

Marcel Studies,
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NEWS AND VIEWS



REPORT ON 2021 GABRIEL MARCEL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING

The meeting was held at the Chase Park Plaza Hotel in St Louis, as part of the Annual Meeting of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, 18th-21st, Nov 2021, and chaired by Dr Brendan Sweetman (Rockhurst University). Two stimulating papers were presented, followed by helpful, insightful commentaries. The proceedings closed with a lively business meeting!

The first paper, “Intersubjectivity and Embodied Consciousness: The Insights of Jean-Paul Sartre and Gabriel Marcel” was presented by Jacob Saliba, a doctoral candidate in history at Boston College. Jacob focused in particular on a phenomenological analysis of the notion of “embodiment” as presented in the work of Sartre and Marcel. After a careful description and analysis of both views, Saliba argued that Sartre’s notion of embodiment leads to a social pessimism whereas Marcel’s understanding leads to a social optimism. He went on to consider the question of the ways in which we may be able to promote the latter in order to avoid the social hostility of the former, and more specifically to show how the reality of human embodiment plays a key role in this matter. Dr Teresa Reed (Quincy University) raised a number of interesting points in reply, including to what extent the concept of human nature can help us develop this argument further, and how a careful phenomenological description of what actually occurs in intersubjective relations and how they function in human life is essential in this general discussion rather than an abstract or overly theoretical approach.

In the second paper, “The Dramatization of Absolute Idealism: Gabriel Marcel and F. H. Bradley,” Professor Joseph Gamache (Marion University) addressed the difficult topic of the relationship between the British idealist F. H. Bradley and the French existentialist Gabriel Marcel in a number of areas, triggering a lively discussion. After presenting evidence for Bradley’s influence on Marcel, Professor Gamache traced the connection between Bradley’s criticisms of the metaphysics of qualities and relations to Marcel’s concerns about abstraction, identity, and self-knowledge. He suggested that Marcel, far from having left idealism behind as his thought matured, as is generally believed, actually took Bradley’s criticisms and showed their significance for human life. Gamache ended his discussion by briefly comparing Bradley and Marcel regarding the nature of the Absolute.

The respondent to Gamache’s paper, Geoffrey Karabin (Neumann University) noted that a characteristic of Gamache’s thought is his ability to move seamlessly from abstract analytical and metaphysical analysis to the concrete application of that analysis. Gamache, much like Marcel, is intensely interested in the concrete, lived meaning of what at first appears to be purely abstract, conceptual analysis. It is not surprising, then, that Gamache produces a reflection that moves from Bradley’s conceptual analysis to the dramatization of his thought by Marcel. To further the discussion, Karabin raised a number of questions related to the mechanism by which idealistic abstraction reduces individuals to single properties and which can then lead to violence. Questions were also raised regarding the way in which one can and cannot reduce the self to its relationship with others, as well as the nature of the debt Marcel owes to Bradley’s ideas.

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MARCEL'S CORRESPONDENCE

Marcel carried on correspondence with many well known thinkers and writers, on a variety of subjects, some of it quite philosophical and intellectual, some less so. Much of this correspondence has survived and can be found in the Marcel Collections in the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and also at the Bibliotheque nationale de Paris. Some of it is also held by the Marcel Society in electronic form. Dr James McLachlan, Professor Emeritus at Western Carolina University, has written to remind us of Marcel's correspondence with F.H. Bradley. Much of Bradley's correspondence has been lost, but Prof. McLachlan did find Bradley's replies to Marcel's missives among Marcel's papers in Paris. This exchange covered, albeit only in brief, the subjects of telepathy, abnormal psychology, and the unconscious mind in the attempt to probe the nature of the self. In a future issue, we hope to take a deeper dive into Marcel's correspondence with various figures and its relevance for our understanding of his philosophical ideas, but a reminder to those working on Marcel that this correspondence, along with some of Marcel's manuscripts and other papers (especially his short essays and reviews, which appeared in a variety of French publications) is available for study and research projects.

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NEW GABRIEL MARCEL INSTITUTE AND CONFERENCE!

