

NEWS AND VIEWS

TOM BUSCH INTERVIEW

Thomas W. Busch, Ph.D., had a distinguished career both as a scholar and teacher. After graduating with his Ph.D. from Marquette in 1967, Tom moved onto Villanova University. He served Villanova as a professor, Department Chair, and in various committee roles for a remarkable 52 years. He was awarded the University's Faculty Teaching Award in 2008 and was appointed a Professor Emeritus. During his career at Villanova, he frequently taught Marcel's work both in conjunction with courses related to Existentialism and Existentialist figures more generally, but also in a number of directed studies where students focused primarily or exclusively on Marcel's work.

Professor Busch was a prolific scholar. He published two books in which Marcel was a central figure. His 1987 book, *The Participant Perspective: A Gabriel Marcel Reader*, contained selections from Marcel's work as well as a series of insightful commentaries on those selections. In his work, *Circulating Being: From Embodiment to Incorporation: Essays in Late Existentialism* (1999), Marcel occupied a central place. In that work, Busch made a strong case for viewing Marcel as an important precursor of contemporary philosophical movements. In his discussion, he focuses on the narrative form of rationality he sees in Marcel, along with an emphasis on embodiment, and his keen sense of the centrality of relationships in human reality. In addition to numerous conference presentations devoted to Marcel, Busch also authored numerous articles where Marcel was a central figure. These include: "Gabriel Marcel: An Overview and Assessment," *Philosophy Today* (1975); "Gabriel Marcel: Existence, Being and Immortality," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* (1978); "Gabriel Marcel on the Death of Man" in William Cooney (ed.), *Contributions of Gabriel Marcel to Philosophy* (1989); "Secondary Reflection as Interpretation," *Bulletin de la Societe Americaine de Philosophie de Langue Francaise* (1995); and "Gabriel Marcel," *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* (1997).

Yet despite these impressive accomplishments, any discussion of Tom's contribution to Marcelian thought would be incomplete if it failed to mention his character. In a manner true to Marcel, a word is in order with regard to Tom Busch the man. He is kind, he is available, and he exudes a sense of warmth. He fosters the development of his students and, by all accounts, he is an extraordinary colleague. Tom is a man who cherishes both his immediate and his extended family at Villanova. He is as happy to discuss Sartre or Marcel as he is to chat about Villanova basketball; perhaps nothing gives him more joy than when one of the graduate students or

Villanova professors brings their kids to campus. His availability to others may well be Tom's defining feature and, in conjunction with that availability, he is humble to a fault. In a profession where scholars often draw attention to the grandeur of their intellects, Tom avoids any hint of pomposity. Tom not only taught and wrote about Marcel, he embodied the form of life that Marcel encouraged others to explore.

Geoffrey Karabin

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Interview with Thomas Busch

(Questions Composed by Geoffrey Karabin and Brendan Sweetman)

Marcel and Existentialism: *Would you consider Marcel an existentialist thinker?*

While it is true that Marcel rejected the label of "existentialism" for his philosophy, he was uncomfortable with any labels that would define him or sum him up. At one time he allowed that he might be called a "neo-Socratic," a sort of label that rejected labels insofar as Socrates was a searcher and was skeptical of the definitive. If we add to this uneasiness with labels, Marcel's rejection of system, his emphasis on situatedness and embodiment, his method of relying on participant experience, it all seems very existential. At bottom, existentialism stressed finitude and all these just mentioned themes reflect that.

Grappling with Marcel's Existentialism: *How do you approach the teaching of Marcel?*

Given Marcel's rejection of system, I found it difficult to teach him. I ended up compiling pages of quotations from his various texts that seemed to tie his work together, showing implications from work on method, the notion of embodiment and intersubjective life. This was also my motive in publishing *The Participant Perspective*.

How has Marcel contributed to your philosophical outlook?

Many in my generation were led to Marcel through the journal *Philosophy Today*. Its founder and editor for many years was Fr. Robert Lechner, one of my professors, and a founding member of the Gabriel Marcel Society. He published many of Marcel's writings in English translation and many articles on Marcel. Coming from a contrasting background in Aquinas and scholastic philosophy stressing objective thought, I was very taken with Marcel's early work, especially his essays "Existence and Objectivity," and "On the Ontological Mystery," and the move to participant experience and a phenomenological approach to philosophical issues.

