute Thou in human existence. To Marcel, the exigence of being is a manifestation of the Absolute Thou in the world. Thus, as Sam Keen (1984) observes, the exigence of being might be seen as a philosophical corollary to the Augustinian principle: "That one can only seek God because one already has in some sense found him. The hunger for being is possible only because there is a foretaste, the question of being only because there is some indication of an answer, and the quest for being only because there is blinded intuition" (pp. 107-108).

Hence, the exigence of being posits the necessity of the Absolute Thou in human persons' existence. In the final analysis, the exigence of being is the exigence for God, the Absolute Thou.

Rudolph J. Gerber (1968) elaborates on Marcel's otherness posited in the exigence of being. He gives three reasons why God the Absolute Thou is the necessary explanation to human persons: first, human thought is inadequate in explaining the question, "Who am I?"; second, the mutual relationship and dependence among human persons attest a foundation of personal fulfillment which is not itself inherent and dependent on either, but outside of themselves; and third, human personality reflects the personality of an Absolute Thou as the source of earthly personalities. Dennis Kinlaw (2005), an Old Testament scholar, concurs with Marcel



by saying that human persons are essentially other-oriented and thus find their fulfillment outside of themselves. In his book *Let's start with Jesus: A new way of doing theology*, Kinlaw (2005) elaborates,

No human person is self-originating. The choice to bring each of us into existence was made by two other people, so our life is a gift from others. We begin our life in another.

No human person is ever self-sustaining. We live by that which is not from within us. First, we draw our life from our mother; then we live from our mother's milk; we ultimately live from the bounty of nature, whose elements and richness we take into ourselves, including food, water, oxygen, friendship, encouragement, and inspiration.

No person is self-explanatory. There is no such thing as a typical human being. We come in two editions, and two who are different from each other are needed to explain any one of us. The male finds his definition concerning the female, just as the female finds her identity in terms of differentiation from her sexual opposite. Our biology insists that our completion is in another. Each of us is made for another who is distinct and different. (p. 101)

It is for this incompleteness of the nature of human persons that they are not self-fulfilling as Kinlaw is quick to add, "that we are by definition made for love as that gives itself in trust" (p. 101). Kinlaw moves on to assert, "We need to know the model from which our nature was drawn if we are to find out who we are. That model is the triune Godhead" (p. 78).

In the final analysis, the exigence of being reveals the greatest need of human persons—the exigence of God—a fulfillment in life that brings meaning, value, and healing to the broken world. Broken World is characterized by the technocratization, objectification, and functionalization of the human person in the postmodern world—where "men are not viewed as unique persons but are instead treated solely as objects identifiable with their roles" (Anderson, 1975, p. 40). Because the Absolute Thou is in the realm of mystery and can only be approached through secondary reflection, God is not a piece of information to be discussed. Rather, God is a Person and an absolute Presence. Thus, human persons can only participate in the Absolute Thou. The fulfillment of the exigence of being is in and through participation in the Absolute Thou. It should be clear that there is a reasonable grounding of intersubjectivity in the Absolute Thou in Marcel's philosophy. The most profound quest of understanding oneself and others as the pursuit for fullness is only answered and fulfilled by the Absolute Thou. This exigence of God the Absolute Thou is further shown in the context of love, fidelity, and hope.



Absolute Thou Grounds Intersubjectivity on the level of Love, Fidelity, and Hope

The second and final task is to show how the Absolute Thou is the ground of intersubjectivity through love, faith, and hope where the exigence of being, the need of God the Absolute Thou is attained. The following specific questions need to be answered. What is the connection of the three pillars of intersubjectivity, love, fidelity, and hope to God the Absolute Thou? What is it in love, fidelity, and hope that necessitate the Absolute Thou? In God the Absolute Thou, what is it that serves as guiding principles of love, fidelity, and hope?

Intrinsic to the character of love, fidelity, and hope is the element of unconditionality. Each pillar is discussed separately to show its corresponding guiding principle. The last part indicates the three pillars in a triadic relationship with each other.

