Gabriel Marcel is difficult to summarize, but that is as it should be. In common with other existential philosophers, Marcel avoids a system-building approach to philosophy and, like Sartre, was the writer of dramas that embodied his approach to basic philosophical themes. However, unlike Sartre, Marcel was a Christian, though he was uncomfortable with the label “Christian existentialist.”

Throughout Marcel’s writings we encounter his plea to turn to the meaning of our concrete existence itself as a basis for our philosophical inquiry. The temptation to much philosophy of his time was to imitate science by concerning itself exclusively with problems rather than recognizing the dimension of mystery that permeates our existence. This distinction between problem and mystery is one of the themes for which Marcel is known. A problem is a conceptual difficulty that can be attacked with the appropriate technique. There is also a certain kind of distance between the individual and a problem; it is possible to solve a problem or to withdraw from it. A mystery, in contrast, is something in which I am intimately involved. Neither solving it nor withdrawing from it is possible. The list of mysteries that concern philosophy will certainly include love, freedom, and evil, and fundamentally the mystery of Being itself. Consider this point: even if we could “solve” the problem of evil (which we cannot, since evil is a mystery), that would change nothing. We would still have to live in a world in which evil makes its appearance, and would still be faced with the lived experience of evil in our own lives.

The fatal tendency of much philosophy in the mid-twentieth century, Marcel argues, was to turn all mysteries into problems. This degradation of philosophy results when human beings are treated just as objects among other objects. Consider further the nature of having. We have a house, a car, a book. What we have belongs to the objective order. Having relates to what

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is separate and apart from us rather than what is intimately related to us. Another possibility is that our relationship to our possessions will become reversed, as when we speak of being possessed by our possessions, of “being had” or enslaved by things.

The appropriate relationship to what is most intimately associated with us is *being*. This can be seen in the relationship with our bodies. We may be tempted to speak of having a body, but this is really not possible, since having relates to that which is separate from us and removed from us. It is rather the case that we *are* bodily; our mode of being in the world is to be embodied. Through our bodies we extend ourselves into the world and actualize our intentions. It is by means of our bodies that we can become a part of the objective world of nature, but we are not identical with our bodies. There is a transcendent dimension to our experience that can be described only as the mystery of Being.

The phrase “mystery of Being” sounds, well, mysterious. Marcel intends it to. Just as Martin Heidegger points out that the distinctive nature of human existence is to raise the question of being, Marcel affirms that it is through the experience of faith, hope, and love that we open ourselves up to the mystery of Being. These distinctions naturally point us beyond ourselves, however, to relationships with others. A fundamental fact of human existence involves intersubjective relations with other persons. The relationships we have with others are defining moments in our own selfhood.

The selection that follows is from a series of four conversations between Marcel and Paul Ricoeur, who is a contemporary French philosopher of the first rank.* Ricoeur was a student of Marcel and therefore knows his work thoroughly and leads Marcel into a discussion of principal aspects of his thought.

As you read through the conversations, ask yourself why Marcel is uncomfortable with Sartre’s designation of him as a Christian existentialist, given the fact that Marcel is both a Christian and an existential philosopher. You will also note that Marcel refers in many ways to the mystery of Being. How would you express this in your own words? How central is belief in God to Marcel’s philosophy and to existential philosophy in general?

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CONVERSATION 2

PAUL RICOEUR: Our first conversation brought us to a reflection on the close link in your thought between the concrete description of sensation and of the body-subject, and the philosophical theme of existence. But the reader who passes from the *Metaphysical Journal* to *Being and Having* may be surprised to see the question of being replacing the question of existence. The turning point was reached, I believe, in that magnificent text dating from 1933, “On the Ontological Mystery.” Why this change of front?

