

BLACKFRIARS

THE PHILOSOPHY OF GABRIEL MARCEL, by Kenneth T. Gallagher; Fordham University Press; \$5.

The significance of Kant's 'Copernican revolution' lies in the question that gave rise to it: is man capable of metaphysics? Since then there has been an increasing awareness that for metaphysical statements to be meaningful, they must be rooted in some kind of philosophical anthropology. This is a concrete approach to metaphysics, consisting of an explication of the ultimate implications of experience. The experience in question may be man's symbol-life; in this sense for example, Cassirer investigates myth, Heidegger examines poetic language. Or it might be a question of man's intersubjective experience, and in this sense Sartre examines the 'alter ego', Marcel investigates fidelity, hope and love as forms of ontological communion with other persons and ultimately with the Absolute Thou. We then get metaphysical drama and journals.

Marcel's plays are not the *théâtre à thèse* kind. He does not use drama for the purpose of conveying philosophical theories. Most themes appear in his plays before being philosophically thematized. The most basic of all Marcellean themes, that of communion among subjectivities, lends itself to this form of treatment. Marcel dramatizes various checks to authentic communion, various degrees of the master-slave dialectic, we might say. He is trying to indicate that the purely private self is an abstraction. The real ego, the true self that is given in experience is a being-by-participation. More precisely, there is no self except in so far as there is communion with other selves; and there can be no experience of Being except by an authentic self. Love and longing, then are prerequisite modes of existing for a metaphysician. Man affirms Being by the creative testimony of his true self.

It is difficult to synopsise Marcel's philosophy because, like Kierkegaard, he has a horror of systematic thought. It is more a collection of disconnected insights expressed in somewhat mystical language. The work under review is the first full length study of Marcel's thought in English. It shows a clear and sympathetic understanding of an enigmatic philosophy. To anyone already familiar with existentialist thought and language it will prove an invaluable key to the mind of Gabriel Marcel.

NICHOLAS FOLAN, O.P.

THE BARBARIAN WITHIN, by Walter J. Ong, S.J.; Macmillan, New York; 37s.

There are few truly encyclopaedic minds to be found in our intensely specialized world; but Fr Ong's is undoubtedly one of them. This collection of his essays is the most intellectually stimulating book I have read for many months, but its extraordinary diversity of subjects makes it hard to classify and virtually impossible to summarize. Fr Ong's field might be described in that forbidding,