Participant Experience: *In The Participant Perspective, you write that Marcel "did not reject the traditional values which guide rational discourse, such as truth, intelligibility,*

communicability. Rather he sought to rethink these notions within the perspective of participant experience” (p.2). What do you mean by the participant perspective and what would it mean to think these values from this perspective?

Early in his career Marcel’s philosophical interest was taken by idealism. He severely criticized empiricism and direct or “immediate” experience as empty of intelligibility. For him at this time, thought must supply categories of intelligibility. We see him in the *Metaphysical Journal* gradually working his way out of these views. Two years before the publication of the *Metaphysical Journal* in 1927, he summed up his newly developing views in an article just mentioned, “Existence and Objectivity,” which I consider to be a classic of existentialism (comparable to Sartre’s groundbreaking *The Transcendence of the Ego*). Here he criticizes “the arbitrary act by which thought claims to transform into an affirmation of objectivity what is really immediate apprehension and participation” (*Metaphysical Journal*, p.324). To equate being with object is to assume that we can put ourselves in the position of being outside observers of being. If we are to address being it can only be from within our belonging to it, our participation within it.

The rejection of being as objectivity and the turn toward participant experience is developed by Marcel in two directions. One is embodiment and sentiency, rejecting the treatment of the body as object: “To the extent to which my body lends itself to such treatment it is certainly converted into an object. But in submitting it to this treatment I cease to look on it as *my body*, I deprive it of that absolute priority in virtue of which *my body* is posited as the center in relation to which my experience and my universe are ordered” (*MJ*, pp.334-335). In the other direction, his exploration focuses upon intersubjective relationships: “It follows that invocation is made to someone who is in no measure thought of as an object. Invocation is made to *thee* and there the opposition between the *thou* and the object comes into full light” (*MJ*, p.263). In both directions of his explorations Marcel shows himself to be an original thinker. This happened before Merleau-Ponty and Levinas were in the conversation.

Marcel and the Postmodern: *In Circulating Being, you write, “Today, instead of Marcel’s being recognized as a thinker who helped to bring us into the postmodern world, his works are allowed to fall out of print” (p.40). You clearly view Marcel as an important initiator of the post-modern world. What were his contributions in this regard and why do you think they have been overlooked?*

Literally Marcel’s philosophical thinking is “post” to the categories of modern philosophy, which are dominated by conceptual system building (again the equation of being and object). Long before Merleau-Ponty criticized modern philosophy for its “*pensee du survol*,” its “high altitude” thinking, Marcel wrote in his journal in March of 1923: “But it is easy to see that the idea of an absolute observer involves a complete contradiction. The word observer implies the idea of a standpoint or perspective”(*MJ*, p.305). The question then for critics such as Marcel is what becomes of philosophy “post” modernity? I have argued that Marcel’s understanding of philosophy as “secondary reflection” is a form of hermeneutics. Marcel holds that any understanding of being is indirect, that being is known only in its “elaborations.” Furthermore, the situation of any knower, due to the knower’s situatedness must result in the view that understanding is interpretation. I take very seriously what he wrote on this in *The Mystery of Being*. He wrote of our “unconscious assumptions which we share with our contemporaries

during some given period of history; the historically conditioned attitude is something which, for all of us, is quite inescapable; and perhaps we cannot even imagine, without tangling ourselves in contradictions, a *dehistoricized* attitude in the name of which completely objective judgments, judgments quite untainted by the local, the temporal, the personal, and in a word quite free from relativity, could be made about works of art, literature and philosophy”(*Mystery of Being I*, p.197). Given this appreciation of situatedness and perspective (recall how he deliberately dated his thinking in the *Metaphysical Journal* and *Being and Having*), it is not surprising that Marcel considered philosophy to be a communal, dialogical enterprise. “Philosophical experience requires a living communication with other experiences *already elaborated*, that is, dialogue with other philosophers”(*Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, p.9). He considers “negligible” any “philosophical experience that is not able to welcome an experience other than itself.”