GABRIEL MARCEL: I think we ought to set these things straight. The problem of being arises in the middle of the *Metaphysical Journal*, toward the beginning of the year 1919, toward the spring. But it is perfectly accurate to say that until then when I thought about metaphysics I didn’t think about being or the problem of being. And it is interesting to ask why. I believe it’s because my entire formation had been idealist, and the word “being” conveyed to me something of its ambiguous scholastic connotation. For me “scholastic” could only be pejorative. Remember that at that time there were only a few specialists who were interested in the philosophy of the Middle Ages. The rest of us, at least the philosophy students, did not in general know medieval philosophy and were hardly even curious about it. There was a quite respectable M. Picavet who used to give courses on the philosophy of the Middle Ages. But I don’t think he had very many listeners. And I wonder if these listeners were even students. At that time, that is, during the years immediately preceding the war and even perhaps at the beginning of the war, I remained faithful to a certain distinction, one might even almost say a certain opposition between so-called philosophies of being and philosophies of freedom. And all my sympathy was with the philosophies of freedom. I am thinking, for example, of the very real sympathy with which I read certain pages of Secrétan. Moreover, here we come back to Schelling, whom you spoke of the other day. It can be said that Secrétan, like Ravaisson on another level, continued Schelling’s thought without perhaps being very faithful to what is essential in Schelling’s doctrine. But this is not important here.
Hence, certain circumstances which are rather difficult to specify were necessary in order for my thinking to be concentrated on being. And I believe that this could not have taken place until after I was able to develop in a precise or relatively precise way what I shall call the phenomenological perspective. This was the moment when I began to ask myself what we mean when we speak of being, what is our intention, what is our aim. This appears quite clearly in the Metaphysical Journal, if I am not mistaken. Perhaps it would be good to read several lines from this section.

PAUL RICOEUR: Here is the passage: “Being is that which does not frustrate our expectation; there is being from the moment at which our expectation is fulfilled—I mean the expectation in which we wholly participate. The doctrine that denies being can be expressed by the phrase: ‘All is vanity,’ in other words that we must expect nothing, and only the man who expects nothing will avoid being disappointed. I believe that it is only on this basis that the problem can be stated. To say: ‘Nothing is’ is to say Nothing matters.’ I must make a deeper examination of the meaning of this kind of nihilism. Take care not to confound ‘to be’ with ‘to exist.’”

GABRIEL MARCEL: And here does not Claudel come to mind again? Remember that nihilistic character in La Ville who declares at one point, “nothing is.” Here it is certain that Claudel’s influence, his mark on my thought, has been profound. I have very often had the opportunity in later texts to cite this passage from La Ville. It seems to me extremely revealing.

PAUL RICOEUR: But at the same time you are introducing perhaps a certain equivocation. You write several years later in Being and Having: “The uneasiness I feel on these subjects is partly due to my old difficulty in seeing the relation between being and existing. It seems obvious to me that existing is a certain way of being; we shall have to see whether it is the only one. Perhaps something could be without existing. But I regard it as axiomatic to say that the inverse is not possible, except by an indefensible juggling with words.” Don’t you think that the two notions of being and existing, even if they easily overlap one another, nevertheless can be distinguished from one another insofar as they arise out of different preoccupations of yours? As we were saying the other day, you raised the question of existence in relation to the question of objectivity. It was a matter of reaching a zone where it was no longer possible to doubt. Existence is indubitable; but at the same time existence is reached in opposition to objectivity. But you raise the question
of being with a different concern in mind, ontological exigence; we shall have to take up this notion of exigence.

You had been oriented, I believe, toward the problem of being by an extremely concrete preoccupation deriving on the one hand from your experience of the war and on the other from certain reflections on the spirit of the times, on the course of the world.

GABRIEL MARCEL: Yes, that is beyond doubt. That, I believe, is the really essential point. In fact it is in the meditation entitled, a little heavily, “On the Ontological Mystery” that this opposition is made completely precise, I would even say almost this polarity between what appeared to me as something given in a world more and more technologized, more and more functionalized on the one hand, and on the other this aspiration, this exigence which bears us toward a fullness, toward something which is totally resistant to these functional and abstract determinations.

PAUL RICOEUR: Yes, “On the Ontological Mystery” begins with a reflection on the sense of a world centered on what you call the “function,” the biological function, the social function.

GABRIEL MARCEL: That’s it. It is a world where man is dealt with only as a bundle of functions. And hence, a distinction is made between vital functions and psychological functions; the status of the latter is rather uncertain since they are situated between the vital functions and the social functions properly speaking. Nothing seems more awful to me than this reduction of man, of a human being (and here it is necessary to accent the word “being” and man’s dignity) by such distinctions. It is all too clear that what I said at that time, around 1930, has become infinitely more detailed in the world we are in today. We will have to reconsider at greater length this central theme in our fifth conversation.

PAUL RICOEUR: In brief, the word “being” helped you at a certain time to mobilize a protest that came from the depths. The ontological exigence is thus no longer simply that indubitable character we were speaking about in connection with existence; it designates the recovery of a forgotten foundation.

GABRIEL MARCEL: This exigence seems to me to go against the facts, if you will, like the foundation of a protest.