Agape as the Guiding Principle of Love

The unconditional demand of love in an I-thou relationship hints at the source of meaning and fulfillment to human love. A vow made, for instance, in a wedding ceremony implies unconditionality if it is meant to be genuine, meaningful, and perpetual: “I shall continue to love you no matter what happens; . . . for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death do us part.” However, the unconditionality of a vow in a purely humanistic setting is unrealizable. The fact that betrayal of commitment is a human possibility proves that human persons themselves cannot be the foundation of their love and unconditional vow. More so, just like the I, the other is subject to death; this shows a limitation that inspires an element of dissatisfaction in human love. As Donald McCarthy (1966) expresses:

When the love of human thou gives me personal meaning, his love does not reach the very depths of my empirical self to know me completely as I am. It remains a particular love, limited in itself, but tending, as my love does also, to a universal communion which exceeds the natural power of any creature whatsoever. Moreover, isn't this other person also subject, like me, to death? What will become of our communion unless it is founded on a more profound Being? (p. 178)

Thus, Marcel proceeds to say that an unconditional vow must be grounded on an infinite reality, God the Absolute Thou, “a being that can assure me that my loved one will always be worthy of my love and that I can always be assisted to be faithful to my commitment” (Anderson, 2006, p. 169). Herein is the core of Marcel’s argument, that the unconditional love presupposed in the I-thou relationship finds justification and consummation on the level of agape or charity. That is to say, charity or *agape* is the guiding principle of the I-thou relationship. Marcel (1962) elaborates”



The more egoistical love is, the more the alluringly prophetic declaration it inspires, and it should be regarded with caution as likely to be contradicted by experience; on the other hand, *the nearer it approaches to true charity, the more the meaning of its declaration is inflected and tends to become full of an unconditional quality which is the very sign of presence* [emphasis added]. (p. 66)

Marcel (1964) further explicates the agapeic love beautifully being the foundation of the I-thou:

It is the dawn of what I have called inter-subjectivity, that is to say, mutual openness. It would be useful to show that this cannot be conveyed in strictly relational language; for from the moment we become presentially aware of one another, we can no longer be considered as two terms external to one another. We are on the verge of becoming interior to one another. But of course, this interiority is only fully realized, that is to say, affected in LOVE or, more precisely, in true AGAPE. (p. 255)

As such, charity or *agape*, the love of God the Absolute Thou, for Marcel, is inextricable from the love of intersubjectivity or I-thou relationship. That is to say, the love of God and the love of human persons are mutual, for the former is the foundation of the latter. Hence, Marcel affirms the two inseparable greatest commandments of the Torah and of the Bible in which the first is the basis of the second: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind;” and “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:37, 39; Deut 6:6, and Lev 19:18). For Marcel, the love of neighbors and creation is the expression of one’s love for the Creator. It is in the relationship with others and the world that God is glorified. As Marcel (1949) expresses, “My deepest and unshakable conviction . . . is not God’s will at all to be loved by us against the Creation, but rather glorified through the Creation and with the Creation as our starting-point” (p. 135). Hence, with charity or *agape* as a guiding principle of the I-thou relationship, human persons can give a valuable contribution to the community. That is, as Marcel (1951) stresses, “by the radiance of charity and love shining from their being, they add a positive contribution to the invisible work which gives the human adventure the only meaning which can justify it” (p. 45).

In a fascinating conversation with his foremost student Paul Ricoeur, Marcel (1973) speaks movingly about intersubjectivity which true nature is charity or *agape*:

By “life” I mean life with others, reflection about others, personal relationships, about intersubjectivity, which perhaps we haven’t talked enough about and which is nonetheless so essential to me. I think it could be said here that intersubjectivity is openness to the other, and openness which is perpetually threatened because, at every moment, the self may close itself again and become a prisoner of itself, no longer



considering the other except concerning itself. *But the possibility of opening to others (that is, in a completely different language, charity) is one of the key certitudes I have come to. I think that it is on the level of agape, on the level of charity or intersubjectivity, that experience undergoes a certain transformation in that it takes on the value of a test [emphasis added].* (pp. 253-254)

Here emerges a contrast between I-s/he/it relationship and I-thou relationship. As graphic as before, Marcel describes I-s/he/it relationship like a world where the “I” reigns and rules at the expense of others. It is a broken world, a world that is void of love. It is the prison of the self. It is a poverty of the soul that spreads like leprosy, as Marcel describes. In Christian terms, it is a sin, which John Wesley (n.d.) depicts as “chains of iron and fetters of brass. They are wounds wherewith the world, the flesh, and the devil, have gashed and mangled us all over. They are diseases that drink up our blood and spirits, that bring us down to the chambers of the grave” (pp. 218-219).

Marcel’s analysis of the I-s/he/it relationship affirms the universality of sin. However, the I-s/he/it relationship should be seen in the light of the biblical understanding of sin as its framework. This could only be followed by a full discussion of how biblical understanding of sin gives an intelligible framework to Marcel’s I-he/she/it relationship, which is beyond the scope of this study. Kinlaw’s reflection on Marcel shows the connection of the I-s/he/it relationship to the biblical understanding of sin. Kinlaw remarks that Marcel’s “analysis of sin in that passage (to Ricoeur) is a broken relationship—interpersonally not just with the law. It is when a person shuts himself off from another” (Kinlaw, personal communication, August 1, 2012).

