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Article

The Body and Marcel's Notion of Embodied Subjectivity

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Abstract: In recent years, the human body has been the focus of discussions in many fields, not only those naturally related to the body, like medicine and other health sciences, but also in the social sciences and philosophy. The human body is a fundamental matter that underlies most of the biological, health, physical, social, cultural, and even religious issues today. From a philosophical perspective, it has been hitherto considered, albeit in a very restricted manner. But today, philosophical discussions about it cover more ground, not just about its relationship with the mind or spirit, but its social and political significance, its relation to values and work, its relation to cognition and identity, and care of the self, among others. In this paper, I mainly focus on Marcel's notion of embodiment as our unique and intimate relationship with our body that shows our subjectivity as an embodied subject. I discuss how such an intimate relationship is experienced through our feeling of our body, and how our embodied self enables us to relate with others and participate in the world. To provide a philosophical background, I first traced the important conceptions about the body from the Ancient, Medieval, Modern, and Contemporary philosophers.

Keywords: Marcel, body, embodied subjectivity, feeling

My body, my choice. In the present time, the body has become the locus of self-expression. Some people have focused on their physical appearance and how they project their physical image onto others. How people project or treat their bodies is a way to express oneself. Since it is one's body, then it is one's choice to do whatever one wants to do with it. However, the body is not something that one just "possesses," and therefore, one can do whatever he or she wants to do with it. Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973)[1] draws a distinction between "having a body" and "being

[1] Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

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a body." The body is an expression of who we are; we are our bodies. Therefore, whatever we do with, for, or about it, reflects selves and entails responsibility. There is a danger of absolutizing one's choice when it comes to the body. Choice is not absolute, and it always involves responsibility, responsibility for oneself and for others. If a choice involves and impacts the welfare or life of others, then one must weigh and carefully consider his or her choices and their consequences.

Often, societal perception of self-worth is measured by one's physical or bodily appearance; hence, there is a tendency to focus too much attention on physical appearance and how to look physically attractive. It is not bad to focus on one's body as it is part of who a person is. Care for the self as the life-long commitment to ensure holistic well-being of oneself, includes caring for the body and promoting physical and mental health, prevention and management of illness when it occurs, and comparatively better quality of life. Of course, there is a difference between being concerned with only the appearance and image projected to others and commitment to the total well-being of the body. But if a person is only focused on projecting an image, there can be the danger of a disconnect between what one really is and the image that one projects. The commitment to the body is far more profound than projecting an image or an appearance. The human body is not just an image or a projection; it is part of who the person really is; it is part of his personality—the physical aspect of one's personality.

While the human body is part of who one is, it can be considered both a blessing and a hindrance. For a person endowed with a well-developed and healthy body, it is a blessing, while for those with some bodily disabilities or deformities, it could be a hindrance or a curse. Still, others may not be comfortable with the body they were born with, especially when it comes to sexuality. Others may consider altering some body parts or organs to enhance their physical appearance, even altering their natural and innate bodily constitution. But then again, choices involve accountability. Whatever attitudes, perceptions, perspectives, or notions we may have about the human body, one thing is certain: it is part of our identity and, as such, has its worth and dignity. The human body defines who we are as persons and is an essential aspect of our personality.[2] It is the body that is the foundation of our physical and biological existence.

[2] Jove Jim S. Aguas, "Karol Wojtyla's Notion of the Body: Corporeality and Human Sexuality," paper presented in the *International Congress on Catholic and Corporeality* (The University of Social and Media Culture, Torun, Poland, 24–25 November 2023).

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Philosophy of the Body

The duality of the body and soul has been a basic framework of Western philosophy. Since the time of the Greeks, the body has always been considered separate and opposed to the soul. Plato considered man as a soul trapped in the body, and the body, with all its desires, prevents the soul from attaining the knowledge of the forms. Rene Descartes (1596–1650) proposed an exaggerated type of dualism of the body and soul and claimed that they are separate substances with respective properties of thought and extension. During medieval times, the body was suspected of being sinful or unclean, and one needed to purge it through fasting and abstinence. In general, the body has always been considered either an instrument of the soul or a second-rate partner of the soul or mind, which often keeps the soul from exercising its capacities. However, in contemporary philosophy, the body is more understood and appreciated as an integral part of our human identity, an expression of our freedom, and a vital component of human relations. Existentialist philosophers shed light on the proper understanding of the human body and dispel the notion that the body is a source of corruption and that it is just an object that can be used or manipulated for whatever purpose of the individual.[3]

