

THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES IN NATIONAL COHESION: A REFLECTION ON GABRIEL MARCEL'S INTERSUBJECTIVITY

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Abstract

This paper is a reflection on the practical utility of Gabriel Marcel's thought in the face of rising social crises and division in the society. At the dawn of the 21st century, humanity seemed to have slowly descended into chaos. Although the world experienced scientific and technological breakthroughs, the products of these achievements have further caused a lot of harm to man. Man's social identity is threatened as individuals and communities wage wars against one another. Men have closed themselves against one another and have failed to reflect on another's self-worth. Socially, humanity have lived in dread of what Marcel described as the 'broken-ness' of the society. As a solution, Marcel advocated humanity to live intersubjective life. This paper employs descriptive and analytic methods. It argues that as a task for social revolution, Marcel's thought has to be engaged to bring about national cohesion. The paper asserts that the practical benefit of intersubjectivity appears most clearly in the value it assigns to unity of purpose, and ideas of human worth, camaraderie, shared aims and brotherhood to resolve the growing tensions in the society.

Keywords: Role, Philosophy, National Cohesion, Intersubjectivity

Introduction

Today, humanity faces a number of social problems. Quite true that this is a decisive period of history, a glorious age marked by scientific and technological achievements; it is indeed a time of globalization and the whole world is experiencing remarkable changes in all areas of existence. Unfortunately, this is only one side of the story; there is another side, mostly unsaid and dark in all sense. Baiju (2006) professed that it is a terrible time, we happen to live, tainted with unheard cruelties of man against man and devastating wars of nation against nation. Although man glories in his achievements, he is threatened by the stuff of his creativity. The invention of military hardware such as weapons of mass destruction, missiles, and guns rather threatened man's existence. No wonder Baiju (2006) adds that it is an age of material progress and moral regress where the value of culture, religion, tradition, family, relationships and morality is at shake. It is a fact that, human today life is filled with anxiety and threatened by

meaninglessness.

In Africa, the problem of human existence is multifaceted. News of terrorist attacks, wars and communal conflicts are common headlines. There is hardly any television or radio bulletin without mention of violence. Dokubo and Oluwadare (2011) notes that Nigeria in particular, has experience a dramatic increase in violence, terrorism and the like in the past few decades. Lawless sects have risen in various parts of the country. Media reports on Boko Haram bombings, insurgent killings, herders' attacks, kidnappings, armed robbery and banditry, militancy and so on are a commonplace. These happenings are pointers that human existence in this part of the world, like the rest of Africa is unspeakable and appalling. It is a phenomenon that threatens and undermines the economic, political, religious and social security of the nation.

World over, philosophers have tried to address the problem of human existence. For instance, having witnessed the horror of World War I and II, philosophers like Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Heidegger, Sartre up to Marcel (Dukor, 2009) raised existential questions. While all existentialists addressed different topics their focus was to hoist the position of man. Marcel in particular, became popular in his view that man has become a slave to the products of his ingenuity. He recommended intersubjectivity as the answer to calm the chaotic world. Sunnie (1993) remarks that Marcel's position appeals to the life experiences of us all. During his time, Marcel's treatise made a qualitative impact in human relations. The crux of this paper is to reflect on practical benefits of Marcel's thought to the condition of Human existence in a modern state.

The concept of Intersubjectivity

Intersubjectivity refers to an interpersonal relationship or bond that exists among humans. **Brinck (2008)** defines it as “the sharing of experiences”. She categorized three ways that experiences can be shared namely: jointly, reciprocally, and by complementary interaction. The variety of shared experiences include; emotion, attention, and intention. Gillespie and Flora C (2010) points out that, it is as a short-hand description for a variety of human interactions. It has been used to refer to agreement, treaty or truce between people on a given set of meanings. Thus, intersubjectivity in this sense is simply a word for agreement.

Susswein and Racine (2015) define intersubjectivity as a technical concept used to classify interactive behaviours and abilities. The “perspectives” expressed in these definitions do not convey a univocal notion of intersubjectivity, however it point to a complex phenomenon, or a set of related phenomena, in which experiential, behavioural, genetic and neural processes and levels are interwoven in both potentiating and actualizing what it means to be human. Thus, Intersubjectivity in Marcel's thought is similar to the Zulu concept of *Ubuntu* and Tiv philosophy of *Ya na Angbian*

The Society and Human Existence

Africa generally is the most conflict-ridden region of the world and the only region in which the number of armed conflicts is on the increase (Dokubo and Oluwadare, 2011). It is no gainsay that human existence in Africa and Nigeria in particular is filled with terror. Violence and carnage characterize the society particularly in the North East,

NorthWest and Middle Belt regions of the country. This is not to say that the South East and West are spared of bloodbath. Armed gangs and militancy prevails in the creeks of Delta regions. Adekanye (2007) identified many of the causes of violence in Africa today with the potent ambition of socio-economic dislocation burdens of debt, IMF structural adjustment programmes, the stresses of environmental and human insecurity and the pressures of democratization, including the contradiction of forces of exclusion, marginalization or domination and demands for empowerment. The combined effect of these had produced the alarming rise of social and ethnic tension and conflict.