Marcel indicates that a solution or cure for the broken world or broken relationship ruined by the I-s/he/it relationship is found beyond the problematic thinking. Unreservedly, Marcel argued that the transformation of broken relationships takes place in intersubjectivity or *agape*. As Marcel (1951) asserts, outside intersubjectivity or charity, it is “impossible to be open to others, to welcome him in the deepest sense of the word, and to become at the same time more accessible to oneself” (p. 10). Regarding the centrality of love, Kinlaw remarks: “Gabriel Marcel has confirmed my belief in the Trinity. He has confirmed my belief of Wesley’s teaching on entire sanctification” (Kinlaw, personal communication, August 1, 2012).

Thus, in his painstaking analysis of human nature, exigence of being, broken world, and intersubjectivity or I-thou relationship, Marcel discovers a ground in which nothing goes higher than charity or *agape*. Wesley (1971) tried to elucidate this agapeic love that Marcel was grasping in his book:

Love is the highest gift of God; humble, gentle, patient love; that all visions, revelations, manifestations whatever, are little things compared to love . . . It was well you should be thoroughly sensible of this, the heaven of heavens is love. There is nothing higher in



religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for anything but more love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way . . . if you mean anything but more love, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way and putting them upon a false scent. (p. 99)

Nothing can surpass the level of charity or *agape*—where the transformation of I-s/he/it relationship to I-thou relationship is only possible—because to Wesley, God is *agape*.

In speaking of intersubjectivity as charity or *agape*, Marcel points to the heart of the Trinity. As George Maloney (2004) observes in his book *Abiding in indwelling in Trinity*, “Gabriel Marcel describes the mystery of true love in the Trinity and our human love relations: “The I is the child of the We” (p. 20). In the same line of thought, Kinlaw comments that Marcel is prying on the doctrine of the Trinity, which is the necessary model in which human nature finds its meaning and fulfillment (Kinlaw, personal communication, August 1, 2012).

Marcel, however, does not fully elaborate agapeic love. This inadequacy in Marcel demands an in-depth exploration of the triune Godhead who models agapeic love. But, perhaps to Marcel, this is beyond philosophical reflection and is proper only for the theologians to discuss. One only needs to explore the context of the triune Godhead to see how the agapeic community in the three Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) gives the framework to intersubjective or interpersonal relationships, which is beyond the scope of this work. Thus, in affirming that intersubjectivity is nothing but charity or *agape*, Marcel offers a sound argument that human nature cannot escape the infinite Being as the source, the ground, the symphony, and the bond of the I-thou relationship. Moreover, in this inherent orientation of human love to the agapeic love of God, Marcel may be providing the key to help with some biblical and theological accounts.

Faith as the Grounding Principle of Fidelity

The above discussion on *agape* hints at the relationship between fidelity and faith because love and fidelity are inseparable. And so, just as love’s unconditional demand has its full assurance in *agape*, fidelity’s unconditionality is possible in faith. According to Marcel, the unconditional demands or aspiration of fidelity is fully articulated in the religious faith. As Marcel (1962) holds, “Fidelity can never be unconditional except when it is Faith” (p. 133), i.e., such commitment reaches its best explanation when pledged to God the Absolute Thou.

Furthermore, Marcel (1949) says, “faith is essentially fidelity, and in the highest possible form” (p. 22). But as Keen (1984) explains, “fidelity in human relationships is not something added to faith; it is how the believer is faithful to the Absolute Thou” (p. 114). The inseparability of the vertical relationship (faith in God) is obvious from the horizontal relationship (fidelity to others). One’s faith in God assures one’s fidelity to others. As Marcel (1950) elaborates, “the



more we shall put love at the center of our lives, the more certain we shall be that we act according to God's will" (p. 40). Reversely, one's fidelity to others testifies to one's faith in God the Absolute Thou.

I-thou relationship or intersubjectivity, a community-centered agapeic love, has coherence and unity through faith in God the Absolute Thou, the living center of the relationship. It is the Absolute Thou's presence recognized in the love of I-thou relationship that makes love perpetual and fulfilled. It is in faith that fidelity gets strength and constancy in the temporal plane and amid uncertainties.

God the Absolute Thou and Hope

The second link of the grounding of intersubjectivity in the Absolute Thou is the demand for eternity, the indestructibility of love. Marcel's painstaking endeavor to find meaning to intersubjectivity or the I-thou relationship against the sting of death led him to discover the mediating synthesis, the unconditional hope in the ultimate resort, the Absolute Thou. Marcel has made it clear that this justification cannot be done on the level of thought alone; it must utterly include a deep dimension of life if the justification is to be real and not merely an illusion.