A lasting conversation about the body and soul is portrayed during the last days of Socrates (469–399 BC) in prison prior to his death. His conversation with his close friends focused on the true philosopher's attitude towards death. His companions appear to be surprised at Socrates, who appears to be unperturbed and willing to die and justifies this willingness to die. Socrates asserts that the philosopher is always pursuing death, and it will be inconsistent with his pursuit if he refuses it now that it is at hand. Socrates says: "he who has lived as a true philosopher has reason to be of good cheer when he is about to die, and that after death he may hope to receive the greatest good in the other world."[4] According to Socrates, the philosopher seeks and enjoys the pleasure of the body—food, drinks, sex, and other pleasures—but only to the extent that they are necessary to live. Beyond this, he despises them because bodily pleasures obtained from senses, desires, and feelings hinder the soul in its search for knowledge of true existence. He says that thought is clearest when the body least influences it; hence, knowledge can be fully obtained when there is a separation between the soul (which includes the mind) and the body. However, that separation of the body and the soul happens in death. Socrates, in asking Simmias if Simmias believed in death, explains that death is the separation of the soul

[3] See *Ibid*.

[4] Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892), 64.

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and the body after which the soul exists in herself and is parted from the body and the body is parted from the soul.[5]

The philosopher, therefore, whose object is the truth obtained by the clear vision of the soul and who tries to detach himself from the confusing vision of the body, is constantly practicing a kind of death. Socrates says that the philosopher attains the knowledge of the highest purity with the mind alone and does not allow in the act of thought any intrusion of the senses to accompany reason. Thus, Socrates continues,

> With the very light of the mind in her clearness penetrates into the very fight of truth in each; he has got rid, as far as he can, of eyes and ears and of the whole body, which he conceives of only as a disturbing element, hindering the soul from the acquisition of knowledge when in company with her ….[6]

Like any other compound thing, Plato (c.429–c.347 BC) considered the body a perishable physical object. The soul, on the other hand, resembles the essences or *forms* and shares in their permanence. Bodies are considered matter without thoughts and fundamentally different from their souls or minds.

Aristotle (c.384–322 BC) rejects Plato's conception of the relation of the body and soul and proposes a different conception of the body and the soul. His idea about the body and soul is based on his theory of hylomorphism, which explains the composition of corporeal substances. All corporeal or physical substances are composed of matter (*hyle*) and form (*morphe*).[7] Matter is the indeterminate but determinable component, while form is the determining component of a corporeal substance. The form constitutes its essence, the essence being the set of qualities that make the substance what it is. Matter is the principle of individuation, which means that matter or the body individualizes a corporeal substance, making it different from others; it could also refer to the collection of possibilities from which something else may be actualized. The form signifies actuality, while matter signifies potentiality. The matter of a human (or any other living thing) is its body, which is made up of organs, but the organs are only organs when they are part of a living thing. The body, too, is only a body when it is part of a living thing. The soul is the form of a living thing.[8]

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[5] *Ibid*.

[6] *Ibid*., 66.

[7] Aristotle, *De Anima*, in Richard McKeon ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 412a15–16.

[8] *Ibid*., 412a19–21.

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Although the body has a minimal role or function, the Greek conception of the body was not entirely negative. During Ancient times, the body was also associated with health (and disease), power, and athleticism. Many Scholastics subscribed to the hylomorphic theory of Aristotle, and one of them was St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). According to St. Thomas Aquinas, intelligence is a proper capacity of the human soul that does not need the cooperation of any organ in its operations. The human soul is also the "form of the body," and just as every form is the principle of all the operations of the informed matter, the human soul is the principle of all operations performed by the body through its various organs.[9] However, we can see that St. Thomas also acknowledges the role of the body through the senses in his theory of knowledge. It is through the senses that we gain access to the external world and perceive the material and concrete qualities of the external objects.

The role of the body during the Ancient and Medieval periods is sparingly recognized, and there is a generally negative view of the body in relation to the soul, spirit, or mind, especially in the soul's ascent to eternal life. During the medieval period, the body was looked upon with suspicion as something that needed to be purged or cleansed if one wanted to attain eternal life. Some strands opposed a pure soul to a sinful body. The Gnostics, for example, saw the human spirit as naturally good, but it is imprisoned in the body, which was naturally evil. We can trace this back to Plato, who stressed that the soul that is purified of bodily pleasure through philosophy may enter immediately into the blissful company of the gods. People tend to consider the body as a thing without comprehension, choice, or judgment, contrary to the self-determination and free will of the soul or mind. The body is seen as a mere instrument of the soul.[10]

During the Modern period, Descartes contends that there are two separate substances, namely the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*; the mind is a *res cogitans*, and the body is a *res extensa*. The mind is a separate substance because it does not depend on the body to exist or be understood. The mind and the body are separate because they have different attributes. However, according to Descartes, the human body is closely connected with the mind. "It may also be concluded that a certain body is more closely united to our mind than any other, from the fact that pain and any other of our sensations occur without our foreseeing them; and that mind is conscious that these do not arise from itself alone, nor pertain to it is so far as it is a thinking thing, but only in so far as it is united to another thing, extended and mobile, which

[9] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (USA: Benziger Bros. Edition, 1947), Ia.76.a1; *Contra Gentiles*, (New York: Hanover House, 1955–57), II, 57 and 58.

