



Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973)

is a major European philosopher (as well as a dramatist and piano player) whose work is most often labelled as existentialist, albeit in a theistic version that set him against the atheistic existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre. Closer to the truth would be to qualify Marcel's philosophy and method as, to use his own expression, 'neo-Socratic' phenomenology because of the dialogical nature of his descriptive modes of enquiry. The major themes discussed in his work include concrete experience, participation, freedom, creative fidelity, availability, hope, the person, ontological exigency, reflection and transcendence. Although Marcel did not explicitly engage with non-western philosophy, aspects of his work are particularly pertinent to the practice of intercultural philosophy in the context of globalisation. His philosophy, being in essence both an advocacy for and embodiment of the dialogical method, did not endorse any attempt to think relational experience through radical alterity as in Emmanuel Levinas or Jacques Derrida. For Marcel encountering another person – or, for that matter, cultural otherness – should involve a kind of communion that transcends differences but which in turn guarantees their very possibility. The unity at stake calls for availability on behalf of all participants; a form of fidelity that should by no means be confused with homogenous submission (fideism). Moreover, the communion understood as orientation that precisely renders possible communication between self and otherness is no less than a dynamic of reciprocity that renews all parties involved by being opened to each other. In this sense, the creative element of the relational experience with otherness bears strictly no comparison with heterogenous subjectivity. To reflect the non-dualistic nature of the ethical relation Marcel formulated his key idea of 'creative fidelity', a conception that is proving to be all the more relevant in a 'broken world' whereby intercultural experiences lived through at an unprecedented speed and on sweeping scale unavoidably bring into question our certainties as to the identity-play of similarities and differences. Re-reading Marcel in the light of current debates in intercultural philosophy looks increasingly indispensable.

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See in particular Marcel's philosophical texts:

Being and Having (Être et avoir, 1935)

The Mystery of Being (Le Mystère de l'être, 1951)

Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope (Homo viator: prolégomènes à une métaphysique de l'espérance, 1944)

Man against Mass Society (Les Hommes contre l'humain, 1951)

Creative Fidelity (Du refus à l'invocation, 1940)

The Broken World (Theatre play, Le Monde cassé, 1932)