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'The Majesty and Poverty of Metaphysics'

*The Journey from the Meaning of Being to Mysticism
in the Life and Philosophy of Jacques Maritain*

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented is entirely my own.

Signed:

Anthony Richard Haynes

25th October 2018

Abstract

This study is concerned with the spiritual impetus and the lived dimension of the philosophy of the French Thomist Jacques Maritain in light of John Caputo's Heideggerian critique of Thomist metaphysics. In *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics*, Caputo argues that the thought of Thomas Aquinas, probably the most important and most representative figure of orthodox Catholic thinking, is a paradigmatic case of what Martin Heidegger calls 'ontotheology'. This is the dominating tendency of Western philosophy and theology to view Being not as a mystery, but metaphysically as a mere collection of *things* which are simply *present*—external to the human being and the value of which is *use*. For Aquinas, according to Caputo, God is the highest 'being' that creates other 'beings', and it is in virtue of this relationship that human beings, allegedly made in God's image, view the world simply as a collection of things to be manipulated. The first question constituting this study's point of departure, then, is: if Aquinas is indeed an exemplar of ontotheological thinking, is the same true of Jacques Maritain, perhaps the twentieth century's most influential follower and interpreter of Thomas Aquinas?

Yet in the same work Caputo also proclaims that what has been said is not the whole truth about Aquinas, and the argument that his thought is an instance of ontotheology is in fact what Caputo sets out to respond to—for the sake of recovering an Aquinas who was not a 'cold rationalist', but a spiritually gifted contemplative, a Catholic saint. Caputo makes the case that we can, by employing a method of 'retrieval' or 'deconstruction'—inspired by Heidegger and Jacques Derrida—find that which is hidden or left 'unthought' in Aquinas but which nevertheless determines his entire philosophical and religious life. This, Caputo argues, is a pre-metaphysical, mystical tendency directed towards the mystery of being, which overcomes metaphysics and escapes ontotheology. Here I apply this Heideggerian critique and retrieval to Maritain, and I argue that while there is in Maritain the same 'ontotheological' tendency

to view reality as a collection of things and God as paradigmatic maker of things—the *prima causa* so richly expressed in Thomistic doctrines of the ‘transcendentals’ and participative being—there is in him a deep pre-metaphysical, mystical tendency which is, in fact, far more explicit than in Aquinas.

In the first part of the study, I compare the philosophical doctrines and projects of Maritain and his first teacher and guide, Henri Bergson, and then of Heidegger in relation to Maritain. I also give a sketch of Maritain’s religious and intellectual development, identifying the key religious and artistic figures involved: the novelist Léon Bloy and the painter Georges Rouault. In light of the philosophical analyses and what can be gleaned from Maritain’s biographical notes, his correspondence, and the biographical insights provided by those close to him, I argue that we can see in Maritain the same concern for the question of the meaning of being in relation to human life that we find in Heidegger, and that, like Heidegger, this concern underlies his philosophical thought and serves as the impetus for something beyond philosophy. I show that from his Bergsonian beginnings to his later days as a Little Brother of Jesus, Maritain has a profound sense of the pre-conceptual and intuitive kinds of knowledge that we find in existentialist thinkers such as Heidegger, and also artists and mystics. I posit that while Maritain claims what he calls the ‘intuition of being’ is the most primordial experience human beings can have of ultimate reality, there is, in fact, an experience, or aspiration to have such an experience, which is even more basic, with greater implications for overcoming metaphysics and ontotheology: *mystical communion* with ultimate reality. The aspiration for such communion is, I claim, the ‘unthought’ in Maritain that must be sought out for the purpose of retrieving a Maritain who goes beyond metaphysics.