[10] See a similar discussion in my paper, "Karol Wojtyla's Notion of the Body."

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is called the human body.[11] Descartes' dualistic position attracted many critics. Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677) denied this dualism and argued that mind and body are the very same thing "expressed in two ways." Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) and Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715) both denied that distinct created substances (such as mind and body) could really have a causal influence on each other.

In the contemporary period, there were philosophers who recognized the importance of the body and stressed its important role in the total structure of the human person. One of them is Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), who shows the limit of an objective interpretation of the body and provides an alternative understanding of the body across a series of domains, including the experience of one's own body, lived space, sexuality, and language. Merleau-Ponty describes the body's typical mode of existence as "being-toward-the-world"—a pre-objective orientation toward a vital situation that is explicable in terms of third-person causal interactions or by explicit judgments or representations.[12] Merleau-Ponty related the understanding of time, space, the other, the natural world, freedom, and intersubjectivity to the body. Karol Wojtyla (1920–2005), or John Paul II, stressed the importance of the body to man's existence and identity.[13] Wojtyla considers the body as part of the psychosomatic unity of the human person. The body manifests the somatic constitution of man, and in order to fully understand the human person, we need to shed light on his somatic dynamism.[14] According to Wojtyla, the body is the basis of our corporeality. As human beings, we are not only rational but also corporeal because of our bodies. The body is also the basis of our differentiation as male or female and, therefore, the basis of our sexuality.[15] Michel Foucault (1926–1984) focused on the body in his analysis of phenomena such as psychosis, clinical medicine, and prison systems. Foucault explained how power mechanisms relate directly to the human body, its many functions, and its physiological processes, feelings, and enjoyment.[16] In the 20th century, the philosophy of the body focused more on essential questions of human society and culture,

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[11] Rene Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, *Principles of Philosophy*, trans. by John Veitch, Part II.2, in *The Classical Library* (2002), <http://www.classicallibrary.org/descartes/principles/>.

[12] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1962).

[13] Aguas, "Karol Wojtyla's Notion of the Body."

[14] Karol Wojtyla, *Acting Person* (Dordrecht, Holland; Boston, USA; London, England: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1979).

[15] See Jove Jim S. Aguas, "The Philosophical Foundation of John Paul II's Notions of Marriage and Unity of Man and Woman in His Theology of the Body," in *Philippiniana Sacra*, 55:164 (January–April 2020), 51–74.

[16] See Michel Foucault, *The History of Madness*, trans. by Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (London/New York: Routledge, 2006) and Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. by Alan M. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1989).

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thus providing an original and detailed analysis of human nature and its roles and performances in social operations. It also showed the operating mechanisms and internal contradictions of contemporary Western society.[17]

Gabriel Marcel's notion of man is clearly expressed in his description of man as an incarnate subjectivity. He explains that philosophy of existence must have a concrete point of departure, not just a logical certitude, but an existential indubitable, and that is man's incarnate subjectivity or embodiment. The following sections discuss Marcel's thoughts on the body, specifically on embodiment, feeling, and participation.

Marcel on Man as Embodied Subjectivity

For Marcel, the human person or man is not an epistemological specimen meant to be analyzed and dissected; the person is a concrete individual, a human being who manifests his existence through his body. As a concrete and embodied subject, he is not found in the arid and empty generalizations of specialized investigations about what happens to a person or in the uncritical examination of the etymology of the word person.[18] What really counts is the concrete individual. He writes:

> The empirical self-in-general is a fiction. What exists and counts is such an individual, the real individual I am, with the incredibly minute detail of his experience, with all the specifications of the concrete adventure that belongs to him to live and to him alone, not to another being.[19]

Man is not a self-enclosed ego; he is open and disclosed to the world and to others. This openness to the world and others is made possible through his body. Because of his embodiment, he is able to participate in the world and relate with others. Intersubjectivity and human relations and interaction are possible because man has a body; he is an embodied or incarnate subjectivity. Man cannot reach out and make his subjectivity known without the body; in fact, he cannot act with the body. Marcel believes

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[17] Duoyi Fei, "From 'the mind isolated with the body' to 'the mind being embodied:' Contemporary Approaches to the Philosophy of the Body," in *Cultures of Science*, 3:3 (September 2020), 206–219, < https://doi.org/10.1177/2096608320960242>.

[18] Jove Jim S. Aguas, "The Filipino Value of Pakikipagkapwa-Tao Vis-À-Vis Gabriel Marcel's Notion of Creative Fidelity and Disponibilité," in *Scientia: The International Journal on the Liberal Arts,* 5:2 (December 2016), 21.

