

The Ontological Demand of Hope: Defining Our Moral Stance on Modern Institutions

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Abstract

In support of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), this study strengthens the psycho-social relationships within modern institutions by emphasizing hope as a core value of work ethics. The challenge in contemporary institutions is balancing the interests of the administration and employees, which often creates moral dilemmas regarding administrative practices and community ethics. This study explores constructive ethics grounded in hope to enhance self-authenticity in administrative processes and to promote community ethics and attitudes toward institutional policies. It engages in a philosophical discussion on hope, examining its ontological aspect, which is crucial to support administrative decision-making. In this study, Gabriel Marcel's (1965) ontological views on hope and Emmanuel Levinas' (1969) ethics of the face were explored to address the challenge of modern institutions. This study used hermeneutics as a textual analysis to examine the leading works of Marcel and Levinas on social ethics and modernism. The study underscored the significance of (1) self-reflection and (2) ethical reciprocity, fostering individuals' ability to recognize 'moral disturbance' influenced by the social realities of others, thereby enhancing one's moral responsibility and accountability. Consequently, the study highlights the importance of social communion in alleviating community differences and apathy through the ethics of hope. The findings emphasized the need to incorporate a hopeful moral attitude into social policy formulation and policy evaluation, particularly in the context of deregulation.

Keywords: *Gabriel Marcel, Emmanuel Levinas, phenomenology of hope, ethics of hope, and face*

Introduction

Conflicts arising from contemporary institutions are inevitable and pose a challenge to maintaining stable interpersonal relationships in the workplace. This challenge underscores the importance of prioritizing the development of sustainable relationships within the development program as a prerequisite for achieving long-term success (Ekpe et al., 2022; Yelgin & Geylan, 2024; Danauskė et al., 2023). In most institutions, administrative functions are often perceived as highly authoritative and regulatory, which often conflict with community values and ethics of the working community. In such a context, the tension of interests between institutional goals and progress, and the community's ethical

principles within the workplace, poses a challenge to maintaining a sustainable relationship. More often, we confine our actions to duties and obligations, thus making them categorically imperative, highlighting Kantian ethics. From this context, we are constituted by our categorical boundaries, diminishing our focus on personal reflection towards the other. Consequently, the challenge diminishes our moral stance within the community and compromises our empathetic understanding. The challenge, therefore, often highlights the administration or institution as agents of moral indifference and apathy towards the other, particularly towards the working individual, resulting in neglect of a community of persons, making them 'one-dimensional, superficial,

and complacent individuals' (Marcuse in Farr, 2018; Cutts, 2019).'

Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973), a French Christian existentialist, offers an insightful discussion of recognizing the presence of others, emphasizing his ontological views on hope as a transformative ethic. He strongly suggests that individuals should learn to be available to others regarding spatiality and temporality, and to consciously engage with them respectively. This is a metaphysical engagement of one's existence to profoundly recognize that an individual is actively involved with the reality of the other. In complement with Emmanuel Levinas (1905–1995), a French existentialist with Jewish ancestry, offers an ethical approach that explores moral responsibility through the evaluation of the "face" of the other. The concept of "face" entails acknowledging another individual's presence, emphasizing the act of seeing them with generosity by assuming full responsibility towards them before taking any intentional action. These ethical principles of Marcel and Levinas encourage us to shift our ethical orientation toward cultivating a mutual understanding between the "I" and the "Other," through hope and friendship, to overcome the challenge of indifference and apathy within administrative systems. Hence, the ethics of hope is paramount to developing communal identity and values, which ultimately become integral components of institutional ethics.

This study explores the ethical dimension of hope to foster moral responsibility toward the self, others, and the environment, engaging in a philosophical discourse on hope as a response to the alterity of morality in modern institutions. This study aims to develop a basis for a thorough evaluation of institutional policies and regulations by conducting a phenomenological analysis of hope; it seeks to create core values based on shared reflection to develop approaches and practices that foster a

sustainable relationship between the administration and employees.