We are delighted to announce the founding of the **The Gabriel Marcel Institute of Philosophy**, in Sydney, Australia, and its first major conference! Founded by Dr Matthew Del Nevo (Catholic Institute of Sydney) and his student, Nathan Tartak, Professor Del Nevo (who will serve as first Research Director) tells us that the Institute was set up to extend the spirit of Gabriel Marcel's philosophy into the new century. Taking as its motto the title of one of Marcel's best known works, "Creative Fidelity," the Institute will not focus exclusively on Marcel, but will also pursue themes in which he was interested, intending to engage with the work of a variety of thinkers from different disciplines, all the time inspired by the "Marcelian spirit."

To that end, the Institute will hold its first conference in October 2023, on the topic of T.S. Eliot and Religion. From the call for papers: "We invite papers on any aspect of T. S. Eliot and Religion, from any perspective whatsoever. Submissions will be selected for presentation on the day of the conference. These and other submissions that were not able to be presented on the day will be published in the inaugural edition of our subscription journal, *The Marcellian*, the annual journal of the Gabriel Marcel Institute of Philosophy, Sydney. Proposers should send a 300-500-word proposal, a 100-word abstract, a 100-word biographical statement, and contact information, to: mdelnevo.marcelinstitute@outlook.com. **(The deadline for proposals has been extended to August 1st, 2023.)** Venue: The Gabriel Marcel Institute of Philosophy, Sydney, 17 Augusta Street, Strathfield, Sydney NSW 2135, Australia. Papers may be delivered or written in French or English. **Date of conference: Saturday, 28 Oct 2023.** There will be a get-together with a paper reading and discussion the night before. Cost: A\$200. Concession A\$150. No cost for Members of the Gabriel Marcel Society or to those giving papers.

Subscription to *The Marcellian* (paper copy) is A\$25.” Contact Dr Del Nevo for further information.

The New Marcel Institute at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, Australia





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WHAT MARCEL IS SAYING

GABRIEL MARCEL: The role of death in my plays is absolutely primary, and so too in a certain way is the role of sickness. Incidentally, this is one of the things which, rather unusually, Pierre Aime Touchard has reproached me for in his book *Dionysos*. He says I have given much too much importance to sickness and death. I confess that this made me smile because I do not believe that one can give too much importance to sickness and death. It is in facing them, in fact, that we are at the very heart of our destiny and of our mystery.

Now there is another point I would like to insist on with regard to this relation between my dramatic and my philosophical work. This is the fact that the dramatic vision, what I see with the help of my characters, has very often been an anticipation of what could appear to me only later on at the philosophical level. A number of examples could be given. You referred to *Le Palais de sable*, which is one of my first published plays. *Le Palais de sable* was written in 1912-13, and what strikes me is that it is clearly in advance of what I was writing at that time in the philosophical register. One sees here, actually, a kind of criticism, from an existential standpoint, of that idealism of faith that I was still somewhat clinging to, a criticism which appeared again a little later on in the first part of the *Metaphysical Journal*.

Already in *La Palais de sable*, without my being able at that time to formulate it for myself in a precise and philosophically rigorous way, the fundamental idea of intersubjectivity appeared, the fact that we are not alone, that whatever we do we are responsible for what happens to others.

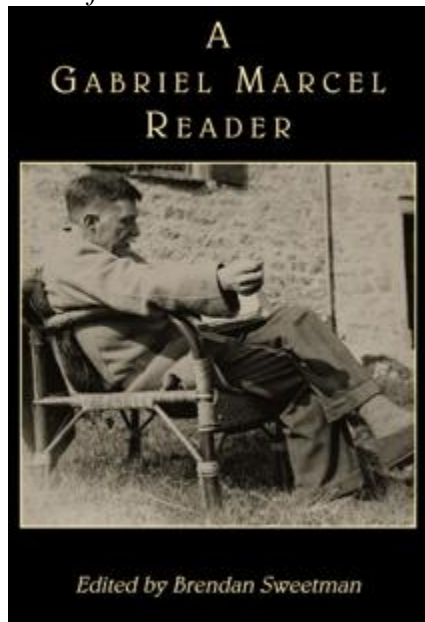
Another play often mentioned in books about my work is *L'Iconoclaste*. In the last scene the idea of mystery as clarifying appears in a dramatic context, mystery as a positive value which comes to be set in opposition to what remains merely problematic.