PAUL RICOEUR: But what is astonishing is that you raised your protest at that particular time, not only against the reduction of existence to a bundle of
functions, but also against a basic philosophical tradition, the tradition of the *cogito*, which other philosophers today are again disputing. In turning the ontological exigence back against the *cogito*, do you not risk weakening the core of resistance to this tendency of the world which you condemn?

**Gabriel Marcel:** This is perhaps one of those points where I would have to revise what I wrote at that time. It seems to me now that I would not put the emphasis where you do. I do not want to say that I am against the *cogito*; that would be absurd. What I wanted to say was that Descartes seemed to me precisely to have mistaken the indubitable character of existence, a character which in general seems prior to any determination or to any intellectual act whatsoever. I think we would have to examine—but I have never undertaken this—the relation between what I outlined at that time and have doubtless elaborated in my later works, and what Karl Jaspers has written against the *cogito*. I believe that there our positions are extremely close.

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, but both of you have read Descartes in Kantian terms. For you the *cogito*, I think, is the epistemological subject. When you call the *cogito* “the guardian of the threshold of the valid,” you reduce the *cogito* to a pure function of watchfulness over a world of pure mental objects. But Descartes himself saw in the *cogito* essentially the affirmation, “I am.” In this sense, perhaps, you recover in your work Descartes’s forgotten intention by taking the “I am” in all its density.

**Gabriel Marcel:** Yes, I believe there was much more in Descartes’s thought than my critique of the *cogito* might suggest. Indeed, I have often said that there is infinitely more in Descartes than in Cartesianism. On this point you agree with me, don’t you? In any case, a certain kind of Cartesianism has resulted in a narrowing of the field of Cartesian thought. The idea of absolute freedom, as Descartes conceived it, obviously goes well beyond a formalism of the *cogito*. I think you are probably right when you say that I had too much of a tendency to read Descartes in Kantian terms. Moreover, it is probable that the-idea of the transcendental ego correlative to the Kantian object is much more central to all my reflections. In any case, I am sure that your reservations are from the historical point of view absolutely justified.

**Paul Ricoeur:** Inversely, it could be said that your “On the Ontological Mystery” is not sufficiently critical from another point of view. Let us reread the text we were alluding to just a moment ago. “Being is—or should be—necessary. It is impossible that everything should be reduced to a play of successive
appearances which are inconsistent with each other ('inconsistent' is essential), or, in the words of Shakespeare, to ‘a tale told by an idiot.’ I aspire to participate in this being, in this reality.” Would not critical reflection come to question the value, the soundness of this protestation? Will it not be brought to denounce this “being is,” or even more this being “should be,” as the expression of wishful thinking, of a confusion between desire and reality?

GABRIEL MARCEL: This is certainly a question we have to raise. In fact I did raise the question at that time and I have come back to it quite often. But the answer should have been much more rigorously formulated than in fact it was. What I was trying to show was first of all that a philosophy that neglects ontological exigence or that repudiates it is strictly speaking possible. A philosophy of despair is possible. I don’t believe it can be seriously said that such a philosophy entails contradiction. What strikes me as false is pretending, as certain pessimists do, that this philosophy of despair in fact is required by a certain objective reality, by a certain structure in things, which could be considered apart from every form of desire. I believe that in fact there is an assumption there and that this assumption needs to be explored from the viewpoint of a philosophy like mine.

PAUL RICOEUR: But in that case, everything is a matter of our being able to link critical reflection on adverse “assumptions” with . . .

GABRIEL MARCEL: That’s it . . .

PAUL RICOEUR: . . . with what you have called “concrete approaches.” . . .

GABRIEL MARCEL: Yes.

PAUL RICOEUR: How would critical thinking today link these concrete approaches—for example, the analysis of having, of autonomy taken as stoic constancy or as the will to be in agreement with oneself—with ontological exigence? Your method consisted then in somehow mining these experiences in order to recover there that reference to being which you call fidelity. . . .

GABRIEL MARCEL: Yes . . .

PAUL RICOEUR: What would it mean today to relate the criticism of assumptions to the retrieval of these ontological experiences?