In Nigeria today, man's worth is calculated in terms of functions and he is titled by his functions. The inherent majesty and sacredness of human being have now been replaced by his functional values. Technology enjoys the absolute primacy. The value of human beings is determined by human ability and man loses his real personality. His life has become a journey without any purpose and goal. This why Marcel complains that “man appears more and more, both to himself and to others as an agglomeration of functions” (Lescoe, 1974); Marcel is not against technology, but he is against technocracy, technology and techno mania, which are the attitude of worshiping technical progress. It could be summarized here that, life in Nigeria is no longer considered as a divine gift, but as a joke. Man is considered only as an instrument among many others. He is no longer is human but a commodity to be used and exploited by some mass movements whether social, industrial or political .

Pathway to Marcel's theory of Intersubjectivity

Marcel introduced the notion of intersubjectivity in his famous Gifford Lectures of 1949 entitled “A Broken World” (Lescoe, 1974). Baiju remarked that “for Marcel, today's world is a *Broken World* and it causes lots of stress and tensions in man, giving rise to the feeling of alienation, despair, anxiety and uneasiness” (pg. 3). Sawchenko (2013) further explained that Marcel struggled with the existentialist questions of life and death in his own life, he also wrestled with them in his philosophy and his writing. Thus, Marcel's thought was influenced by experiences of his time, private and public. Sawchenko (2013) traced that, during the First World War, Marcel worked as head of the Information Service organized by the Red Cross, a role in which he was surrounded by death and grief. Of course, his duties included carrying news of injured and deceased soldiers to their families, an experience that influenced him deeply. Like his public life, Marcel's private life was not healthier either. Sawchenko (2013) also notes that:

The early death of Marcel's mother and his Red Cross work with the families of deceased soldiers caused him to question the meaning of life and death. Losing his young wife emphasized for him this existentialist predicament. He was preoccupied with the idea of maintaining relationship with those who have been separated from loved ones through death. This led to his inquiry into these existentialist themes in which he explored ideas of loving faithfulness and fidelity (pg. 9).

Murchland (2008) added that, Marcel's “views on interpersonal relations were deeply influenced by his own family's relationships as he was growing up having lost his

mother before his fourth birthday. Questions of openness and connection, of devotion and love, of fidelity and responsibility toward others grew in him as a result of these early experiences. As an only child, and growing up in a household in which differing temperaments and opinions resulted in strained relationships, pressed him to take a more mature attitude than children at ease in their environment. Marcel came to understand that life presents radical incompatibilities which cannot be resolved by means of intellectual formulae or conventional attitudes.

Thus, in the *Gifford Lectures*, Marcel pointed out that “we live today in a world at war with itself, and this state of world-war is being pushed so far that it runs the risk of ending in something that could properly be described as world-suicide” (Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, 1950). Marcel asserted that the World is broken because the structure of society based on true and authentic relations collapses due to several reasons. He also observed that the world loses its real unity. The idea of community becomes more and more impossible. What Marcel bewailed here was the loss of human dignity which has been flaunted on account of violence, wars and conflict evidenced in the World War I and II. Having witnessed the horrors against humanity at the war front, Marcel was convinced that the world was really set for a suicide. He believed that our world is slowly succumbing (if not that it had already succumbed) to a passionless age – a completely “mechanistic age” where the power of machines rules. Indeed, as Marcel remarked, we live in a 'heartless' world.