PAUL RICOEUR: But if the drama anticipates your philosophy, what happens to the autonomy of the philosophical act, of philosophical reflection? Could we accuse your philosophy of being a philosophy of the theater? You have insisted on the importance of what you call "secondary reflection." What place has the reflective moment in this meditation on drama and on the tragic in thinking?

GABRIEL MARCEL: I believe that the autonomy of the philosophical act, which is actually an act of reflection, must be recognized absolutely and safeguarded completely. Moreover, I think you are right in recalling here what I have written about secondary reflection. What did I want to say exactly? I wanted to say that surely there is a primary reflection which, roughly speaking, is purely analytical and which consists, as it were, in dissolving the concrete into its elements.

But there is, I think, an inverse movement, a movement of retrieval, which consists in becoming aware of the partial and even suspect character of the purely analytical procedure. This reflective movement tries to reconstruct, but now at the level of thought, that concrete state of affairs which had previously been glimpsed in a fragmented or pulverized condition. It is quite certain that it is this secondary reflection which is at work in all my philosophical writings, starting from the moment when I truly became fully conscious of my task. Perhaps this is not yet sufficiently clear in the *Metaphysical Journal*. But it becomes perfectly clear in *Being and Having*, and even more so in the later writings.

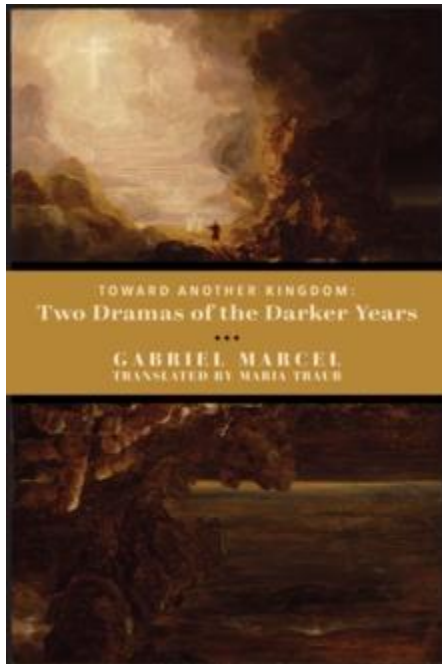
Taken from: Brendan Sweetman (editor), A Gabriel Marcel Reader (St. Augustine's Press, 2011)



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RECENT AND UPCOMING SCHOLARSHIP

1. Coming soon:



Maria Traub, editor and translator,
*Toward Another Kingdom: Two Dramas of
 the Darker Years: Gabriel Marcel*
 (forthcoming from St Augustine's Press)

Professor Traub's latest translation of Gabriel Marcel's post-war plays is a window into the French philosopher's answer to his own signature questions regarding human

existence. And as in the earlier collection of plays, *The Invisible Threshold*, the realism, passion and sincerity that frame conscience and moral duty in Marcel are most profoundly visible in the day-to-day of family life. Ideas never before presented theatrically emerge in Marcel's characters who struggle to understand their times and how best to live in them. Post-war life was as much a spiritual reckoning as it was a new society, and Marcel's treatment of introspection is a valuable key to his own work.

Marcel's dramas require characters to respond authentically and from their true selves. He thereby offers the vision of how individual compromises may build up to break the world and condemn, or, conversely, contribute to the discovery and meaning of relation and redemption. Traub's new translation will interest the player as much as the scholar, and Marcel's aptitude for theatrical writing is proven once again. His intellectual sensitivity creates characters that beckon performance, which is an added dimension to the presentation of the human condition.