The Ontology of Hope

Gabriel Marcel (1949; 1951) defines man as a traveler who is journeying toward a meaningful existence, which he refers to as "homo viator." He begins to explore the horizon of this journey, emphasizing that it is a passive process of seeking the truth about human existence. As we travel across the horizon of human experience, which is bounded by our own existentiality, referring to our relations with other individuals and the environment, we become more active and engaged with ourselves, others, and the environment. We have learned to distinguish our unique realities from others. This event is fundamental to human existence because it helps us realize how ethics is constituted from within. In other words, as travelers, we have learned that, by recognizing the value of active engagement and participation in reality, we hope for something that defines our human existence. Hope, therefore, for Marcel, is not a passive feeling but an active engagement that shapes our ability to understand the beyond of one's primordiality. As an ethical attitude, hope becomes innate and absolute because it stems deeply from our existential experiences, a journey that is fully conscious of our intersubjectivity with, or among, other beings. Therefore, hope is an 'active communion' holding against the 'unknown' reality of others and the environment as much as it firmly builds a bridge to connect the 'mystery of existence,' making it available to be known to oneself and the other (Marcel, in Copleston, 1952).

From this active engagement with reality, a constitution of meaningful events, as a product of the constitutive experiences, enables individuals to respond to their existential challenges and struggles. Individuals have been provided with a source of purpose, which

eventually creates the value of experience, to one's existence. They have been empowered to seek transcendence; therefore, through hope, we are able to recognize the importance of 'active participation' to constitute a meaningful experience, which is essential to human intersubjectivity. Hope, from this perspective, has established its ontological value embedded in the recognition of active participation. On the other hand, when individuals neglect their sense of intersubjectivity, feelings of indignation arise, often leading to a sole focus on personal points of view and satisfaction. They become isolated, which restricts their ability to recognize one another and blurs their judgment, leading them to value only themselves and resulting in despair and diminishing their sense of hope of connecting and relating to others.

Therefore, the process of hopeful, active participation allows us to reflect on the 'givenness' of realities as they directly appear in consciousness and to construct our ethical response to the challenges of life. Through deep reflection on the mutual bond with others and the environment, it establishes that hope is a fundamental element to recognize the intrinsic goodness that resides within one another.

The Ontological Problem of Modernism

The modern society, as described by Gabriel Marcel (1962) in his work "Man against mass society," is a broken world in which individuals prioritize materialism and individualism over self-authenticity and community values. This social condition has valued a broader range of collective gratifications. Individuals have gradually become superficial, and social interactions have been commodified, thus reshaping our understanding of humanism. This event has resulted in a reduction in meaningful relationships, shifting to a condition in which individuals are simply conforming to a unified system, in which they have been categorized or labeled according to the functions and roles

they play. This occurrence could have altered individuals' response to communicative ethics, affecting mutual understanding and collaboration with one another, thus becoming overwhelmed with egotistic views, which are exclusive and self-centered. Instead of recognizing an individual's self-worth and value, it shifted to a constructive ethics that supports the reification of human nature and the commodification of human interactions with one another. Moreover, modern society has strongly emphasized the pursuit of personal satisfaction and desires. This ideology has liberated modern social consciousness, which, through practical knowledge or application of abstracted knowledge, enables individuals to gain immediate happiness that responds to their life's challenges and issues. This perspective, as understood by modern society, suggests that objective knowledge can offer all the answers to social distress. However, this point of view is self-sustaining and disconnected from others' unique experiences and endeavors, leading to feelings of despair, isolation, and meaninglessness. As individuals tend to neglect communal shared experiences, a sense of extreme individualism has prevailed in modern society. Hence, it compromises the value of the interrelated connections among human persons in establishing intersubjective understanding and responsive actions that could sustain genuine relationships.

