

NEWS AND VIEWS

Recent Marcel Scholarship

1. We are pleased to draw attention to an essay on Marcel by one of our previous contributors to *Marcel Studies*, Dr. Steven Knepper. The essay is “Gabriel Marcel: Mystery in an Age of Problems,” and appears in a volume edited by Gene Callahan and Kenneth B. MacIntyre, *Critics of Enlightenment Rationalism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

From the book description: “This book provides an overview of some of the most important critics of ‘Enlightenment rationalism.’ The subjects of the volume—including, among others, Burke, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, T.S. Eliot, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, C.S. Lewis, Gabriel Marcel, Russell Kirk, and Jane Jacobs—do not share a philosophical tradition as much as a skeptical disposition toward the notion, common among modern thinkers, that there is only one standard of rationality or reasonableness, and that that one standard is or ought to be taken from the presuppositions, methods, and logic of the natural sciences. The essays on each thinker are intended not merely to offer a commentary on that thinker, but also to place that thinker in the context of this larger stream of anti-rationalist thought. Thus, while this volume is not a history of anti-rationalist thought, it may contain the intimations of such a history.”

2. See also a short article on Marcel by Geoffrey Karabin (Neumann University and Editorial Board member of *Marcel Studies*), “The Heaven of the Transhumanists,” published in the *Genealogies of Modernity Project*: February 9th, 2021. The article is available at: <https://genealogiesofmodernity.org/journal/2021/1/29/the-heaven-of-the-transhumanists> located in the *Genealogies of Modernity Journal*. Website at: <https://genealogiesofmodernity.org/journal>

3. See an article in the *Journal of Continental Philosophy* on Marcel’s play, *The Emissary*, along with Act III of the play (translated by Maria Traub). The article is: Brendan Sweetman and Maria Traub, “Introduction to Gabriel Marcel and *The Emissary*,” *Journal of Continental Philosophy*, Vol 1: Issue No. 2, pp. 318-344.

Abstract: Act Three of Gabriel Marcel’s play, *The Emissary*, is presented in English for the first time. The introductory essay introduces Marcel and several of his best known themes, especially the distinctions between problem and mystery, and primary and secondary reflection. Focusing

on the relationship between experience and conceptual knowledge, it discusses Marcel's attempt to argue philosophically for a return to ordinary experience. The role of drama and art in the recovery of the realm of mystery is also highlighted. The play illustrates these themes at the concrete level as it raises many of the challenging situations and moral dilemmas that emerged from the occupation of France by a brutal enemy during World War II. The realities of deceit, betrayal, and blackmail are all in the air, as are real worries about reprisals, violence, and irreparable loss. In a moving, gripping drama, Marcel portrays the occupation as an occasion for deep soul-searching among the characters, in the midst of great suffering and loss, and, rather than passing easy judgment, he suggests a journey toward healing, one inspired by compassion, honesty, courage, and faith.

The article can be accessed here:

https://www.pdcnet.org/jcp/content/jcp_2020_0001_0002_0318_0344

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Journal of Continental Philosophy

The above mentioned article reminds us of the recent launch of a new journal, which will be of great interest to readers of *Marcel Studies*. The Journal is edited by faculty at Western Sydney University, and there is a great deal of free content as well as subscription information at their website:

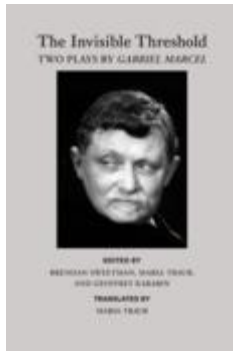
<https://www.pdcnet.org/jcp/The-Journal-of-Continental-Philosophy>

From the masthead: The *Journal of Continental Philosophy* is a new peer-reviewed venue for original work in this rich tradition. It publishes research from established academics of senior standing as well as emerging scholars. It also features essays in translation by key figures in Continental Philosophy, including important essays by Hannah Arendt, Alain Badiou, Simone de Beauvoir, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Luigi Pareyson, Gianni Vattimo, and Simone Weil, Gabriel Marcel, and others.

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NEW BOOK ON MARCEL

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The Invisible Threshold: Two Plays by Gabriel Marcel

Edited by Brendan Sweetman, Maria Traub, and Geoffrey Karabin; Translated by Maria Traub, 275 pages, 6" x 9", preface, notes, bibliographical

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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Marcel on Jean-Paul Sartre and Values

This raises the whole question of values as they are conceived by Sartre. From his standpoint, values cannot be anything but the result of the initial choice made by each human being; in other words, they can never be "recognized" or "discovered." "My freedom," he states expressly, "is the unique foundation of values. And since I am the being by virtue of whom values exist, nothing—absolutely nothing—can justify me in adopting this or that value or scale of values. As the unique basis of the existence of values, I am totally unjustifiable. And my freedom is in anguish at finding that it is the baseless basis of values." Nothing could be more explicit; but the question is whether Sartre does not here go counter to the exigencies of that human reality which he claims, after all, not to invent but to reveal.

Not to deal exclusively in abstractions, let us take a concrete case. Sartre has announced that the third volume of his *Les Chemins de la Liberté* is to be devoted to the praise of the heroes of Resistance. Now I ask you in the name of what principle, having first denied the existence of values or at least of their objective basis, can he establish any appreciable difference between those utterly misguided but undoubtedly courageous men who joined voluntarily the Anti-Bolshevik Legion, on the one hand, and the heroes of the Resistance movement, on the other? I can see no way of establishing this difference without admitting that causes have their intrinsic value and, consequently, that values are real. I have no doubt that Sartre's ingenuity will find a way out of this dilemma; in fact, he quite often uses the words "good" and "bad," but what can these words possibly mean in the context of his philosophy?

The truth is that, if I examine myself honestly and without reference to any preconceived body of ideas, I find that I do not “choose” my values at all, but that I *recognise* them and then posit my actions in accordance or in contradiction with these values, not, however, without being painfully aware of this contradiction (as was clear to the ancients: *video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*). It should perhaps be asked at this point if it is not Nietzsche who, with his theory of the creation of values, is responsible for the deathly principle of error which has crept into speculation on this subject. But although I am the last to underrate the objections to Nietzsche's doctrine, I am inclined to think that his view is less untenable than that of Sartre, for it escapes that depth of rationalism and materialism which is discernible, to me as to others, in the mind of the author of *L'Être et le Néant*.

I would suggest in conclusion that existentialism stands to-day at a parting of the ways: it is, in the last analysis, obliged either to deny or to transcend itself. It denies itself quite simply when it falls to the level of infra-dialectical materialism. It transcends itself, or it tends to transcend itself, when it opens itself out to the experience of the suprahuman, an experience which can hardly be ours in a genuine and lasting way this side of death, but of which the reality is attested by mystics, and of which the possibility is warranted by any philosophy which refuses to be immured in the postulate of absolute immanence or to subscribe in advance to the denial of the beyond and of the unique and veritable transcendence. Not that there is anything in this which, in our itinerant condition, we can invest like a capital; this absolute life can be apprehended by us only in flashes and by virtue of a hidden initiative which can be nothing other than grace.

[From: *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, pp.79-90; trans. M. Harari (New York, Citadel, 1970)]