2. *The Oxford Handbook of Phenomenologies and Organization Studies*, edited by F.X. De Vaujany, J. Aroles and M. Pérezts (Oxford U.P., 2023)

From the Publisher: Phenomenological approaches to Management and Organization Studies offer a means to problematize 'appearances' in the field, allowing us to 'see' things in a different light and uncover what is hidden from our consideration by our theoretical or ideological assumptions. This handbook aims at showing the unexpected richness and diversity of

phenomenological and post-phenomenological thinkers such as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Arendt, or Scheler, as well as others belonging to the French new phenomenology (Marion, Henry) or the German neo-phenomenology (Schmitz). It also details the contributions of thinkers like Bachelard, Deleuze, or Foucault whose inscription and departures from phenomenology are illuminated. In this process, phenomenologies are historically, critically, and openly discussed by leading scholars while highlighting the interweaving between phenomenologies and other streams such as process studies or critical perspectives. Beyond a theoretical description, the chapters also show how phenomenologies and post-phenomenologies can help management and organization scholars and students to understand a huge variety of contemporary phenomena such as distributed collective activity, artificial intelligence, digitalization of organizational processes, remote work, financial markets and financial instruments, entrepreneurial events, cinematographic organizing of social media, issues of place and emplacement, commons and communalization processes and questions of embodiment and disembodiment at work.

3. Our friend Martin Grassi in Buenos Aires has a new article out (in Spanish):

“Gabriel Marcel: La Metafísica ante la Muerte,” in *Aoristo: International Journal of Phenomenology, Hermeneutics and Metaphysics*, 2017 (1):142-158.

En el presente trabajo intentaremos mostrar cómo la experiencia de la muerte pone en jaque la categoría metafísica de presencia, que se encuentra en el corazón de la obra de Gabriel Marcel. A diferencia de otras filosofías de la existencia, la significación metafísica de la muerte no la encontramos en la conciencia de la muerte propia, sino en el acontecimiento de la muerte de la persona amada. Por esta razón, el sentido de la muerte solo es inteligible en el marco de la experiencia de la fidelidad y del amor, y su carácter trágico reside en que parece deslegitimar la promesa de eternidad en la comunión de los amantes y la consistencia ontológica de la existencia. Lejos de ser extraño al ritmo dramático de la filosofía marceliana, la reflexión en torno a la muerte subraya la necesidad de pensar la presencia en conjunción con la ausencia, lo cual nos abre a una filosofía que trasciende el ser entendido como presencia y apariencia, para abrazar lo inaparente como lo realmente significativo. De este modo, encontramos la radicalización de la fenomenología como hiperfenomenología en la propuesta de Gabriel Marcel, quien podría considerarse uno de los iniciadores de la tradición que hoy recibe el nombre de “giro teológico de la fenomenología.”

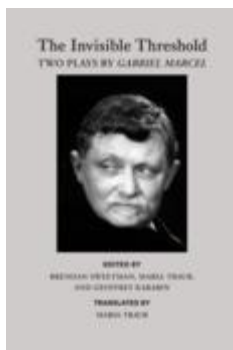
[*Translation*: “Gabriel Marcel: Metaphysics before Death.” In this paper we will try to show how the experience of death challenges the metaphysical category of presence, which is at the heart of Gabriel Marcel's work. Unlike other philosophies of existence, the metaphysical significance of death is not found in the awareness of one's own death, but in the event of the death of the loved one. For this reason, the meaning of death is only intelligible within the framework of the experience of fidelity and love, and its tragic character resides in the fact that it seems to delegitimize the promise of eternity in the communion of lovers and the ontological consistency of existence. Far from being strange to the dramatic rhythm of Marcel's philosophy, reflection on death underlines the need to think about presence in conjunction with absence, which opens us up to a philosophy that transcends being understood as presence and appearance, to embrace the

inapparent as the really significant. In this way, we find the radicalization of phenomenology as hyperphenomenology in the proposal of Gabriel Marcel, who could be considered one of the initiators of the tradition that today is called the "theological turn of phenomenology."]

4. R. James Lisowski, "Gabriel Marcel and Thomas Aquinas," *International Philosophical Quarterly* (2020) 60 (4): 473-488.