The challenge has not yet been contemplated because modern society has been highly focused on logical abstraction and scientific knowledge, neglecting that communal shared values could have uplifted the community's spiritual unity. Considerably, the problem is not sociological; by examining established norms and belief systems, the neglect of fostering a community of persons is the primary challenge to address. In Levinas' terms, the modern society has cumulated an 'economy of beings' rather than a 'community of beings.' He asserted that individuals are not

subjects of intentional actions; they are not mere representations of knowledgeable objects of the encountered world, but rather not of the 'same,' but the other with shared meaningful realities (Levinas, 1969; 1987). Therefore, the problem of modern society, as argued by Marcel, is ontological, preserving mutual trust within individuals, which is grounded on 'hope' to encounter the other, is truly genuine and sustainable. Significantly, Marcel (1949) reminds us to pay attention to 'inner disquiet,' a 'moral disturbance' that arises from the conflict between our desire to seek meaning and the external constraints that challenge our transcendence. To overcome this moral challenge, we should address the issue of dehumanization in modernism (Marcel, 1962). Building strong connections strengthens a sense of belonging and promotes community support, creating a more vibrant and cohesive environment for everyone.

The Ethics of the Face of the Other

In Emmanuel Levinas' philosophical work titled "Totality and Infinity," he embarks on an exploration of "what is there other than Being? (Levinas in (Davis, 1996, p. 34)." This philosophical inquiry serves as a response to Martin Heidegger's notion of Dasein, which is presented in Heidegger's seminal work "Being and Time." He turns to the analysis of a moral responsibility that emerges from encountering the 'Other,' and not on 'Being,' which is evident in the "face" of the Other (1961). The concept of the face is viewed as an act of recognition that the Other exists independently outside of one's subjectivity; it provides a framework to contemplate the reality of other Beings, as infinity, alterity, and exteriority, which is distinct from one's conscious being. In other words, the face is an intersubjective phenomenon that exposes the self to reveal the embodiment of the Others, to be known by the self. The ultimate goal is to highlight the ethical dimension of oneself towards the Other, a

desire to be with the absolute Other. From the 'need' to respectfully be in communion with the Other creates an ethical boundary to acknowledge the existence of Others, shared within the same realities, to 'caress' and not to 'possess' the Other (Levinas in Davis, 1996, p. 45-46), which serves as fundamental discourses for Levinas' phenomenology of alterity, which highlights a 'reciprocity' of moral obligation in seeking absolute happiness with the Other.

Significantly, our ethical responses should be liberating, alleviating one's existential distress; we are encouraged to engage with the Other to realize what must necessarily be done. Ethics, for Levinas, is not to fulfill 'what we ought to do,' but rather 'to be with' to know what to act accordingly. The act is not imposing; instead, it is co-journeying with, hence, Levinas calls this act 'excedance' and not 'transcendence.' The latter refers to an idea that the self can intelligibly be known through introspection, that human consciousness can recognize itself beyond its own intentionality. While the former refers to an idea that the self "[...] can willed ascension to the higher reaches of Being, [referring] to an exit from or exceeding of Being without direction or ultimate goal (Levinas, in Davis, 1996, p. 18)." From this perspective, it clearly demonstrates that individuals should realize that an immersive act is to be with the Others as they share a common encounter of reality.

In modern society, according to Levinas, individuals place an extreme emphasis on the Same over the Other, which leads to reverence for rationality and science and results in dehumanization. The ethics of the face is crucial to human existence, for it determines the moral act towards the Other as well as it defines individuals' concept of social justice, as it ontologically directs a willful act towards the Other. Above all, Levinas is trying to establish that our ethics must be, in simple terms, that "I am present, but my presence is always for you."

Methods

This study used hermeneutics as textual analysis, exploring Marcel's philosophical discourses on hope to reveal its ethical dimension and associate it with Levinas' conception of social ethics. It applied a thorough and critical analysis of their ideas, arguments, and significant contributions to the field, highlighting their impact and relevance. The following steps were used: (1) Identifying the central themes, arguments, and positions of the philosophers are essential for understanding their ethical perspectives; (2) Evaluating their philosophical views in social ethics and justice and associating it to the main points they were trying to establish, (3) Conceptualizing their philosophical discourses on being as ontological analysis, to withdraw the ethical framework of hope as a constructive ethics.

Results

The discontent that shapes our lives: a byproduct of the chaos of our modern age. Intellectual abstraction served as the fundamental source of categorical reasoning, providing a logical explanation of highly self-sufficient and independent social functions. Modern institutions overshadow human identity, diminishing the value of the individual and leading to a greater quest for answers to our existential discontent.