[19] Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Hope* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 19.

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that Descartes's view of the self is not an accurate description of how the self actually is in experience. By focusing too much on the analysis of clear and distinct ideas, he overlooked the fact that our first contact with the world is without any mediation from clear and distinct ideas or clear representations.[20] For Marcel, man's fundamental situation in the world, which defines his "ideas," and any description of them has a reference to a human body and its place or "situation" in existence.[21] The human subject is fundamentally embodied being-in-a-situation and is not primarily a thinking or knowing subject. It ensures that one's experience and knowledge of the world will be shaped by his or her situation, and such a situation determines the complex web of relations that one finds himself or herself intimately involved in at any given moment of his or her existence. One is not just a spectator of life or one's life; one is involved in the various projects and practices that shape his or her life.[22] He or she exists in a specific context by virtue of his or her particular embodied context in the world. This embodied situation is defined by his or her particular spatial and temporal location, general and personal history, cultural and economic context, etc.[23] This experience of embodiment ensures that the person is a being-in-a-situation

Marcel grounds his notion of man on his description of man as an embodied (incarnate) subjectivity. For him, a philosophy of existence must have a concrete point of departure, not just a logical certitude but an existential indubitable.[24] He posits that any attempt to define existence must have a "touchstone of existence."[25] If Descartes finds this in the *cogito* and clear ideas, Marcel finds his starting point in the immediacy of lived experience itself. If Descartes starts his philosophical reflection with a methodic doubt towards establishing the *cogito*, thus making the *cogito* the central datum of metaphysical reflection, Marcel considers the incarnate being as the central datum of metaphysical reflection starting off with experience, particularly the experience of embodiment, that is, the experience of being a body. Therefore, Descartes's cogito lacks concreteness and cannot be constituted as an existential point of departure. Marcel's existential point of departure, his indubitable, is the incarnate being or the incarnate or embodied subjectivity. Marcel's central datum of existence is embodied

[20] Brendan Sweetman, "Gabriel Marcel: Being and Having," in Michael Kuhnlein ed., *Philosophy of Religion and Critical Analysis of Religion: A Handbook* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlig, 2018), 569.

[21] *Ibid*.

[22] Brendan Sweetman ed., *A Gabriel Marcel Reader* (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine Press, 2011), 69.

[23] Sweetman, "Gabriel Marcel: Being and Having," 570.

[24] See Gabriel Marcel, *Mystery of Being I*, (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1950), 109.

[25] *Ibid*., 108.

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(incarnate) subjectivity, that is, the affective unity that the self has with its body. According to Marcel, incarnate subjectivity is the touchstone of existence; denying it would make any assertion that anything else existed would become quite inconceivable.[26] Existence has always been a reference to one's body, so "when I affirm that something exists, I always mean that I consider that something as connected with my body, as able to be put in contact with it, however indirect this contact may be."[27] For Marcel, the only way that man can exist in the world and think about the world and relate with the world and others is by being embodied, or incarnate that is, to be a body. It is through embodiment or incarnation that the person is present in the world; it is because of the body that the person is able to express his subjectivity.[28]

Being and Having, Problem and Mystery

To fully grasp man's embodiment and relation with the world, Marcel relates it to the two modes of man's relation with the world, namely, *having* and *being*. "*Having*," according to Marcel, is our normal mode of relating to the world; it does not simply imply possession or acquiring of possessions; rather, it represents a stance and way of dealing with our world, of organizing and mastering it. *Having* is characterized by abstraction from the concrete reality; we seek to objectify our world, viewing it as an object to be possessed and controlled. We approach situations principally as problems to be solved, e.g., "I wonder how it works? What is wrong? What does she want." The basic relation becomes one of objectification, manipulation, control, and domination. In the case of persons, we tend to characterize or categorize. *Having* always has something to do with what is external to us, independent of us. Further, Marcel writes:

> What we *have* obviously presents an appearance of externality to ourselves. But it is not an absolute externality. In principle, what we *have* are things (or what can be compared to things, precisely in so far as this comparison is possible). I can only *have,* in the strict sense of the word, something whose existence is, up to a certain point, independent of me.[29]

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[26] *Ibid*., 109.

[27] Marcel, *Being and Having,* 10.

[28] Aguas, "The Filipino Value of Pakikipagkapwa-Tao Vis-À-Vis Gabriel Marcel's Notion of Creative Fidelity and Disponibilité", 21.

[29] Marcel, *Being and Having*, 155.

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The mode of relating, which Marcel terms *'being*', is completely opposite to that of '*having*.' *Being* is essential to our personal relationships as well as to our living richly human events. When one approaches the world with the attitude of '*being*,' that world appears as something he participates in. I am immersed in it, and it appears to me not as an object but as a presence. I deal with the concrete experience and not the abstraction.