Furthermore, Marcel identified three factors that accounted to the world's losing of its real unity and peace namely: (i) *Increased socialization of life* where man's true identity is reduced to mere 'identification cards/documents'; (ii) *Extension of the powers of the State* where the government acts like an omniscient god; and (iii) the *Loss of real unity due to lack of brotherhood, privacy, creativity and reflection* (*The Mystery of Being*, pg. 181). Marcel stated that these signs are certain global evils which present a reality that needs to be transcended or overcome. These are atrocities which, at their very foundation, are due to man's failure to reflect on the presence and worth of the 'other' by “taking one's own self as the center”. *Yosnhiy (2009) also notes that seeing man's cruelty against man, Marcel queried, How then do we hope in the midst of our world's broken-ness, a broken-ness which holds us captives in our own world?*

Marcel's existentialist ontology therefore provided a realistic stance that affirms the dignity and unity of the person. Marcel offers us a perfect formulation of hope: “***I hope in thee for us***” (pg. 112). The very essence of this declaration lies within the intersubjectivity of hope. His works emphasized the first person, and the intertwining of the life experiences of persons in his writings revealed his theme of *intersubjectivity*. Marcel noted, “it must be realized that our situation as a 'broken world' is a form of captivity – where we, as human beings, are alienated or deprived of a certain kind of liberty; we are captives in a sense that we are trapped inside a system of a mechanized world – “a bureaucracy of life” . It is based on this background that Marcel rolled out the notion of intersubjectivity as a road-map for world peace, freedom from scientific slavery and development of humankind.

Marcel's Proposal

Intersubjectivity is a premise aimed at bridging authentic relations in between persons, communities and nations. Marcel identifies availability, freedom, fidelity and fraternity, faith, hope and love as the values capable of constructing the desired peaceful world. Availability also called disponability implies openness, welcoming, surrender, readiness to respond, loving attitude, sympathy, admiration and commitment (Schilpp and Hahnm, 2013). Marcel says that disponability and commitment go hand in hand. Disponability refers unqualified and unreserved availability. It is just like the availability of the mother for her child. One becomes totally available for the other without foreseeing any egoistic profit.

Marcel gives equal place to the second pillar, freedom and fraternity. He noted that “the freest man is also the most fraternal....The fraternal man is linked to his neighbour in such a way that this tie of fraternity not only does not fitter him but frees him from himself. The unfree man is the most self-enclosed within himself” (Collins, 1963). Freedom grabs the uniqueness of individuality. Fraternity enhances the individuals to exercise their freedom. Freedom strengthens our relationship. Therefore fraternity is the expression of the *I-Thou* relationship. He says that a fraternal man is enriched by his brother and the society becomes strong in its nature.

Thirdly, Marcel argues that Fidelity, the third value implies an unconditional vow to another person. In fidelity, we make commitment and promise in order to which we need faithfulness, a “creative fidelity”. Fidelity, according to Marcel, is a risk and a leap to darkness in the sense that “...in swearing fidelity to a person, I do not know what future awaits us or even, in a sense, what person he will be tomorrow; the very fact of my not-knowing is what gives worth and weight to my promise (Marcel, *Being and Having*).

The next pillars of Marcel's bridge are faith, hope and love. Faith is the highest expression of fidelity. Faith can be understood in two ways, i.e., as conviction and as commitment (Marcel, *Homo Viator* 1962). In a genuine commitment one engages in a mystical encounter with the other (Baiju 2006). Marcel explains faith as conviction, “...when I believe in God and when one asks me questions about this faith or I question myself about it, I would, of necessity, have to declare that I am convinced of the existence of God” (Lescoe, 1979).

Whenever there is faith, it will carry love. Love gives meaning to human existence. All forms of authentic relationship find its climax in love. Marcel stated that “Love is substantial, love is rooted in being, and love is not commensurate with anything on which a value can be set or with anything 'marketable’” (Marcel, *Man against Humanity*). Finally, Marcel maintained that hope is fundamental presupposition of fulfilled human life. Hope gives meaning to man’s existence. Hope is born from humility and not from pride, because a proud man is cut off from certain form of communion from his fellow men. Hope is always liberative and is not a way to escape from realities. A genuine hope is not at all escapism. Hope is not only a personal appeal to the self but an appeal to the selves of all of us. The subject of hope is not “I” or “You”, but “We” born out of love. Thus, these values become pillars the bridge could be made up of. Schilpp and Hahh captured that:

Intersubjectivity in Marcel is the relation between two subjects. It is the subject to subject relation, which is opposed to ego-centricity, but founded on love and harmony with the other. Presence belongs only to the being capable of giving himself to others. Therefore presence is intersubjective. Friendship, marriage, paternity and fraternity are the various modalities of intersubjectivity. It is through creative fidelity, hope and love that one can attain the stage of intersubjectivity. The growth of the society and its every member is based on the intersubjective relation of the members....we should be open to others and must be able to meet them without allowing oneself to be dominated or utilized (pg.16).

Marcel's position shows his view that intersubjectivity is that authentic relationship capable of constructing the world of love that is made up of values. Availability, faith, hope, love, freedom, fidelity and fraternity are those values which are called the pillars of the bridge. These values are not what 'we have' but what 'we are'. They help humanity to realise their own self and strengthen our relationship.