GABRIEL MARCEL: Well, I believe that what intervenes here is what Schelling, in probably a very different sense, called a higher empiricism.
In other words, it is a recourse to a certain type of experience which must be recognized first of all and which in some way bears within itself the warrant of its own value. In fact, if there has been a real transformation in my thinking, it is in my way of appreciating experience. I must say that I smile a little when I think of the scorn which empiricism and even the notion of experience roused in me at a certain time of my life. I have come to understand that this refusal of experience, this kind of systematic apriorism, actually betrayed a lack of reflection, and that it was necessary to rediscover experience, but at a level beyond that of traditional empiricism. Moreover, as I mentioned in a communication to the Institut, my friend Henry Bugbee introduced ten years ago the notion of experiential thinking as opposed to empirical thinking. It seems to me that we will have an opportunity later on to see this kind of thinking, for it is precisely this experiential thinking which is at work in this investigation, where we are dealing with themes you were speaking about a moment ago, particularly with fidelity, which, as you know, ultimately plays a pivotal role in my thinking.

**Paul Ricoeur:** In brief, we would have to say that these cardinal experiences bear in themselves the critical function. They are critical experiences to the extent that they are experiences which effect in the same movement the retrieval of the ontological aim and the criticism of the modalities which conceal it from us.

**Gabriel Marcel:** And these experiences in fact accommodate what I have called secondary reflection, as opposed to primary reflection, which is purely critical or analytic. Secondary reflection is a reconstructive reflection, and the practice of this reflection has been my concern from the moment when, toward the 1930s, I became fully aware of what I wanted to do.

It has been my aim to bring about this reconstruction, but to bring it about in an intelligent and intelligible way, and not by some kind of appeal to purely subjective intuitions.

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**Conversation 4**

**Paul Ricoeur:** In this fourth conversation, M. Marcel, I want to ask a question we cannot put off any longer. A tag—there’s no other word for it—has been attached to your work, the tag of Christian existentialism. People like to say that there is an atheistic existentialism, that of Sartre and Heidegger, and
a Christian existentialism, that of Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel. What do you think about this?

**Gabriel Marcel:** I must say that I’m completely against this classification. You know as well as I do that Sartre was the one who started it in his well-known lecture on existentialism as a humanism. I cannot protest enough against this way of putting the matter. In fact I have never spontaneously used the word “existentialism.” It was in 1946 at the Rome Congress that I found out that someone had used the word to characterize my work. At the time I was rather unconcerned. But shortly afterward I did become concerned when someone came to ask whether I would agree to the title *Christian Existentialism* for a commemorative volume which was to be dedicated to me in the collection *Présence* which Plon publishes.

I have to say that on the whole I did not find the idea very agreeable. I made it a point nevertheless to ask the advice of a man I had a great deal of confidence in, Louis Lavelle. I said to him: “You know my work. I have a great deal of confidence in your judgment. What do you think of the matter?” He answered: “I understand very well that you don’t like the phrase ‘Christian existentialism.’ I don’t like it either. It seems to me nonetheless that you can make a concession to your publisher.” So I yielded. But very soon when I became aware of the inanities the word “existentialism” led to, and especially among society women, I was sorry to have been so accommodating. Since 1949 I’ve said on every occasion that I reject this tag, and more generally that I’m repelled by labels and “isms.”

**Paul Ricoeur:** Nevertheless, that summary characterization included an adjective, the adjective “Christian.” We can’t get away without some discussion on this point.

**Gabriel Marcel:** Certainly not.

**Paul Ricoeur:** How do you see the relationship of your philosophy to Christianity? I’m asking the question because, without any ill will, someone might object to your thinking along these lines. When you speak of the ontological mystery, you are using a word taken from the language of Christianity, the word “mystery.” But the word “ontological” belongs to the language of philosophy. Doesn’t the expression “ontological mystery” really say too much for the philosopher, and not enough for the believer or at least for the theologian, inasmuch as you make no specific reference to the person of Christ as such? What do you think of this line of reasoning?
Gabriel Marcel: Here we have to go back quite a bit. What has to be seen is how I came to Christianity. You know I was raised without any religion and that, nevertheless, from the moment I began to think philosophically for myself, it seemed I was irresistibly drawn to think favorably of Christianity. That is, I was drawn to recognize that there must be an extremely profound reality in Christianity and that my duty as a philosopher was to find out how this reality could be understood. The problem I had then was truly a problem of intelligibility. That was when I used to hand in my writings to Victor Delbos, and I used to feel what a great interest he had in this inquiry. But over the years I found myself in the quite unusual situation of someone who believed deeply in the faith of others and who was completely convinced that this faith was not illusory, yet who could not acknowledge the possibility or the right of taking this faith absolutely on its own account. There was a paradox there—I saw this very clearly—which lasted a long time. I might also say that I walked a tight rope for a long time, and that at a certain moment I needed some outside intervention, that of Mauriac, to help me face this anomaly, to question, to ask myself: “Do I really have the right to stay any longer on this path?” No, I felt drawn to profess my allegiance openly. This happened at a time in my life when I was at peace with myself and when there was no special anxiety. For me this was a reason for thinking that the invitation Mauriac addressed to me should be taken absolutely seriously. I have probably told you that I hesitated for some moments. I said to myself: “I must become a Christian, I must enter a church, but will this be the reformed church?” My wife was Protestant and we were extraordinarily close. I have the greatest affection for her family. I have a brother-in-law who is a minister and who is really like a confidant to me. But I chose Catholicism. The influence of du Bos was certainly the major one. It seemed to me that choosing Christianity meant choosing Christianity in its fullness, and that I would find this fullness more in Catholicism than in Protestantism. It seemed to me that Protestantism offered only partial, variable, and sometimes inconsistent expressions of this fullness, and that it would be very difficult to choose among these expressions. That’s exactly how things happened.