Balancing autonomy and accountability in the workplace. The contemporary world develops a highly standardized and controlled social condition, advancing the interests of institutions over the accounts of individuals' everyday experiences. The workplace prepared individuals' needs to align with the upholding ideologies of the time, and a culture of hegemony prevailed in structuring individuals' relationships towards the self, others, and the environment.

The intersection of sociality, morality, and metaphysics. Institutions measured the quality of social interactions through the structured system and norms of the accepted ideologies and practices. It ensured individuals' moral conduct through the classification of social roles and compartmentalization, thereby securing their functions and purposes within the system, thereby conceptualizing a fanaticized consciousness in modern institutions. The interplay between institutions and individuals shaped the values and ethical standards governing their existence, influencing how individuals perceived their societal roles and responsibilities.

The primacy of enjoyment in moral philosophy. Ethics serves as a fundamental set of principles guiding individuals' actions in any circumstance. However, it emphasized the importance of engaging in enjoyment and being open to the possibility of transcendence. Enjoyment was shown as the first morality that moved individuals to act morally in reciprocity, thus requiring individuals to begin with willingness as a primary element of moral conduct.

The service of knowledge and mutual connection. Whatever we know about the other is a strong link and support to the other's existence. The act of service highlighted Others as a source of ethical response, influencing both individuals' actions and relationships with them, ultimately benefiting everyone involved. Knowledge liberates a human person from ignorance, but it must also serve the Other, which is empathetically liberating for both individuals.

Discussion

The study underscores that modern institutions have contributed to how individuals change their subjective perspectives and humanism in creating a meaningful experience in the work setting. Individuals' interactions with one another are shaped by their respective community values and ethics, particularly in their workplaces, where relationships between administration and employees play a crucial role in integrating interests and approaches toward specific objectives. This event posed a challenge to modern institutions to balance a perspective that is inclusive for the administration and the employees, which is fundamental as it holds the core values and ethics of the institutions towards their employees, *vis-à-vis*. From the term used, "employees," it already treats the individuals as part of the institutional system. It conveys the idea that individuals are part of the whole system, functional and progressive. This condition posed a challenge to find a sustainable ethical framework that acquires recognition of the other as the Other to provide an honest, humane relationship between the administration and the recognized individual persons. Following Emmanuel Levinas' conception of the ethics of the face, our ethics should always be receptive, fully engaging with the need to be in communion with the Other, as it implicitly guides our action to the totality of the Other and of oneself. The willed action is reciprocal, free, and liberating to one another.

However, in modern society, as reflected in related institutions, the neglect of communal and shared interactions among individuals has diminished because of conflicting interests, values, and ethics in the workplace. In effect, individuals adjusted their community values and standards, which then became impersonal and detrimental to one another, eventually weakening the subjective core of individuality and the foundation of sociality that constructs

human intersubjectivity. In other words, the being of the individual as an employee is inseparable from their temporality and historicity, which serve as the framework for their willed action. The administration or institution should consider this view: that individuals' values and ethics are characterized as modes of responsive ethics. Therefore, as suggested, the administration or institution should aim to understand these principles and values, explore their qualitative elements, and include them in the deliberation of the decision-making process. Hence, it establishes that the core of modern institutions should be their employees, recognized individual persons, holding the perspective that institutions should be a community of persons, not of commodified individuals.

Otherwise, the institution becomes an agent of the 'culture of hegemony,' which precludes self-interest and is highly self-expressive for personal and popular trends, turning the institution into a venue for individuals who feel disoriented towards the Other in pursuit of capitalist satisfaction. As reflected in Gabriel Marcel's view of modern society as 'the broken world,' which has resulted in turning individuals' perspectives into a 'fanaticized consciousness' that satisfies a homogenized society, he challenged us to recognize our 'being' within the intricate system of the modern world. By doing so, we can better understand our responsibilities and connections to Others, in an event known as eschatological humanism, which places human dignity at the intersection of human relationships as co-agents seeking transcendence and truth. Thus, an ethical obligation to act begins with a mindful recognition of the Other, where the individual has awakened a sense of commitment to act genuinely. Putting a high priority on the Other, administration, or the institution could help reduce the tendency to treat the Other as indifferent to itself. Instead of leading individuals, as modern institutions have

committed to becoming autonomous, individuals have forgotten to consider their accountability and, in doing so, have achieved their goals at the expense of the Other. Instead, it should be the other way around: individuals should have aimed to go beyond casual interactions, obliterating the obstacles that hinder commitment to genuine relationships.