Mapping out the main branches of Maritain’s thinking about being in terms of the classical doctrine of the ‘transcendentals’ and corresponding instances of connatural knowledge, the second part of the study is devoted to finding where, in Maritain’s thought, a retrieval might be possible. Examining Maritain’s conceptions of the connatural experience-knowledge of the moral

good and mystical experience, I conclude that we cannot discover any overcoming of metaphysics and ontotheology in either when they are taken on their own terms. For underlying both conceptions, I claim, is Maritain's 'master concept' of the 'act of existence', or *esse*, the metaphysical principle which makes it possible for the human being to take hold of their own existence and participate in the moral and divine life. The distinction between *esse* and the essence of beings (*essentia*) and a stress on the former, as Caputo argues with regard to Aquinas, in fact only supports Heidegger's thesis on the ontotheological character of Thomist thought. For a stress on *esse*, the principle by which God creates and sustains things in existence is only the outcome of a preoccupation with conceiving God primarily as the 'maker' of things. And what of *esse* when it comes to mystical experience? Mystical experience, Maritain says, is that of which metaphysical wisdom 'awakens a desire' even while it is unable to attain it, such that the testimony of it, such as that provided by St. John of the Cross, 'no philosophical commentary will ever efface'. Yet here, too, *esse* only serves to make an unbridgeable ontological and cognitive divide between God as viewed in terms of His causal transcendence and as an intentional object of consciousness, as presence—something or someone external to oneself. This is so even as one is, in virtue of the connatural experience-knowledge of love, united with Him in 'one spirit', as Maritain says, following St. John of the Cross.

Given this, I seek a retrieval of Maritain elsewhere, in the richest and most original areas of his thought: the connatural experience-knowledge of the artist and the relationship between the artist and the mystic. For Maritain, true artists and mystics are not concerned with reducing reality to manageable chunks but with expressing the mystery of reality, and, as I demonstrate in the final two chapters, it is when the vocations of the Catholic artist and the Catholic mystic converge in Maritain's reflections—in the cases of Léon Bloy, St. John of the Cross, and Maritain's wife Raïssa—that we are able to retrieve a Maritain that, while very much remaining a Catholic philosopher, is also a mystic. I claim that it is when his thought is situated in its wider existential and religious context that Maritain as *both* thinker and contemplative escapes the

charge of ontotheology because there exists in him a primordial and utterly determining mystical aspiration to experience a communion in love with ultimate reality, best expressed in terms of poetic and mystical language, rather than the metaphysical language of Thomist philosophy. Essential in demonstrating this are events in Maritain's life as well as people—artists and mystics—who reveal the mystery of Being to him. Toward the end of the study, I claim that this immanent mysticism in Maritain—which, unlike that of Caputo's retrieved Aquinas—balances apophatic and cataphatic elements and, as such, is complex and profound enough to render the categories of contemporary debate on the nature of mysticism and mystical experience in need of revision.

Lay Summary

The boundary between philosophy and mysticism blurs as soon as we speak of the meaning and mystery of reality, and how we ought to live when such mystery pervading all things begins to occupy an important role in human thought. Where exactly a thinker lies on this most opaque of boundaries defines what the thinker values the most in his or her life and the trajectory of their intellectual project as reflective of such philosophical and spiritual convictions. This study is concerned with the question of the relationship between the philosophical and the mystical in the life and writings of Jacques Maritain, a French Catholic philosopher and perhaps the twentieth century's most influential follower of the most representative thinker of Catholic thinking, its 'Common Doctor', St. Thomas Aquinas. I take as my point of departure John Caputo's argument in his book *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* that Aquinas' thinking is an instance of what Heidegger calls 'ontotheology': thinking characterized not by a contemplative or mystical appreciation of the mystery of reality, but rather by the dominating conception of reality as a collection of *things* to be manipulated. Such an attitude has prevailed in the West for centuries, argues Caputo, partly because Aquinas (and his followers) view God as the archetypal 'maker' of the world, whom we emulate in our technological mastery over nature.

Might the same be said for Maritain? In the same work, Caputo sets out to 'retrieve' an Aquinas quite different from the Aquinas just described. The Aquinas which Caputo feels is truer to the historical person is not a calculative rationalist, with no sense of the mystery of the universe or of God, but is rather a deeply humble and contemplative soul, befitting the title of 'saint'. To retrieve or rediscover this more genuine Aquinas, Caputo seeks to situate Aquinas in his wider context and vocation as a medieval Dominican friar of deep religious piety before a philosopher-theologian. A key event in Aquinas' life that Caputo draws on is Aquinas' alleged mystical experience in which he had a vision of God, and after which he said all of his writings were only worth 'straw'. In this