Being and *having* are related to two modes of awareness or attitudes towards reality, which Marcel calls *problem* and *mystery*.[30] A *problem* is a question in which the identity of the person asking the question is not an issue; it is an issue that can be considered objectively and so one is not personally involved in the issue at hand. A *mystery,* on the other hand, is something that affects one personally, and so one is involved. Marcel elaborates:

> A problem is something that I meet, which I find completely before me, but which I can, therefore, lay siege to and reduce. But a mystery is something in which I am myself involved, and it can, therefore, only be thought of as a sphere where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and initial validity.[31]

Marcel stresses that a *problem* is in some way outside us, something apart from our intimate experience and something towards which we adopt a merely impersonal attitude. Hence, it can become an object of general knowledge and public inquiry. In scientific investigation it is possible to make a clear-cut distinction between the subject who inquires and the object which is being investigated. Hence, in a sense, a problem emerges as something definite and specific, detached and of a fixed pattern. This is revealed through the way in which we believe that a given problem may be resolved in terms of a 'solution' that can be tested and verified in experience. A mystery is personal, one that is deeply connected to the subject and, therefore, cannot be objectified, verified, or universalized based on some data. There are data that by their very nature cannot be set against the self

[30] Marcel relates this to his conception of the broken world when he states that the broken world is one that is "on the one hand, riddled with problems and, on the other, determined to allow no room for mystery." The denial of the mysterious is symptomatic of the modern broken world and is tied to its technical character, which only acknowledges that which technique can address: the problematic. See Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, translated by Manya Harari, (New York: Citadel, 1995), 12.

[31] Marcel, *Being and Having*, 117.

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because such data involves the self.[32] According to Marcel it is a "problem that encroaches on its own data."[33] Such a "problem" is, in fact, meta-problematic; it is a question in which the identity of the questioner is an issue. On the level of the mysterious, the identity of the questioner is tied to the question. A question that involves one's intentions or longings is deeply connected to the person and, therefore, cannot be considered objectively or detached from the person. Its resolution involves the person, and it cannot just be resolved by logic or standard procedure; thus, it is "mysterious."

Problem as an attitude of interpreting reality or things that happen in reality is related to the mode of *having*. Indeed, there is much in our everyday life that genuinely presents itself as a problem to be solved. There is a genuine problem, and we must go about the normal logical thinking process to come to some sort of solution. When we are faced with genuine problems, there is no other logical course of action but to maintain the attitude of *having* and seek a solution. We can lay down certain conditions or procedures necessary for the acceptance of any particular solution as valid. When those conditions are satisfactorily fulfilled and the procedure is followed, then we say that the solution has been 'verified.' We presuppose that such verification is carried out by the mind of a 'depersonalized subject' or a detached and objective investigator who is able to reach exactly the same conclusion as any other investigator. This is an essential condition for the establishment of any kind of objective knowledge. Unlike *problems*, *mysteries* cannot be solved with techniques and verified and standard procedures and, therefore, cannot be answered the same way by different people. A verified procedure, technique, or solution will not apply in the different cases presented by different persons. *Mystery* differs from person to person precisely because it is tied to the person. In fact, we wonder if *mysteries* are open to "solutions" at all, because it is non-objectifiable.[34] *Problem* belongs to the realm of *having*, while *mystery* belongs to the realm of *being*.

Our personal experience of embodiment is one of *mystery*. Marcel explains that the experience of our embodiment is given to us in a way that is not exclusively objective. Our first experience of our embodiment is that "it is my body." We cannot think of our own embodiment as a problem, the body as something detached from us because as soon as we think of it as a problem, it ceases to be my embodiment, but be, and it becomes a problem of embodiment. Thus, we move from personal experience to abstraction. Marcel, thus relates *being* and *having*, *problem* and *mystery* to embodiment.

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[32] Kenneth Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1962), 32.

[33] Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, 19.

[34] Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 37.

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The body or my body, insofar as it is *my* body, is both something that I have and something that I am. If I look at my body in a disassociated manner and see it instrumentally and objectively, I am distancing myself from it in order to grasp it *qua* object; hence it ceases to be *my* body, but just *a* body, just like how others may look at this body. In this sense, I can have *a body*, but not *my body*. However, when I make the connection that the body in question is *my body* and not just *a body* or anybody's body, then it is no longer just something that I *have*; this body is also me; it is what *I am—I am my body*.