From this commitment, the administration or the institution should experience a feeling of uneasiness that drives them to act willfully toward total communion with the Other. This event, as Levinas pointed out, is an 'ethical intuition' that emerges from natural inclination as social beings to respond or to relate, something that cannot be escaped, but rather is willingly accepted by us. Moreover, Levinas has emphasized putting this commitment as a responsibility toward the Other before any personal intentions. In confronting the self and the Other through this willed-action of responsibility and obligation, we have learned to adopt a 'hopeful' attitude to be empathetic and receptive to the uncertainty of reality. This highlights to the administration or institution to be truthfully committed to their employees, that as an agent of a community of persons, it constructs a sustainable relationship that supports life in the context of the workplace, thus helping one another to address one and the Other's existential distress. Therefore, making modern institutions a sustainable environment for the recognized individuals in the workplace.

At this juncture, the basis of receptive ethics, which holds intersubjective relationships within and among individuals, is empathy, a universal language that transcends boundaries, creates a sense of belonging, and makes us feel received and entirely given by the Others. Through this experience, we become interconnected in spirit because we have given something freely offered; in return, it liberates us from the uncertainty and the unknown of the Other, deepening our empathetic understanding of ourselves. In effect, it leads to insights of self-reflection and enhances our sense of self-

reflexivity. This event refers to the "ontological exigence" mentioned in Marcel's (1951) work on "The Mystery of Being: Faith and Reality," which guides us in unraveling the mystery of existence and provoking the search for meaning in life. Nonetheless, it is viewed that seeing Others with generosity is the account of our being.

In contextualizing a morally hopeful attitude in response to modern institutions, we should begin by acknowledging the Other for helping us to realize the totality of our existence. It did not complete our being, but it refurbishes the value of our being, clarifying the essence of our existence. This would prevent us from becoming fanatics of values and ethics that modern institutions have offered. Hence, taking into consideration that the administration should return to a hopeful attitude, guiding that the foundation of the institution is built upon friendship and mutual trust.

This study suggests three morally hopeful attitudes for self-reflectivity, or introspection: (1) Individuals should begin with a gaze of generosity toward the Other, by allowing the self to be engulfed by the presence of the Other. (2) Individuals should dialogue with the Other, making the self 'available' or 'disponible' for receiving and accepting the Other, creating a space for encountering the Other. For self-reflexivity, or receptivity, (3) Individuals should engage with active participation, with empathetic understanding; the act towards the Other is created with fidelity to sustain the relationship. Therefore, the basis for a morally hopeful attitude that the administration should incorporate in their deliberation and development of institutional policies and regulations is as follows: (1) a gaze with hopeful generosity to know the Other; (2) a dialogue with hopeful availability to create a space to encounter the Other; (3) an active engagement with a hopeful act to create a relationship grounded on loyalty and fidelity.

Conclusion

Based on this, the study concludes that modern institutions should develop policies that enable individuals to express their existential distress and should approach them with genuine generosity, recognizing their existence as part of the administration's moral responsibility. Otherwise, individuals are reduced to mere reifications of institutional and structural systems. Institutions should create spaces for dialogue, making the administration available for a hopeful friendship built on genuine trust and acceptance. Most importantly, modern institutions should actively support creative efforts to better understand their people with trust and confidence, thus making the institution a community of recognized persons.

The real challenge for sustainable development programs in modern institutions is to build a sustainable relationship grounded in a morally hopeful attitude within the workplace, thereby sustaining a holistic environment. This moral attitude serves as the basis for empathetic understanding, which constructs individuals' sense of love, care, and compassion toward the Other.

For further research, the study suggests developing these findings into a valuable seminar that improves interpersonal relationships. Therefore, this collaborative environment, through the philosophical discussion on hope as a moral framework, will ultimately promote strong ethical practices within modern institutions.

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