study, I apply Caputo's method to the case of Maritain and argue that while there is the same 'ontotheological' tendency to view reality as a collection of things and God as paradigmatic maker of things, there is in Maritain a deep pre-metaphysical, mystical tendency which is in fact far more explicit than in Aquinas. By exploring Maritain's philosophical relationship with Heidegger and the philosophical, religious and artistic influences in his life, such as Henri Bergson, the novelist Léon Bloy, Georges Rouault, and the Counter-Reformation mystic St. John of the Cross, I make the case that Maritain has a profound sense of the pre-conceptual and intuitive kinds of knowledge that we find in artists and mystics, who are not concerned with reducing reality but with expressing the mystery of reality. It is when the vocations of the Catholic artist and the Catholic mystic converge in Maritain's reflections that we are able to retrieve a Maritain that, while very much remaining a Catholic philosopher, is also a mystic who escapes the charge of ontotheology. This, as I say in the final two chapters, is because Maritain expresses his most profound statements about mystical experience of God not in the metaphysical language of philosophers, but in language that is at once poetic and mystical—largely shaped by the most influential figures in his life and thought, who reveal the mystery of Being to him.

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Abbreviations

Bibliographical details of the works listed below can be found on the footnotes throughout this study. Except where noted otherwise, all works are solely by Jacques Maritain.

<i>AG</i>	<i>Approaches to God</i>
<i>AIG</i>	Raïssa Maritain, <i>Adventures in Grace</i>
<i>AS</i>	<i>Art and Scholasticism with Other Essays</i>
<i>BPP(R)</i>	Maritain Heidegger, <i>The Basic Problems of Phenomenology</i> (followed by section and page number) (revised edition)
<i>BT</i>	Martin Heidegger, <i>Being and Time</i> (Macquarrie and Robinson translation) (followed by section and page number, except for the untitled page prior to the introduction)
<i>BW</i>	Martin Heidegger, <i>Basic Writings</i>
<i>CIAP</i>	<i>Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry</i>
<i>CR</i>	<i>Challenges and Renewals</i>
<i>DK</i>	<i>Distinguish to Unite or The Degrees of Knowledge</i>
<i>EE</i>	<i>Existence and the Existent</i>
<i>HA</i>	John D. Caputo, <i>Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics</i>
<i>IBPMP</i>	<i>An Introduction to the Basic Problems of Moral Philosophy</i>
<i>IM</i>	Henri Bergson, <i>An Introduction to Metaphysics</i>
<i>M</i>	William Harmless, <i>Mystics</i>
<i>MAG</i>	<i>Man's Approach to God</i>
<i>MEH</i>	John D. Caputo, <i>The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought</i>
<i>MP</i>	<i>Moral Philosophy</i>
<i>N</i>	<i>Notebooks</i>
<i>OCC</i>	<i>On the Church of Christ</i>
<i>PBC</i>	John G. Trapani, <i>Poetry, Beauty & Contemplation: The Complete Aesthetics of Jacques Maritain</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>The Peasant of the Garonne</i>

<i>PI</i>	(with Raïssa Maritain) <i>Prayer and Intelligence & Selected Essays</i>
<i>PLT</i>	Martin Heidegger, <i>Poetry, Language, Thought</i>
<i>RMNL</i>	<i>The Rights of Man and Natural Law</i>
<i>RR</i>	<i>The Range of Reason</i>
<i>SJCW(R)</i>	St. John of the Cross, <i>The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross</i> , translated and edited by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (revised edition)
<i>TLH</i>	George Pattison, <i>The Later Heidegger</i>
<i>UT</i>	<i>Untrammeled Approaches</i>
<i>VRE</i>	William James, <i>The Varieties of Religious Experience</i>
<i>WHBF</i>	Raïssa Maritain, <i>We Have Been Friends Together</i>