Marcel Today: *How do you think Marcel's ideas speak to us today?*

In the context of his own time, Marcel confronted a sense of nihilism embedded in and growing in the modern West by constantly affirming that “being is what withstands—or what would withstand—an exhaustive analysis bearing on the data of experience and aiming to reduce them step by step to elements increasingly devoid of intrinsic or significant value” (*Philosophy of Existentialism*, p.14). In works such as *Being and Having*, *Homo Viator*, and *Creative Fidelity* he singled out for criticism elements of our culture which promote an “emptiness” of being, such as scientific reductionism, a positivistic attitude toward value, a debilitating dependence on technology, anti-humanistic social movements. He contrasts the nihilistic sense of emptiness with the sense of “depth” and “presence” in the experience of the Thou, “a ground where all technics are seen to be incompatible with the fundamental nature of being”(PE, p.30). In the context of our own time, the sense of nihilism has enveloped the natural world, reducing it to pure instrumentality and resource.

Of course we have no words of Marcel to count on as we confront the particular challenging issues of our time, such as the fallout of social media on human relationships, the effects of the internet on our thinking, the growing proliferation of artificial intelligence and robots in our lives, our subordination to impersonal market forces. We can only think in the “spirit” of Marcel, and I think he would be happy about that, for even during his life time he complained that his “philosophical writings...have occasioned too many commentaries which are often mere repetitions rather than creative reflections”(TWB, p.236).

Marcel & Nature: *Did Marcel offer an adequate account of nature?*

It would appear that Marcel’s focus on exploring “depth” in human relationships would preclude him from today’s conversation about our understanding of nature. While he said very little about the natural world, what he did say is, I think, significant. In *Homo Viator* appears an essay in two parts on the poet Rilke under the title “Rilke: Witness to the Spiritual.” In Part Two Marcel discusses Rilke’s attitude toward nature. Marcel notes, sympathetically, Rilke’s “reverence for things”(Homo Viator, p.244) and cites him saying “I want to love things as persons”(HV, p.244). Rilke saw “the spiritual, not as cut off but as being involved in things themselves”(HV, p.244). Things have “a mystery of inwardness,” an “inward hiddenness,” in other words, a depth, they have being. The poet, the artist (and today’s environmentalist?) witness this intrinsic worth of things and must speak for mute nature, “translate that intimate inward being of which things in

themselves are unconscious”(HV, p.256). By the end of the essay, Marcel is really worked up, referring to a growing climate of “devastating action...more widespread each day, on the eve of destruction which can reduce to nothing the people and things we live for...”(HV, p.270). Another of his writings where he addresses nature is the chapter “Life and the Sacred” in *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*. Here he refers “personally to what I have experienced in certain gardens or groves in Japan, or even more recently in the surroundings of San Francisco”(TWB, p.110). He articulates those experiences in terms of experiencing the “being” of the natural world, its “integrity”, a “dignity” requiring “respect.” By the end of the essay he consciously links this ontological defense of the natural with his earlier defense of the human against nihilism; “We see today...that the forces in favor of the desacralization or even simply the devaluation of life are the same as those that tend to dehumanize man...” (TWB, p.270).

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Personal Memories of Gabriel Marcel

By Miklos Vetö

I was born and brought up in Hungary where, after the Communist take-over in 1948, the publication of Western philosophical texts had been brought to a standstill. We just knew about “Existentialism,” and heard about Gabriel Marcel, *the* Christian Existentialist, not much else. After the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, I was to be imprisoned but was ultimately able to escape and managed to go to Paris. I participated in the activities of the Catholic Chaplaincy of the Sorbonne, the *Centre Richelieu* which used to organize different events, seminars, lectures, etc. We had for a full year Father (not yet Cardinal) Daniélou; for an individual lecture François Mauriac and in May 1959, Gabriel Marcel. He walked over from his apartment, Rue de Tournon, less than half a mile from *Place de la Sorbonne*, talked to us for about an hour and then told us to ask him questions. I was at that time an undergraduate, a philosophy major, and I asked him about something I can’t recall. At the end of the question-period, he asked me for my address. A few days after I was to receive a letter with a terrible handwriting¹ which I had the greatest difficulty deciphering. I was however able to read that I am invited for dinner but I was very uncertain about the date. So I turned up the evening I hoped to be the *one*—with fear and trembling—and fortunately it turned out to be the right day! There was dinner for three: Marcel himself, an American playwright, and an undergraduate of 22 years named Miklos Vetö. After dinner, Marcel read us a play of his until midnight.