You referred to that essential text on the ontological mystery which came after my conversion. My conversion was in 1929 and that text was written in 1932. I don’t believe it is easy to specify exactly what the relationship was between this kind of experience—I can use the word properly here—this lived experience which accompanied and followed my conversion, and what is said in this text. I believe that even at the time I was writing
those reflections on the ontological mystery I experienced the need to reach a level universal enough to make what I was saying acceptable or understandable by non-Catholics and even perhaps by non-Christians, so long as they had a certain apprehension of what seemed to me essential.

**Paul Ricoeur:** You speak somewhere about the peri-Christian zones of existence. It’s these you wanted to touch on in your work. But the question remains. When you take up the themes of hope and fidelity, aren’t you exploring theological dimensions?

**Gabriel Marcel:** Of course . . .

**Paul Ricoeur:** You’ve refused the title “Christian existentialist.” But if the bond between “I believe” and “I exist” is constitutive of your philosophy, if it contains the principle for every refutation of despair, don’t you have to accept the term “Christian philosophy?”

**Gabriel Marcel:** Strictly speaking yes . . . perhaps I would accept this term to the extent that I reject the position Bréhier took when he denied—which seems completely absurd to me—that life or Christian experience could include elements capable of nourishing and enriching philosophical thought. In this way, that is, as a negation of a negation, I would accept the idea of a Christian philosophy. But let us return to what you were just saying, something which is very important. I consider myself as having always been a philosopher of the threshold, a philosopher who kept himself in rather uncomfortable fashion on a line midway between believers and nonbelievers so that he could somehow stand with believers, with the Christian religion, the Catholic religion, but also speak to nonbelievers, make himself understood by them and perhaps to help them. I don’t think this kind of preoccupation is an apologetic one—that word would be completely inappropriate—but I do think that this fraternal concern has played an extremely important role in the development of my thought. Thus the questions or objections you’ve brought up are certainly legitimate, and I am not dismissing them. But I must somehow specify and locate the place where I have always stood, where perhaps I continue to stand . . .

**Paul Ricoeur:** This threshold position links you with Jaspers and Heidegger. I would very much like to discuss this with you.

**Gabriel Marcel:** Certainly.
Paul Ricoeur: I am letting myself draw you onto this ground because some years ago when I wrote about you I was myself much more aware of your kinship with Jaspers than with Heidegger. But today I think I would emphasize the distance and even the opposition I’ve since noticed between you and Jaspers, and on the other hand I would underline everything which, despite very strong appearances to the contrary, draws you closer to Heidegger.

Gabriel Marcel: I think you’re completely right. It’s certain that when I read Jaspers’ Philosophy—that must have been in 1933 if I’m not mistaken—I was extremely impressed. In many ways this reading seemed liberating. I am alluding especially to volume two, Existence. I found there masterly analyses, particularly of what Jaspers calls limit situations, and you remember that I wrote a study then which first appeared in the Recherches philosophiques and which afterwards was included in the book Creative Fidelity.

I was attracted much less by volume three, Transcendence. It seemed to me that there the idea of cipher which Jaspers used so copiously remained equivocal. It was impossible to get a firm grip on it.

Paul Ricoeur: My own tendency would be to view Jaspers’ second volume with the same reservations you just mentioned. His philosophy of freedom stresses choice so much, that is, self-choice in anxiety, whereas I see a more Claudelian strain in your philosophy of freedom. For you, the freedom of response goes beyond the freedom of choice. By way of contrast I am much more aware now that in Jaspers’ philosophy of freedom the major emphasis is on exile, solitude, and refusal. This is what moves all his thought toward a kind of romantic speculation on failure, something that runs throughout his thought. I’m thinking of texts like the doctrine of the night in which everything that has an order must be destroyed, where the night is seen as the thrust of existence toward its own ruin. I don’t think that you could have written that kind of text.