This distinction between *my body* and *a body* or *I have a body* and *I am a body* points out not only the distinction between *being* and *having* but also shows how we relate to other things and persons differently through these two modes. *Having* corresponds to things that are completely external to us. I have things that I possess that I can dispose of—and this should make it clear that I cannot *have*, for example, another person. *Having* implies this possession because "*having* always implies an obscure notion of assimilation." While the encounter with otherness takes place in terms of assimilation when speaking of *having*, the encounter with other persons can also take place on the level of *being*. In this case Marcel maintains that the encounter is not one that is purely external and, as such, it is played out in terms of presence and participation rather than assimilation. *Being* is the opposite of *having*; it is essential to our personal relationships and living richly human events. When one approaches the world with the attitude of *being*, that world appears as something he participates in. The person is immersed in it, and it appears to him not as an object but as a presence. My body is apprehended as presence, and the *thou* or other is given as co-presence; these are not acts of being, but modes of being.[35]

Embodied Subjectivity

Let us dig deeper into what Marcel means by embodied or incarnate. "To be incarnated is to appear to oneself as body, as this particular body, without being identified with it nor distinguished from it."[36] Man as a subject appears and exists in the world and relates with other beings as a *body*. Marcel, however, clarifies that embodiment does not mean being identified or distinguished as a *body*. Man is not distinguished from other things as a *body*. He stresses that identification and distinction are correlative operations that only pertain to the realm of objects, and man is definitely not an object. The *body*, though considered something, is not just an object; hence, it can neither be identified nor distinguished from the self. "Of this *body*, I can neither say

[35] *Ibid*., 55.

[36] Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 20.

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that it is I, nor that it is not I, nor that it is for me (object). The opposition of subject and object is found to be transcended from the start."[37]

Embodiment implies the unique experience of intimacy of one's body; the *body* as *mine,* as my lived body. Without the principle of intimacy, the body would just be anybody's body and would just be like any "*body*." Marcel observes that a purely objective conception of the body fails to recognize the bond that exists between the self or me and my body. Embodiment or "incarnation is the situation of a being who appears to himself to be, as it were, bound to his body.[38]

Marcel further distinguishes between *a* body or a body-object and *my* body or body-subject. *A* body is something; *a* body is a particular body that is ostensively definable; it is definite, fixed, and can be applied to any person. There is some anonymity to *a* body because it could be referred to just any other person. To consider the body as an object is to consider it something that can be scientifically known, labeled, and categorized. The body, considered an object, can be analyzed, studied, used, and even manipulated. Just like any other object, it can be treated as an instrument or a commodity. However, the body is no instrument; any instrument is a means of extending or strengthening the original power possessed by the person who uses it. A hammer, for example, extends the capacity of a carpenter. However, the hammer as an instrument is something outside or external to the carpenter or the person; to consider the *body* as an instrument is to consider it as external to the person. However, the *body* is not external; it is the person himself.

My *body* is not a possession or an instrument; however, it is what makes possession and instrumentality possible. The intimate relationship between me and my body is a unique relationship for while it is described as a unity, such *unity* cannot be described as an identity. Hence, the body is not just *a* body; it is *my* body. *A* body is objective; my body is me. "I *am* my body in so far as I succeed in recognizing that this body of mine *cannot*, in the last analysis, be brought down to the level of being this object, *an* object, a something or other."[39] There is a difference between *having* a body and *being* a body. In the case of persons and our body, we tend to characterize or categorize.

Insofar as it is *my* body, my body is both something that I have and am. I can see my body in a disassociated manner and see it instrumentally, but in doing so, in distancing myself from it to grasp it *qua* object, it ceases to be *my body*. I can have *a body*, but not *my body*. As soon as I make the connection that the body in question is *my body*, not just *a body*, it can no longer

[37] Marcel, *Being and Having,* 12.
[38] *Ibid*., 10.
[39] Marcel, *Mystery of Being*, 124.

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be something that I have; this body is also me; it is what I am. "*My body* is *my* body just insofar as I do *not* consider it in this detached fashion; I do not put a gap between myself and it. To put this point in another way, *my body* is mine in so far as for me, *my body* is not an object, but rather, I am *my body*."[40] Hence, "to say that I *am* my body is to negate, to deny, to erase that gap which, on the other hand, I would be postulating as soon as I asserted that my body was merely my instrument."[41] Marcel further explains: "Speaking of *my body* is, in a certain sense, a way of speaking of myself; it places me at a point where either I have not yet reached the instrumental relationship, or I have passed beyond it."[42]

Feeling and Embodiment

However, how can we say that it is really our body? What is the primary mode by which I can say that this is really *my body*? Marcel answers because we feel our body. Feeling is the primordial modality of embodiment. Marcel says,

> *My body*, insofar as it is properly mine, presents itself to me in the first instance as something felt; I am my body only insofar as I am a being that has feelings. From this point of view, it seems, therefore, that my body is endowed with an absolute priority in relation to everything that I can feel that is other than my body itself ….[43]