In September 1959, the young Father Lustiger, our chaplain, told me that I should interview Marcel for *Paraboles*, the Chaplaincy weekly. So, accompanied by a middle-aged lady with an enormous typewriter, I went to his apartment and put to him all kinds of questions which he was graceful enough to answer.² Marcel invited me also to come to his *Friday* meetings.

¹ We exchanged afterwards many letters, but one day he was to write to me: “your handwriting is about as bad as mine, so we better stop this kind of exchange...”

² *Technique et Sacré. Une réflexion sur la civilisation par Gabriel Marcel. Paroles recueillies par Miklos Veto*, (Paraboles, 1959,) November, p.212. Paraboles only printed a selection of our exchanges, the complete text

Each Friday, from 5 to 7pm a large and very heterogeneous group of people, students, philosophy teachers, society women, freaks, monks, Christian or Buddhist, turned up to talk about a wide selection of philosophico-social themes. The exchanges were lively and animated but of a very disparate intellectual value. I do remember mainly a couple of elegant and quite domineering upper-class ladies and an elderly Russian in a white garb and sandals who managed to talk about martyrdom whatever the official subject-matter of the afternoon had been!³

From late 1959 onwards my meetings with Marcel had become quite irregular. I went first to Oxford and then to America, yet we remained in close touch. He tried to read the poorly typed first draft of my dissertation on Simone Weil but his sight was failing, so I don't know how much he actually read of it. I remember vividly also a short encounter with him in early 1961. A fellow student of mine in St Antony's College, Oxford, a National of Burundi, got caught up in a conspiracy against the government of his very recently independent country. I learned that he had been sentenced to death so I went to the Académie des Belles Lettres to find Marcel, asking him to sign a petition which he did. However, the signature of a few prominent French intellectuals did not impress the government of the *mwami* (=the King of Burundi) and the former Oxford student's life ended on the gallows.

But the major event—at least as far as I am concerned—of our exchanges was still to come. I left France first for England then for America for the simple reason that to get a University job in France you had to be a French citizen. Yet to become a French citizen you must have lived five years in France. But to live in France you have to make a living. The dilemma was straightforward, in order to make a living, you must have a job, but not being a French citizen, I could not get the job I wanted. From 1965 onwards I had been on the Yale Faculty and I still did not give up hope of returning to France. So I went to see a cabinet Minister of de Gaulle at his country seat to ask him whether he could help me. He said yes, provided I can give him a letter from somebody important in my trade to show that I would deserve to be made an exception. So Marcel wrote a magnificent four page letter which enabled the *Conseil d'Etat* to make use of an article of the *Code de la Nationalité Française* according to which the foreigner who did or who is likely to do “exceptional services” to France can be naturalized without delay. I was told later that this article is used for repatriating spies back to the motherland before they are jailed. So I became a French citizen.

In 1969-70 I was on sabbatical leave from Yale in Paris. Marcel came to dinner in our apartment. We asked him to see our two small children but I am sorry to say, we had the feeling that he did not admire them enough. After dinner I took him home—and I shall be ashamed of myself forever about what I did when we arrived at his house. Marcel lived in the old house of Rue de Tournon which at this time had not even an elevator. He was eighty, I was 33, so I began to run up the stairs. Marcel tried to follow me but when we reached the apartment at the fourth floor, he was entirely out of breath and had to take pills. I was frightened that he would have a heart attack.

The last time I saw him was January 1973. I wrote him a few months before that I was to go to a Congress in Brazil and I would be able to do some travelling on my own. He explained to me that I should absolutely go to the XVII century Portuguese capital, Olinda, a white, gleaming

will appear only more a quarter of a century later, as *Réflexions sur la civilisation. Gabriel Marcel interrogé par Miklos Veto* (Cité, 1986), n. 14, pp.7-19.