Gabriel Marcel: Certainly not. Romantic and, if I remember well enough, Wagnerian strains can be detected in his philosophy, don’t you think? No, I think you’re completely right.

Paul Ricoeur: What place does the theme of anxiety have in your philosophy?

Gabriel Marcel: Yes, this question has to be met head-on. Certainly for me the theme of anxiety is not the central theme of what I would call, grosso modo, my philosophy of existence. Perhaps this is what makes a very great
difference between myself and, for example, Heidegger. It has become more and more clear to me—and here in fact we meet Claudel again—that there could be an existential experience of joy and of fullness. And I believe also that what you pointed out about freedom is perfectly correct. The identification of freedom with freedom of choice was a mistake. Just this morning I had to make a somewhat painful decision. It was a matter of my recalling from a publisher a certain text that he had asked me for, because I realized that if this text were published it would put someone else in danger. I didn’t hesitate. I said: “The text has to be recalled, even suppressed.” I had made no real choice there, and yet I had never felt more free than at that moment. Why? Because there was nothing resembling an outside necessity. There was just this certainty that I would be betraying myself, be wanting in my own person, be putting myself in contradiction with everything I had always thought and said yes to, if I failed to recall the text and as a result exposed someone else to serious danger. This example seems to me quite revealing.

Paul Ricoeur: I want to come back to the theme of anxiety because it has been a source of misunderstanding between Heidegger and you. Heidegger’s texts on anxiety have too often been read by way of Sartre. Actually, for Heidegger the anxiety provoked by the contingency of everything is the result of a disengagement from what you would call the ontological dimension. This brings me back to the suggestion I just made, that perhaps you are very close to Jaspers in appearance, but under the surface very close to Heidegger. What Heidegger calls the forgetfulness of being has an echo in your analysis of having, of indisponibilité⁴ and of despair. Similarly your use of questioning, which we will have to come back to in our sixth conversation, seems to me close to Heidegger’s use of interrogation. I would locate the difference between Heidegger and you in another area, that is, in your relationship to the Judaeo-Christian tradition. I am always somewhat disturbed by what I might call the prudence with which Heidegger circumvents this tradition.

Gabriel Marcel: Heidegger is a Greek!

Paul Ricoeur: It is only to the extent that your philosophy is more peri-Christian or pre-Christian than Christian that your standpoint as a philosopher of the threshold approximates Heidegger’s.

Gabriel Marcel: Yes, probably so. I think that what Heidegger’s position and my own have most fundamentally in common is the sacred sense of being, the conviction that being is a sacral reality. This seems to me extraordinarily
important, and I believe it is sufficient to dispel any illusions one might have about the closeness between Heidegger and Sartre. I’m glad that you are giving me a chance to express myself on this point, because the satirical play I wrote about Heidegger could be misleading here. The French title of the play is La Dimension florestan, but the actual title is the German one, Die Wacht am Sein. Actually the criticism in the play is directed essentially at the use of jargon and a kind of pretension. But it doesn’t exclude—and I’ve taken pains to say so, once in a lecture delivered at Oberhausen and another time in Berlin—it doesn’t at all exclude the possibility of a metaphysical kinship between Heidegger and myself.

Of course I am still a little doubtful as to how, when all is said and done, the well-known distinction between being and a being is to be interpreted. For example, I asked Henri Birault the following question: “Do you think Heidegger would accept my program of substituting for being the light, the illumining, and for a being, the illumined? Do you think Heidegger would go along with this?” Birault seemed rather skeptical. I don’t know what you think of the matter. For me it’s extremely important, because Heidegger’s terminology is a problem for me here. I find it suspect because on the whole it depends too much on grammatical analysis. Yet it can’t be denied for a moment that for Heidegger, who in certain respects is an inspired thinker, this terminology corresponds to an experience that is spiritual, speculative, and extremely deep.

Paul Ricoeur: I would tend to minimize this disagreement about terminology and to emphasize a difference in the use of metaphor: Heidegger’s metaphors are Greek, your own are biblical.

Endnotes

4 Mr. Marcel has suggested keeping this word in French, since previous attempts to translate the terms disponibilité and indisponibilité have, in his judgment, not been successful. The idea is something like being at the disposal of others, openness, availability.—Translator.
5 “Die Wacht am Rhein” is the title of a German nationalistic song.—Translator.