Introduction: The Meaning of Being and the Journey to Mysticism

1. Developmental Background of the Study

Jacques Maritain, was a major representative of the 'Existential' school of the twentieth century's Thomist revival that followed Pope Leo XIII's call for the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas to be taken up and revitalized in Catholic centers of learning. Existential Thomists like Maritain, and also Étienne Gilson, were distinguished from earlier 'Aristotelian' Thomists by their insistence that the dynamic principle or 'act' of existence of any given being is more ontologically basic than the principles of form and prime matter that make up its substance.¹ Maritain's philosophical project was also in sharp contrast to 'Transcendental' Thomists of the revival such as Joseph Maréchal, Bernard Lonergan, and Karl Rahner, who sought to employ the insights of Kantian or modern transcendental philosophy and situate the source of knowledge in the knower. Maritain was deeply distrustful of and rejected much of modern philosophy, conceived in the wake of the 'epistemological' and 'subjective' and turns, beginning in earnest, for him, with Descartes.²

One exception to Maritain's opposition, however, was the French philosopher Henri Bergson. Bergson's thought was neither of Cartesian origin nor (at least explicitly) Christian, and when I first began delineating the topic and identifying the themes of my doctoral research, the crucial role of intuition in many modes of knowing was, I learned, both Bergson's major philosophical contribution and a point on which many twentieth-century philosophers

¹ John. F. X. Knasas, *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2003), pp. 14–17.

² Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), p. vii, 24.

working within the Cartesian tradition—namely, phenomenologists—agreed upon. Consequently, I had in mind a comparison between the Maritain and major phenomenologists of the twentieth century on the subject of the epistemological relevance and modalities of intuition.

In my reading of Maritain, I found that the most significant concept pertaining to intuition in his work was that of ‘connaturality’—a concept, as we shall see, that Maritain appropriated from Thomas Aquinas but whose content and application was also inspired by Bergson’s philosophy of intuition. A most basic characterization of connaturality as presented by Maritain is pre-conceptual, intuitive and, most important of all, experiential knowledge. It is for that reason both affective and cognitive, and involves description of the phenomena known just as much as explanation about how they are known. This latter point I saw as the main point of contact between Maritain and phenomenologists. Given that in almost all of his discussions of the nature and possible instances of connaturality Maritain deals with moral knowledge, artistic knowledge, and mystical knowledge, I thought it appropriate to model the major chapters of my thesis according to these three modes of intuitive, or connatural, knowledge. These are featured in the second part of the thesis.

I soon realized that because the subjects of morality, art and mystical knowledge are first of existential or lived significance, the most appropriate phenomenologists for my comparison were *existential* phenomenologists rather than early Husserlian phenomenologists whose principal concerns were almost entirely epistemological and abstract in nature—examples of the latter being Husserl himself, and, to a lesser extent, Edith Stein. In virtue of the fact that a study on a thinker should be concerned with the biographical as inextricably related to their ideas, there was also a methodological requirement that the existentialists about whom I chose to study were those whose work Maritain had explicitly addressed and critiqued in his own writings, rather than arbitrarily chosen among the long list of twentieth century existentialist thinkers. Among these, Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre were the two obvious choices given that they both feature in some of Maritain’s major works. It was also in virtue of this biographical aspect of the study that Maritain’s own

philosophical development had to be mapped out. To this end Part I of the study includes an exposition of the problematics and themes in the work of Bergson, as Maritain's first philosophical guide, serving to convey the first inspirations and later trajectory of Maritain's thought.

As I moved to investigate Heidegger's existentialism, I found that a central theme that constantly recurs throughout the work of both Heidegger—and, retrospectively, Maritain—is the relatedness that all human ways of acting and knowing, such as morality, art and mysticism have with ultimate questions posed for human existence—the question of the meaning of life and that in which it is contained, namely the question of the meaning of reality or being as such. Such questions, while obviously being the biggest of all, are not just for specialists in epistemology, and they are, above all, of existential, lived significance to us all. As I began draw the connections between Maritain's doctrines of the intuition of being, of the good, of art and the beautiful and of mystical knowledge with this question of the meaning of being—all the while drawing parallels with Heidegger—I chanced upon the book *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics*, by the renowned Heidegger scholar John Caputo. Caputo's central argument in that book would come to determine my doctoral research.