³ The Historical Society of the VI arrondissement of Paris organized a meeting on June 19 2014 on the work of the historian Anne Mary, a Marcel scholar. See *Un salon philosophique au rue de Tournon a XXe siècle : les vendredis de Gabriel Marcel*.

marvel. So I reported about my trip in my Christmas letter to him. A little later when I visited him in Paris, I told him: "I followed your advice and went to Olinda." I was going to elaborate about the architectural marvels of this ancient city but he stopped me drily, saying "you have already written to me about this..."

He looked in good health yet I had some forebodings about his departure. Every day when I read my *New York Times*, I looked anxiously at the Obituary page until I did find on October 9 a short article announcing the death of *Gabriel Marcel*. He had been a nice man, an unpretentious, simple, genuinely friendly person, full of good will and endowed with an impish mind taking nobody too seriously, especially not himself.

Miklos Vetö is a Hungarian-French philosopher. Born in Budapest in 1936, he studied at the Sorbonne and at Oxford, and taught at Marquette University and Yale University in the United States, and at the University of Poitiers in France. A prolific author, his books include works on Schelling, Kant, Fichte and Marcel. He lives in Paris.

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Recent Marcel Scholarship and Notices

- Terence Sweeney, "Against Ideology: Gabriel Marcel's Philosophy of Vocation," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, Vol 16:4 (Fall 2013).
- Susan Windley-Daoust, *Theology of the Body Extended: The Spiritual Signs of Birth, Impairment, and Dying* (Lectio, 2014). In the course of her discussion, the author argues that John Paul II's work is very similar to Marcel's and that John Paul is using Marcel's notion of *disponibilité*, although he does not refer to Marcel (perhaps because he is always thinking of these issues in relation to the work of Max Scheler, who had a deep influence on him.)
- Geoffrey Karabin, "Reflections on Gabriel Marcel's Belief in the Afterlife," in *Living Existentialism: Essays in Honor of Thomas W Busch*, eds. Gregory Hoskins and J. C. Berendzen (Eugene, OR.: Pickwick Publications, 2017), pp.45-59.
- Gregory B. Sadler (ed. and trans.), *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation: The 1930s Christian Philosophy Debates in France* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011). This volume contains an essay by Marcel on the philosophy of Etienne Gilson, discussing, in particular, whether there is a Christian philosophy.
- Jean Wahl, *Transcendence and the Concrete: Selected Writings*, edited and introduced by Alan D. Schrift and Ian A. Moore (New York: Fordham U.P., 2017). Jean Wahl was a very important French philosopher and friend of Marcel's. One finds many references to Marcel in this volume. The editors and Fordham University Press are to be commended for publishing for the first time a selection of his main works in English. *Interesting fact*: Emmanuel Levinas, after having his first major manuscript rejected by French publisher, Éditions Gallimard in 1961, and who was on the brink of tearing it up and giving up on academia, was encouraged by Wahl to submit it to the

Sorbonne for the degree of *doctorat d'état*. The Thesis Committee included Wahl, Marcel, and Ricoeur, among others! Awarding Levinas the degree, Wahl noted that his thesis would be one that would be written about in future years. The thesis was later published as *Totalité et infini*.

● **Book Notice:** Miklos Vetö. *Gabriel Marcel: Les grands thèmes de sa philosophie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, Ouverture Philosophique, 2014), 119 pp.

The Franco-Hungarian historian of philosophy, Miklos Vetö, was a friend and a disciple of Marcel. He devoted his last course before his retirement at the University of Poitiers to Marcelian philosophy. This little book is a slightly expanded and corrected version of these lectures. After a brief historical introduction, Vetö expounds the main themes of the author of the *Metaphysical Journal*. After presenting the founding principles of this new metaphysics in three chapters entitled 'From objectification to the unverifiable,' 'From humility to participation' and 'Mystery and Second reflection,' he moves on to the two great Marcelian notions of *embodiment* and *Being and Having*, which moves the discussion to the questions of 'Values and Possessions.' Vetö then turns to expound the distinction between Existence and Being, and to reflect on the dialectics of Gift and Fidelity, which prepares the way for the central Marcelian theory of Intersubjectivity. The book concludes with chapters on 'Hope and Immortality' and 'Faith and God,' where Vetö explains how this Christian Socratist developed a philosophy of religion respectful of divine transcendence yet firmly anchoring the discourse on God in *analogia entis*, analogy displayed through a metaphysical anthropology.