Very significant to his theory is the concept of I-Thou. Recall that, also fundamental to Marcel's doctrine of intersubjectivity is his view on "*Being and Having*", "...being as the common foundation and unity" of all beings" (Schlipp and Hahn, 1991). But today's man is more concerned with his havings rather than his being. Today's man is assessed by what he possesses, rather than what he is, therefore he is running to gather more and more havings (Baiju, 2006). Man can transform, meanwhile, his having into being. When one escapes from his ego-centricity and enters into the realm of self-giving, then the person becomes capable of transforming his having into being. Marcel makes allusion to I-Thou who is the facilitator of this intersubjective relationships. I-Thou relation is the transformation of "having" into "being". Marcel noted that an inauthentic person is self-enclosed, while an authentic person is open to all others and considers other persons as *thous*, more than a *he* or *she* or *it* (Lescoe, 1974). Marcel declares here that "When man considers others as objects or things to be used, then he goes back to having from being".

This I-Thou relationship crafts opportunity for a presence, participation and intersubjectivity among human beings. Presence, participation and intersubjectivity are in Marcel's estimation reciprocally all-encompassing. An I-Thou relation is embedded in a communion or collectivism. Baiju (2013) interpretes that in I-Thou relationship, man becomes present to the other in a mutual openness and self-giving. He becomes aware of his existence in the most unqualified manner only when he meets the other as thou, as another subject. It could be understood that, the relationship is a loving encounter, a genuine meeting in love, a friendship and spiritual availability. In an I-Thou relation, person respects and loves the other as he loves and respects himself. Here one sacrifices himself for the best of others. He is governed not by any egoistic desire, but by a self-giving desire.

Next to I-Thou, Marcel proposed that an Absolute Thou brings validity for I-Thou relationship, because the being finds depth and dynamism of this relation in the Absolute Thou (Schilp and Hahn, p.g.139). Marcel points out that to love a creature is to love him in

God. I-Thou relationship discovers my freedom, because my freedom is actualized when I am available to my neighbor. In this relation one is present to the other, in the same way as he participates in the other's being. I-Thou relationship is a pure relation between two subjects, which is an intersubjective relation.

Marcel's concept of intersubjectivity is indispensable for the progress of the human person in Nigeria in that intersubjectivity or the relation to the other, on which the community is based, provides man with a means of discovering ourselves and of finding bearings in the world. Marcel calls intersubjectivity a corner stone of ontology (Marcel, *Mystery of Being* pg. p.g 225). A good illustration of intersubjectivity according to Schilpp and Hahn (1991), can be found in the relationship between a musician playing an opus of chamber music, where each musician plays a role and makes a contribution in collaboration with others. The Nigerian Society for its smooth running needs necessarily the presence and participation of all members in the society. This is analogous to the saying that "United we stand and divided we fall".

Applying Gabriel Marcel's recommendations of intersubjectivity to Nigeria will mean that we are but a single tribe. It could be observed that sectionalism, nepotism and ethnicism constituted a thorn in the flesh to Nigeria. To the extent that 'juicy' appointments, sensitive political offices, certain government parastatal are highly reserved or given on the basis of where one comes from. Implementing intersubjectivity will correct the pointless dominance of the so-called 'major' tribes. Even the Killer herders in the bush will begin to see farmers as brothers. Insurgent and militant groups will see no need for bloodshed. People will begin to dialogue instead of resorting to violence. This will take the nation to a point where people will consider one another as brothers and sisters, an extension of oneself. An Igboman will treat an Hausa or Yorubaman like himself and vice versa. Only by entering into that interhuman relationship both emotionally and physically as Marcel recommended can there be peace.

Conclusion

This paper reflected on the practical relevance of Gabriel Marcel's notion of intersubjectivity. It was argued that although Africa and Nigeria in particular is broken by wars, violence and banditry; that Marcel's intersubjectivity is sufficient to heal her broken-ness. Marcel observed that the cause of violence in the world is the disconnection between humans; the inability of one to identify with the other, or see one as an extension of oneself. In his proposal, Marcel proposes a remedy to heal this *Broken World*. It was stated that an authentic interpersonal relationship can change the disorderly world by re-establishing affinities based on genuine love. Man needs to be open to his fellow men. Intersubjectivity is the best way of interpersonal relationship, the bridge between people. This paper submits that a dependable rapport will bring more meaning to human existence in the world. In this paper, Marcel's fundamental notions like I-Thou, Absolute Thou, Being and Having and Intersubjectivity are conversed. All these notions add to highlight the dignity of man as subject and as a person.

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