The radical feeling of *my body* as intimately mine as a sense of embodiment is manifested through the internal perception, which Marcel calls *coenesthetic*. This feeling of coenesthesia places me as an embodied being in such experiences as being tired, hungry, energetic and enthusiastic. According to Marcel, this is a primordial feeling because it allows me to experience my body as mine. This primordial feeling lies at the root of all other feelings, such as sensations and activities that immediately connect me with the surrounding objects of the world. It takes absolute priority because to feel anything else, I must first feel my body as mine. My immediate contact

[40] *Ibid.*, 123.
[41] *Ibid.*
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] *Ibid.*, 125

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with my body puts me in direct contact with the world.[44] Feeling implies two mutually implicative acts: the internal perception of my body and the external perception of the world, and there are no gaps between these acts.[45]

Our internal perception or inner awareness of our body is not based on observation, although one's body is something that can be perceived by one's self and others. A person then or an "I" is at once a body-subject and a body-object. So, the body can be both a content of inner awareness and an object of public knowledge. The inner experience or awareness of one's body or sense of embodiment is fused with an awareness of one's self as being in the world; it means that one is not just a body but that he is being in the world with and for others. Being a body, as the very mode of existence, carries with it an awareness of its intersubjective bond with the existing beings around it. The experience of one's body is basically the feeling of one's sense of community with oneself and with the world.[46]

If, for Descartes, the foundation of existence in the world is the cogito for Marcel, the original datum is not "I think" nor "I am alive," but rather "I experience," and experience is founded on embodiment. Marcel writes:

> When I assert: I exist, I certainly mean something more than this; I vaguely imply that I am not only for myself but that I manifest myself, or rather am manifested; the prefix ex in exist, has primary significance because it conveys the meaning of a movement towards the external world, a centrifugal tendency. I exist: that means I have something by which I can be known or identified, either by another person or by myself insofar as I assume for myself borrowed otherness; none of these characteristics are separable from the fact that "there is my body.[47]

The body is definitely our connection or mediator with the world. Objectively, the world may appear to be something detached from the self, but because of the body, we become aware that we are being in the world. The body establishes our presence in the world, which we understand from an existential point of view. Of course, Marcel does not dismiss the objective altogether, but he is trying to drive home the "primacy of the existential over

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[44] Erwin Straus and Michael Machado, "Marcel's Notion of Incarnate Being," in Paul Arthur Schilpp and Lewis Edwin Hahn eds., *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1984), 131.

[45] *Ibid*.

[46] *Ibid*., 127–128.

[47] Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 17.

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the ideal" with the understanding that the existential is related to embodiment or incarnate subjectivity. The world objectively exists, and there is no way we can deny this fact, but our existence in the world is manifested or experienced through embodiment; we relate with the world and everything in it through our body by being incarnate or embodied. Embodiment then becomes the basis of the self's relation or participation in the world.[48]

Embodiment and Participation

In Marcel's thought, relation with the world is a kind of participation; participation is the crossing over of boundaries between the embodied self and the world. This participation or relation is made possible by our sensation or feeling of the world. Marcel works out his own theory of sensation or feeling as a form of participation with the world. First, he distinguishes two kinds of participation: objective participation and non-objective participation.[49] Objective participation is taking part or simply having a share in something. For example, I participate in the ownership of some commodity or property. I have objective participation in my parents' property or I have a share in the food prepared for our meal. In objective participation, one is concerned with data; I am interested in how many of us will share in the property, how it will be shared or divided, and who will take part in the sharing. There is also non-objective participation, as when we participate in a ceremony or an activity. In prayer, for example, one can participate in the adoration. Here, one is no longer interested in data or facts; one is no longer interested in how many are the participants in the adoration or the place of the ceremony or activity. So, here we "arrive at the notion of an act of participation which no longer leaves any place for the objectivity of a datum or even a notification."[50] Marcel further reflects on what he refers to as emergent and submerged participation. In non-objective participation, one thing can be observed and that is the reality that it presupposes an idea on which it depends. In our example, the prayer ceremony or adoration is dependent on the idea of God. Hence, it is by virtue of the idea that participation emerges. Marcel stresses, "The idea, around which non-objective participation becomes possible, is itself the principle of the emergence of participation."[51]

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[48] Straus and Machado, "Marcel's Notion of Incarnate Being," 127–128.
[49] See Marcel, *Mystery of Being*, 137–139.
[50] *Ibid*., 139.
[51] *Ibid*., 140.