This slender book, written in a clear and straightforward style, unencumbered by scholarly digressions yet always faithful to Marcel's texts, makes a unique contribution. After earlier books devoted to different aspects of Marcelian thought, Vetö takes up the challenge of presenting an introductory study which is however also aimed at the attention of the learned reader. It will make a contribution toward the restoration of the figure of Gabriel Marcel to its deserved place in the history of twentieth century philosophy.

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Conversation Partners: Gabriel Marcel and Henry Bugbee

By Michael Palmer

Henry G. Bugbee, Jr. (Feb. 19, 1915—Dec. 18, 1999) was an American philosopher, who at various times in his professional career taught at several universities and colleges, including Stanford University, Harvard University, Pennsylvania State University, and the University of Montana. (The last of these he considered home because, as he put it, "I found that Montana had claimed me and my fundamental loyalties of placement.") His best known work, *The Inward Morning: A Philosophical Exploration in Journal Form*, was initially published by Bald Eagle Press (1958), reprinted by Harper and Row (1976), and reprinted again by University of Georgia Press (1999). Gabriel Marcel wrote the introduction.

In certain respects, Marcel and Bugbee formed a study in contrasts. For one thing, they represented different generations. Marcel was twenty-eight years Bugbee's senior. So when

Bugbee was forty, lean and physically vigorous, Marcel was nearly sixty-eight and struggling with physical challenges. (Bugbee described Marcel as “frail” and “beset with ailments—as I knew him—the familiars of his nights and intimates of his getting about day by day.”). There were notable differences of personal style, orientation, and sense of place as well. Marcel, steeped in French culture, was a man of the city—Paris, to be specific. Though born and reared in New York City, Bugbee was most at home hiking in the mountains and fly-fishing in the rivers and streams of the western United States. (Bugbee was legendary for his skill as a fly fisherman.) One of the most profound differences between them showed up in their respective experiences of war. Marcel saw World War II in Europe through civilian eyes; Bugbee experienced combat first hand in the Pacific theatre, serving as the commanding officer on a small vessel designed for minesweeping and anti-submarine warfare.

Despite their generational differences, contrasting styles, and vastly different experiences, Marcel and Bugbee came to be conversation partners. While teaching at Harvard in the early 1950s, Bugbee began to read Marcel’s philosophical works. The two philosophers met face-to-face for the first time in 1955. Of that meeting Bugbee says, “It was a decisive episode of my life to be able to join M. Marcel in August of 1955 and to confirm with him in detail the mutuality of our work.” Also, “We met at Cerisy [Chateau de Cerisy-la-Salle near the Normand coast in France] and talked for a week. Then, with a trip to Mont St. Michel, there began that introduction to France which M. Marcel later resumed in behalf of my wife and myself through a whole year of constant companionship.”

In his introduction to *The Inward Morning*, Marcel said of their first face-to-face encounter and of Bugbee’s manuscript: “As I said to Bugbee during our long and absorbing talks at Chateau de Cerisy-la-Salle in August 1955, the thing that I find especially striking about his Journal is the extent to which his thought is rooted in absolutely personal and authentic experience; experience as different from mine as it could possibly be, since it is that of a man who has been steeped in the Far West and decisively influenced by his three years at sea during World War II.” In contrast to the detachment which he saw in Sartre’s philosophy (famously described as the world viewed from the terrace of the café), Marcel was impressed by Bugbee’s “deep sense of an encounter;” “we are here in the presence of a philosophy of the open air.”

Their conversation lasted more than eighteen years and ended only with Marcel’s death in 1973. During that time, Marcel visited Bugbee at his home in Missoula, Montana. From there, said Bugbee, “we went about alone together through vast reaches of mountains, of river valleys and along the seaboard of the Pacific Northwest.”

Bugbee wrote two essays which testify to his conversancy with and affinity for Marcel’s thought and demonstrate his own eloquence as a philosopher and essayist: “L’Exigence Ontologique” (*The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, ed. Paul A. Schlipp, Open Court, 1968) and “Le Recueillement et L’Accueil,” *Les Etudes Philosophiques*, 1975).

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