Caputo argues that despite the best efforts of 'existential' Thomists such as Étienne Gilson, the Heideggerian critique of Thomas Aquinas as being a paradigmatic case of viewing being as merely something to be objectivized, as well as failing to differentiate between being as such and beings in the world, still stands.³ While Gilson argues that Aquinas' distinction between the principle of *esse* (the 'act' or 'thatness' of existence) and the principle of *essentia* (the essence or 'whatness' of that which exists) satisfies just these necessities, Caputo argues that because Aquinas' metaphysical doctrines are based upon creation—that which creates and that which is to be created, *esse* in fact serves to objectivize being precisely as an object to be worked, and God, whose *essentia* is pure act, pure *esse*, comes, in fact, to be seen as an

³ *HA*, pp. 2–3.

object Himself—a builder, or *maker*, most fundamentally.⁴ Heidegger argues that Western philosophy has long since forgotten the question of the meaning of being because of an ‘ontotheological’ understanding of being, that is, as an object to be totally comprehended and controlled. According to Caputo, both the medieval Aquinas and the Aquinas of the existential Thomists is inescapably bound to this mechanistic, objectivizing metaphysical structure which leaves nothing left of the mystery of being—nothing of that which allows for the opening up of the difference between being and beings and the ‘unconcealment’ of things into our world.⁵

But another reading of Aquinas is possible, Caputo proclaims. If we take Heidegger’s critique of Aquinas on the former’s own terms, we can acknowledge the objectivizing and mechanical nature of the latter’s philosophical system which dominated Western and Catholic thought for so long. At the same time, we can, by employing a method of ‘retrieval’ or ‘deconstruction’, find that which is hidden or left ‘unthought’ in Aquinas but which nevertheless determines his entire philosophical and religious life.⁶ Retrieving or revealing what is unthought, Heidegger says, is ‘the greatest gift that thinking can bestow.’⁷

The notion of deconstruction as Caputo uses the term refers to ‘taking a text apart in order to find its most essential and enlivening insights and then reconstructing the whole around them.’⁸ In the case of the Thomistic metaphysics of Aquinas, Caputo believes that ‘the uninterruptedly metaphysical mode of St. Thomas’ discourse effectively covers over the truest tendencies of his thought’, and as such, Caputo sets out to ‘break open its metaphysical encasement and to expose the contents of its essentially mystical significance.’⁹ In anticipatory response to the claim that the result of such a deconstruction is a ‘purely hypothetical and capriciously contrived

⁴ Ibid., pp. 5–6.

⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 148–149, 157, 249–254.

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 76.

⁸ *HA*, p. 247.

⁹ Ibid.

Aquinas', Caputo answers that the metaphysical representation of Aquinas is only one way, and not the most genuine way, of presenting his thought.¹⁰ I think we can understand this claim more easily if we consider the fact that a historical figure can be studied in a number of different ways or with different emphases, and the perspective from which one looks at a figure will determine the genre of the study one produces. Naturally, what is presented will only constitute one aspect of a multifaceted life. In the case of Aquinas, if we choose to study him only from the perspective of his metaphysical treatises, we will undoubtedly be left with a 'metaphysical' Aquinas, to the exclusion of other elements in his life and thought.

I mention religious life because Caputo reminds us that Aquinas was not merely an academic philosopher-theologian, but first and principally a Dominican friar and, most basically, a medieval Catholic, whose life was defined by religious practice and piety.¹¹ This is evident in paintings of the saint such as that by Justus of Ghent which is exhibited in the Louvre, as well as in biographies of the saint. Of supreme significance is a reported experience had by Aquinas during the celebration of mass, after which, according to Aquinas' personal secretary Reginald of Piperno, he fell silent on philosophical matters, comparing his masterful writing to 'straw'.¹² This silence in the face of the ineffable mystery of Being, claims Caputo, is the key to the retrieval of a more contemplative, mystical Aquinas—the possibilities of which can be made explicit by means of referring to Aquinas' admirer and successor as chair of theology at the University of Paris, Meister Eckhart. Eckhart's mysticism is precisely one of silence before the mystery of God, of a *Gelassenheit*, or 'letting-be' of God as distinct from any and all concepts or thoughts we may have about Him. In an earlier work, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (1978), Caputo argues that it is this Eckhartian mysticism which is at work in Heidegger's own project and his own 'element' of mysticism, a position which he maintains in *Heidegger and Aquinas*.¹³ Eckhartian mysticism, then,

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 248.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 7, 252–256.

¹² Ibid., pp. 252–253.