Marcel stresses: "thou, at least, shalt not die." This prophetic affirmation and assurance that death is not the cessation of love is the voice of hope that inspires the indestructibility of mutually pledged love. The voice of hope enclosed in the prophetic statement, "thou shalt not die," finds its meaning and justification in the statement, "I hope in Thee for us." Without the "Thee" at the center of the "I" and the "thou," hope is groundless. Such groundless hope thus entails the end of love. Hope, like love and fidelity, is unsustainable in the finite "I" and the "thou" or "us" themselves. Hence, the hope for the "us," this oneness in love between the "I" and the "thou," can only be found in the presence of "Thee," the Absolute Thou. Thus, the eternal character enclosed in love refers back to God, the Absolute Thou, who can only give meaning to the salvific character of hope. The only justification for such a demand for eternity in love is God the Absolute Thou.

Just as charity or *agape* is the guiding principle for love, and faith for fidelity, so hope as inextricable from the Absolute Thou illuminates the true nature of hope. Hope as a radical openness is a recognition of one's exigence of being as exigence for God. Hence, it testifies the centrality of God the Absolute Thou in human existence. And so, as Francis J. Lescoe (1974) remarks:

It is permanently through hope that I discover my relation to the Absolute Thou. Because I realize my complete dependence on this Infinite Being, I am forever protected from despair. I am not tortured by a Heideggerian dread and homelessness;



neither am I overwhelmed by Sartre's absurdity or nausea. I am, in truth, a *homo Viator*, a pilgrim, a wayfarer but not a wanderer of endless and confusing "forest trail." I experience nostalgia for Being and, therefore, I direct my gaze to another life where I shall experience complete fulfillment. (p. 112)

Triadic Relationship of Love, Faith, and Hope

Each of the pillars of intersubjectivity reveals the triadic and indivisible relationship with each other. They all necessitate and have a being beyond the Spatio-temporal dimension, God the Absolute Thou. The prophetic assurance of the eternity of love that lingers amidst the darkness of the broken world, of betrayal, sickness, separation, and slavery is earnestly faith and hope or trust in the power and goodness of God the Absolute Thou. As alluded to, hope inspires the characteristics of love and fidelity. Without hope, love and fidelity, and faith are purposeless. Thus, hope as the life force behind love and fidelity and faith makes hope the final assurance of the grounding of intersubjectivity in the Absolute Thou in Marcel's philosophy. Love and fidelity and faith are the unconditional assurance of the mutual oneness of the I-thou relationship with others and the Absolute Thou. Love as charity and fidelity is the antidote for egocentric living, alienation, detachment, pride, hypocrisy, betrayal, and the cure for the broken world. Hope, however, is the full assurance of the I-thou relationship's mutual oneness not only in the "here are now" but also in the future. In other words, agape and faith are the full assurance of the unconditionality and indestructibility of love. Hope is the full assurance that this indestructibility transcends space and time.

Just as love and faith are inseparable in hoping for the indestructibility of the beloved in the Absolute Thou, love as charity or agape with hope makes hope not self-centered. Hope in agape is always to hope for all of "us," who participate in the journey (Marcel, 1951). What faith does to hope is that it "gives to hope its intelligible framework" (Marcel, 1951, p. 173). Faith in the Absolute Thou that gives the intelligible framework to hope implies life as a divine gift. As Marcel (1951) elaborates, "each of us is in a position to recognize that his essence is a gift—that is not a datum; that he is a gift and that he has no existence at all through himself" (p. 173). That life is a meaningful gift suggests that life has intrinsic worth and life has meaning and a future when the giver of life, God the Absolute Thou, is recognized with deep and wide openness through love, faith, and hope.

However, faith and hope without love beget no relationship at all, as intimate as I-thou. Intersubjectivity as *agape* breaks barriers transforms, renews, and builds a community. It is unselfish, brings fullness, and is irreducible. It aspires to be unconditional and eternal—all these set love as fundamental to fidelity, faith, and hope. Intersubjectivity as *agape* speaks closely to the very nature of God, the Absolute Thou. And so, as the I-thou relationship grows vertically in agapeic love, the more it grows horizontally.



Conclusion

God, the Absolute Thou, is the very essence of intersubjectivity. Because of the unconditional and eternal elements of intersubjectivity, which cannot sustain itself on its own, it has its source in God, the Absolute Thou. Human beings are transformed and enriched in the intersubjective relationship as they find their ultimate consummation of this intimacy in the union with God through love, faith, and hope. It is only in the Absolute Thou, the epicenter and the vital ground of intersubjectivity, that life finds meaning, fulfillment, and eternal value.

Conflict of Interest

This study did not receive funding from any individuals or organizations.

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