Bonner goes on to criticize contemporary parenting books such as Thomas Gordon’s *Parent Effectiveness Training* and Burton White’s *The First Three Years of Life*. Gordon urges parents not to rely on power and authority, but his methods are themselves ultimately manipulative. They foster a society in which parental authority is replaced by therapeutic negotiation. White urges parents to help children attain the maximum level of competence and to put this goal above all else. Such advice is characteristic of a society where workers must learn transferable skills in order to compete in the global post-industrial economy. But Bonner insists that the acquisition of competence must be balanced against other goals, such as learning social skills and respecting adults’ needs not to be continually interrupted. Moreover, the very things cultivated in White’s program—the quest for adoptable and flexible competence, for unconstrained learning and development—are traits that ironically lead grown children to choose a child-free lifestyle.

What is Bonner’s parental ideal? Unfortunately, this is not presented with much concreteness or clarity. He talks about “developing practical wisdom” and seeing parenting as a “moral-practical activity based on *phronesis*, as opposed to ... a technical-productive activity assimilated to *poiesis*” (149). He refers to Arendt’s concept of action, and says that we need to see parenting as a *praxis* done for its own sake rather than for the sake of a product, and to come to terms with the conditions of irreversibility and unpredictability which frame our action as parents. But I am not convinced that such insights are especially lacking in modern or bourgeois parents. If premodern children were not pushed to achieve, it was generally because they were born into a world with limited social options in which they were expected to labor from an early age. Wesley’s insistence on conquering the will of the child also has a lengthy premodern genealogy, going back at least to Augustine’s theology of original sin, if not to the biblical admonition not to “spare the rod.” While Bonner is right in pointing out certain pathologies in contemporary parenting, the recommendation for “more *phronesis*” is not much of an answer.

CRAIG BEAM, *University of Waterloo*

*Circulating Being: From Embodiment to Incorporation. Essays in Late Existentialism*  
THOMAS W. BUSCH  

As Thomas W. Busch notes in the preface to *Circulating Being*, existentialism has tended to be eclipsed in continental philosophy over the past few decades. Increasingly it takes on a somewhat historical appearance, a “pre” to the “posts”
that currently dominate discussion. Philosophies of existence are increasingly regarded as having provided valuable critiques of traditional metaphysics and epistemology, but as decidedly dated in the alternatives they afford for thought. Thomas Busch calls this into question in six concise studies of the writings of Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel, Jean-Paul Sartre, Judith Butler, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Paul Ricoeur. These studies focus on later developments in existential thought in which earlier themes of embodiment, individuality, decision, and the limits of rationality are superceded by incorporation, language, and somewhat nascent forms of communicative ethics. It is in these later developments, Busch argues, that the legacy of existentialism properly lies.

Busch’s approach in these studies is not one of antiquarianism but of hermeneutic and critical retrieval. Later existential thought, he argues, not only prefigures and makes possible several contemporary currents in continental philosophy but in many ways pronounces a powerful critique of such trends. It is a critique that emerges less from the standpoint of existentialism’s earlier themes of lived experience and embodiment than from what Busch calls “incorporation,” the transcendence of individual experience in the discursive circulation of Being, a circulation which, while admitting individual differences, calls discussants together ethically and politically” (x). Camus, Marcel, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty in particular converge not only in their critiques of rationalism or essentialism but in their “intimations of a communicative rationality which is also a call to shared communicative life” (x).

That Camus foreshadows postmodern philosophy in this and several other respects Busch ably demonstrates in his study of that author. In both his fictional and nonfictional writings, Camus examines notions of contingency, solidarity, difference, and the absurd which all have their postmodern counterparts. In Camus we find a conception of truth as intensely personal, the first truth being the absurd itself. The experience of the absurd creates a feeling of having been wronged or cheated, as a consequence of which one affirms one’s desires and their worthiness to be fulfilled. As Busch writes: “my experience of the absurd, and my experience of being cheated, can lead to the further step that all people’s desires, not just my own, ought to be fulfilled, which will produce then the conclusion that the absurd should be diminished not just in my life, but in all lives” (9). The Plague and The Rebel produce this conclusion by introducing a conception of community or solidarity that marks the transition from I to We. Camus’s Notebooks and participation in the Resistance movement also give expression to a notion of community that would be central to his ethics and politics.

Busch’s discussion of Marcel centers around the latter’s distinction between primary and secondary reflection, a distinction central to Marcel’s project of articulating participant experience. Primary reflection refers to an abstract, impersonal, and ostensibly value-free mode of thought of the kind associated with modern technology. Marcel contrasts this with secondary reflection which is
interpretive and situated within participatory perspectives. As Marcel writes: “Thought cannot go beyond existence; it can only in some degree abstract from it; and it is of the first importance that it should not be deceived by this act of abstraction” (30). Busch points out the central place of mystery in Marcel’s thought, the recognition of which is not a resignation to the unknowable but “an essentially positive act of the mind” (33) which by necessity is derived from lived experience. Especially relevant to contemporary issues is Marcel’s analysis of the I/Thou relation. Busch’s description of this is especially relevant to students of Levinas and Gadamer: “The dialogical ‘I’ is decentered in its welcoming openness to and disposition to listen to the Other. Dialogue implies respect for an Other that transcends categories of having, instrumentality, reduction, objectivity, such that I experience in dialogue the ‘hold’ that the Other has over me” (38). Marcel sketches the outline of a communicative rationality and communicative ethics, both implications of the collapse of modern rationalism and of the necessarily interpretive nature of participant experience.

Busch describes late existentialism as “trac[ing] a path from passionate criticism of a modern reason inflated with pretension to certitude and assured of a license to dominate all forms of life, to a reason, now chastened by respect for finitude and, as inherently communicative, inextricably ethical” (127). The embryonic communicative ethics that Busch detects in Camus, Sartre, Marcel, and Merleau-Ponty (one could mention Karl Jaspers in this connection as well, a thinker who receives curiously little mention in this book) foreshadows the ethical theory of Jürgen Habermas while avoiding some of the pitfalls of the latter, not least of which are its arid formalism and forgetfulness of its own finitude. On existential premises, Busch remarks, strong conceptions of distanitation of the kind Habermas invokes are precluded, bringing late existentialism into closer connection with Levinas than critical theory.

*Circulating Being* makes a convincing case for a fresh look at later existentialist thought. While postmodern thinkers may have superceded them in certain respects, the writings of Camus, Marcel, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty are far from ready for consignment to the dustbin of history, but remain capable of pronouncing an incisive critique of both traditional metaphysics and epistemology as well as some more recent developments in continental thought.

PAUL FAIRFIELD, *Queen’s University*