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However, there is a kind of non-objective participation that is not yet emergent but *submerged*. This submerged participation is a feeling below the level of idea or thought; it is a feeling that has yet to emerge into a conscious idea of its own intentionality.[52] While emergent participation is reflective, submerged participation is pre-reflective, but both are modes of feeling. The pre-reflective or submerged feeling is a primordial mode of embodiment. The feeling of community, which mediates every contact with the world, can be brought to the level of consciousness through reflection. The feeling of the body as *mine* is a continuous process of the participation of the self in its embodied situation in the world; this participation can range from the submerged to the emergent. However, because of the submerged participation, the body becomes the "*non-mediatizable immediate*." Marcel explains,

> In so far as it is my body, or the feeling which is not separable from my body as mine, our perspective changes, and we have to recognize the need to postulate the existence of what I will call a non-serializable *immediate*, which is the very root of our existence.[53]

So, in a sense, self, body, and world are not three distinct spheres of reality with clearly definable boundaries but rather fluid categories that flow into one another and define themselves in relation to one another.[54] But the key to the relation of the self and the world is the feeling of the body as a mode of participation; because of the feeling of the body, the self and the world are defined and related. Participation, understood as feeling, ensures that as an embodied being, man is not just a spectator positioned over other objects in the world. Man is not just a detached observer but a participant in the world. Man constitutes himself only in his own intentional acts, but he is already engaged in his own existential situation even before he can stand back and observe what is going on prior to his thinking. Hence, more primordial than our cognition of the world is our participation through the feeling of our body in the world. Embodiment and its mode of feeling as participation is the foundation of our experience and existence in the world. These are thoughts that are very similar to Karol Wojtyla, who also thought of participation,[55] where participation is explained as a property of person and action. First, it is a property of the person, a property that expresses itself

[52] Straus and Machado, "Marcel's Notion of Incarnate Being," 127.

[53] Marcel, *Mystery of Being*, 135.

[54] Straus and Machado, "Marcel's Notion of Incarnate Being," 128.

[55] See Wojtyla, *Acting Person*; See also, Karol Wojtyla, "The Person: Subject and Community," in *Review of Metaphysics*, 33 (December 1979), 273–308.

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in the ability of the human being to endow his own existence and activity with a personal dimension when he exists and acts together with others. Secondly, it is a positive relation to the humanity of others, that is, as a personal self, in each instance unique and unrepeatable.[56] Participation, as a property of person and action can only happen through the body. It is through the body that we relate with others, share our thoughts and intentions and act together with others. It is through the body that we experience, encounter, and participate in the world.

From an objective point of view, the body can be construed as one body among other bodies. However, in this sense, the body is treated as an object with objectivity properties. The body then becomes problematic because it is considered already detached from the self and, therefore, external to it. This detachment, albeit essentially illusionary, becomes the basis of any cognition about the body. Hence, from an objective and cognitive point of view, there is a kind of dualism between the self and the body. But such dualism is inconceivable from an existential point of view.

One has an inner awareness of his body, which is not based on observation, although one's body is something that one's self and others can perceive. A person then or an "I" is at once a body-subject and a body-object. The body is a content of inner awareness and an object of public knowledge. This inner experience or awareness of one's body or sense of embodiment is fused with an awareness of one's self as being in the world; it means that one is not just a body but a being in the world with and for others. Being a body, as the very mode of existence, carries with it an awareness of its intersubjective bond with the existing beings around it. The experience of one's body is basically the feeling of one's sense of community with oneself and with the world.[57]

Conclusion

The body is not just an object or an instrument that we can just objectify, manipulate, or control. It is not something that we just have or possess and therefore can do anything we want with it; it is an essential component of who we are as human persons. The body is not just a secondary component of our personhood; it shares equal worth through different functions with the mind or spirit. As human persons, we are both body and spirit. And just as persons, we are dignified; we must also dignify our bodies. While we can showcase our physical appearance, we need to be mindful that

[56] Jove Jim S. Aguas, *Person, Action and Love: The Philosophical Thoughts of Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2014), 163–169.

[57] Straus and Machado, "Marcel's Notion of Incarnate Being," 127–128.

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behind that appearance or with that appearance is a dignified body. The dignity of the human person extends to his whole being, which essentially includes the body.

We are able to relate with others and participate in the world because of our bodies. We are not just detached observers but participants in the world. However, even prior to our engagement with the world, we engaged first with our existential situation which is primordially rooted in our embodiment. Hence, more primordial than our cognition of the world is our participation through the feeling of our body in the world. Embodiment and its mode of feeling as participation is the foundation of our experience and existence in the world. In that case, we need to be always mindful of how we engage with our bodies and the world. Our bodies are our channel of actively participating in the world in a dignified way.

The body is an integral part of our human identity, an expression of our subjectivity, and a vital component of human relations. It is not a source of corruption, not just an object that can be used or manipulated for whatever purpose of the individual. In this sense, we have more reason to care for our body, not just our mind or soul. As the saying goes, *Mens sana in corpore sano*—"a healthy mind in a healthy body." This calls for caring for the self, which means caring for both body and mind. It means a life-long commitment to ensure holistic well-being of oneself, promote physical and mental health, prevention and management of illness. It means balancing mental pleasure and bodily needs to avoid unnecessary and stressful activities and controlling our selfish desires/practicing moderation—developing temperance and appreciating simple pleasures in life.

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