¹³ Ibid., p. 247.

can be used as a connecting bridge between Aquinas and Heidegger, and establish among them something of a mystical rapport, even if the mystical elements are quite dissimilar and Heidegger cannot, in Caputo's estimation, be called a mystic (for reasons I will elucidate over the course of this study).¹⁴ This 'deconstruction' of Aquinas' allows for a retrospective re-interpretation of the principles at work in his thinking, and Caputo, following Pierre Rousselot's classical study, *The Intellectualism of Saint Thomas*, and turning to Meister Eckhart, Aquinas' successor as the Dominican chair of theology at Paris, finds a luminous thread running throughout. What we find at its end, Caputo argues, is the overcoming of metaphysics and a species of mysticism.¹⁵

With this basic exposition of Caputo's thesis, it should be noted that the notion of deconstruction which he employs seems to be a combination of Heidegger's '*Destruktion*' and Jacques Derrida's '*déconstruction*'. Caputo acknowledges the negative connotations of Heidegger's original term and says that for this reason he prefers the term of 'deconstruction' used by Derrida.¹⁶ Responding to questions about the method, Derrida says that 'deconstruction' is 'an analysis which tries to find out how their [philosophers'] thinking works or does not work, to find the tensions, the contradictions, the heterogeneity within their own corpus. . . . [and in finding these tensions, etc.] it is interested in what is considered the great canon—the study of great Western works—and open at the same time to new works, new objects, new fields, new cultures, new languages'.¹⁷ With this, no explicit goal or end point is implied, which is in contrast to Heidegger who writes that the end of *Destruktion* is to 'arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being—the ways which have guided us ever since'.¹⁸ Caputo repeatedly affirms that in deconstructing Aquinas' metaphysics he intends to break open the 'possibilities which can be brought forth'.¹⁹ At the

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 274–275; *MEHT*, p. 239.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 265–271.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 247.

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, (New York, NY: Fordham University Press), 1997), pp. 9–11.

¹⁸ *BT*, 6/44.

¹⁹ *HA*, p. 274.

same time, he nails his colors to the mast in his commitment to Heidegger's basic claim that Western metaphysics ought to be characterized as ontotheology and that the primordial experience of Being as taken ontotheologically ought to be discerned in Aquinas and overcome.

2. The Case of Maritain

Caputo's amazingly bold (and difficult to understand) claims about Aquinas made me consider Maritain's life and work, as one of the twentieth-century's most influential Catholic and Thomist thinkers, in a new light, and made me ask whether what Caputo said of Aquinas could also be said of Maritain. My research on Maritain led me to believe the answer to this question was 'yes'. Being equally fascinated with Maritain's philosophy and his personal story, I was convinced that the determining factor in Maritain's colossal philosophical project, illustrated especially in his relatively early masterwork *The Degrees of Knowledge*, was his search for the meaning of being and the infinite mystery of being that ever eludes us. This amounts to a *relationship* between the person for searching meaning and ultimate reality that is at first expressed in metaphysical terms but only realizable in a mystical experience which underlies and lies at the summit of such a search. Caputo writes of Aquinas that 'beneath the scaffolding of his Scholastic metaphysics there lies an animating mystical experience.'²⁰ I believed that the same could be said for Maritain when he writes the following:

[A] mystical aspiration traverses every metaphysics; it seems . . . the desire—an inefficacious one—of knowing the first cause in its essence is like a secret fire in the heart of the metaphysician. He does not know what he thus desires, for the philosopher as such has no conception of the Beatific Vision and of what God has prepared for those who love Him. His desire is a natural mystical desire.²¹

Mystical wisdom and theological wisdom vivify metaphysical wisdom, just as the latter vivifies philosophical activities of a lower grade—and this happens in a region in which no human word is

²⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

²¹ *DK*, pp. 284–285.

spoken, and no violence can be exerted, in the immaterial heart of the soul's energies.²²

And perhaps more significantly:

To beat our heads against the wall when the *why?* escapes us is nothing extraordinary. The longing for death always comes when the work of pouring truths into the mould of our truest words seems to be treason to truth. Happy are they whose anguish has been transfigured by the purity of tears. The biographers of St. Thomas tell us that he wept much: the masterpiece of serenest objectivity was born in the tears of a saint. . . . He wept as he gazed at the mystery of being; he wept because he saw enough to faint under the flood of that which he did not see.²³