This article considers the positions of Gabriel Marcel and Thomas Aquinas on self-knowledge and argues for a synthesis between them. The basis of this Marcelian-Thomistic synthesis is their common understanding of the self as inherently in relation to that which is other and in the necessity of activation for self-knowledge to occur. The divergence between these thinkers occurs in regard to the process of activation. While Aquinas presents an Aristotelian account of activation rooted in his understanding of cognition, Marcel offers a broader vision of activation that gives pride of place to intersubjectivity. A Marcelian-Thomistic synthesis preserves the Aristotelian systematization of Aquinas, while adding Marcel's expanded understanding of activation and his prioritization of intersubjectivity. Such a synthesis allows for a treatment of self-knowledge that is metaphysically systematic and true to lived experience.

5. Reminder... of our new book from St Augustine's Press!



The Invisible Threshold: Two Plays by Gabriel Marcel

Edited by Brendan Sweetman, Maria Traub, and Geoffrey Karabin; Translated by Maria Traub, 275 pages.

French philosopher and dramatist, Gabriel Marcel (1888-1973), who belonged to the movement of French existentialism, is one of the most insightful thinkers of the twentieth century. Unlike some of his contemporaries, Marcel approaches human existence from a theistic perspective, and gives priority to the themes of hope, fidelity and faith in the human search for meaning in a challenging world. Written early in his career, the plays in this new volume were originally published in 1913 under the title *Le Seuil invisible* (*The Invisible Threshold*).

The first play, *Grace*, explores the theme of religious conversion. The drama depicts a crisis between characters of genuine depth and sincerity, who are struggling with different

interpretations of shared experiences. After a serious illness, Gerard, one of the main protagonists, undergoes a religious conversion, an experience which allows of two different and irreconcilable interpretations. The play raises the question of grace in a profound dramatization of a personal religious experience as it sustains in challenging life situations.

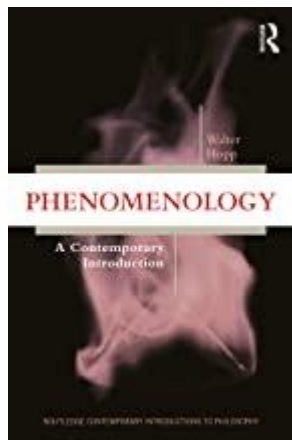
Similar themes are addressed but developed differently in *The Sandcastle*. This drama explores the confrontation between one's beliefs and their consequences when faced with challenging family and social circumstances, especially with regard to the tension between love and freedom that often arises between parents and children. Marcel raises issues of moral character, commitment and sincerity, and introduces the role doubt plays in the way we form and hold our convictions. The springboard for the unfolding of the drama is the contrast between accepting Christianity in an intellectual and cultural sense, and a Christianity that is lived. Both plays bring out one of Marcel's major themes: that life's most profound, fulfilling experiences are often compromised in what he describes as the modern, broken world (*le monde cassé*), a world unfortunately characterized by alienation, loss of meaning and feelings of despair.

These new plays of Marcel's, here translated into English for the first time, will appeal to all interested in the role of grace in everyday life, the relationship between faith and reason, the choice of faith in a secular world, and the struggle between inauthentic and authentic existence. Marcel raises weighty and challenging questions, but does not offer final answers. In his dramatic work, he leaves those to us.

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Books of the past relevant to Marcel:

1. Bernard E. Doering, *Jacques Maritain and the French Catholic Intellectuals* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1983)
2. Ann Fulton, *Apostles of Sartre: Existentialism in America: 1945-1963* (Northwestern University Press, 1999)
3. H. Stuart Hughes, *The Obstructed Path: French Social Thought in the Years of Desperation* (Harper, 1966)
4. James M. Connolly, *The Voices of France: A Survey of Contemporary Theology in France* (Macmillan, 1961)
5. Patrick Bourgeois, *Philosophy at the Boundary of Reason* (SUNY Press, 2001).
6. And a more recent, important publication:



Walter Hopp, *Phenomenology: A Contemporary Introduction* (Routledge, 2020)—a definitive recent explication and defense of the Husserlian phenomenological method.

“This book is a tour de force: it’s the best phenomenological treatment of the selected topics I have ever read.” *Soren Overgaard, University of Copenhagen.*

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