And again, more significantly, in the introduction to his *The Degrees of Knowledge*, entitled 'The Majesty and Poverty of Metaphysics'—from which I take the main title of the present study, hence the quotation marks:

[This] is the poverty of metaphysics (and yet its majesty too). It awakens a desire for supreme union, for spiritual possession completed in the order of reality itself and not only in the concept. It cannot satisfy that desire.²⁴

A few questions related to this hypothesis presented themselves. Were there events in Maritain's life that were of similar effect to those experienced by Aquinas? Could it be that Maritain's modulations of intuition or connatural knowledge as seen in his treatments of metaphysics, ethics and art pointed to some common, higher, intuitional experience that we could call mystical? Perhaps Maritain's intuition of being was itself mystical in nature? Most importantly, however, what precisely is meant by the 'mystical', 'mysticism', 'mystical knowledge', 'mystical experience' was merely assumed by Caputo, and assumed by myself in applying Caputo's thesis to Maritain. These issues presented themselves to me as urgent and requiring the utmost diligence, and the latter, I came to see, required addressing first. The question of what the

²² Jacques Maritain, *Science and Wisdom*, trans. Bernard Wall (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1940), p. 86.

²³ *EE*, pp. 145–146.

²⁴ *DK*, p. 7.

mystical means will be addressed later in this introduction.

The question of whether the mystical was the source and summit of Maritain's religious and philosophical life demanded that I take the thesis in a new direction. In my view this change of direction did not represent a break in terms of subject-matter but rather a progression and indeed a radical pushing through to the highest (or deepest) planes of philosophical and theological discourse, taking Maritain's terms of the intuition of being and connaturality to their final, and logical conclusions.

In this connection I should mention that I found that Maritain and Jean-Paul Sartre shared only two insights—only one of which turned out to be relevant as the nature of the thesis changed. The first is a wordless and earth-shattering intuition of existence or *being*, which for Sartre is the first taste of the meaningless and nauseating reality of the world we find ourselves in. For Maritain, as we shall see over the course of this study, the intuition of being is much richer in possibilities as the gateway to an overarching theistic metaphysics and encompasses both positive and negative experiences. I shall argue that while not being an instance of connaturality, the intuition of being in fact the beating heart of all of Maritain's philosophy and the best way to approach his underlying mystical tendency.

The second shared insight between Maritain and Sartre is the necessary role of intuition in moral decision-making in virtue of the indeterminacy of the circumstances and conditions in which one makes a moral decision. For Sartre this necessity implies absolute moral relativism, whereas for Maritain it amounts to nothing less than evidence for freedom of the will over and against a deterministic human nature that is nevertheless bestowed on us by God. This second point of contact was, therefore, without significant implications for the study, for I am concerned not with the question of moral relativism and its wider implications for the field of ethics but with the values and obligations (and their content) which are at play when moral decisions are made and how they relate to mystical experience in Maritain. I therefore only address the first point of contact which, in itself, does not warrant an extensive, dedicated comparative analysis between Maritain and Sartre

given that Sartre's existentialism is in fact derivative of Heidegger's. As such, I discuss the relevant details of Sartre's intuition of being in the context of the wider comparative analysis of Maritain and Heidegger. And as preparation for this extensive comparative analysis, I provide an exposition of the philosophy of Heidegger in relation to Maritain's preoccupations as a Catholic and a Thomist philosopher in Part I, following the outline of Bergson's philosophy of intuition and its influence on Maritain.

The change in direction, to the mystical experience of reality as the most profound dimension of human existence and the hidden source of metaphysical inquiry, was not, therefore, horizontal but vertical—as one scales a mountain or an aircraft gains altitude, or indeed, as an archeologist digs deeper and a diver pierces the ocean's depths. In the thesis I speak of 'levels of relation to Being', a notion inspired by *Maritain's* 'degrees of knowledge', and which illustrates both immanence and progression rather than clear-cut breaks, implying that if the thesis presented here is broad in its topic (namely, 'Being'), it is also narrow insofar as it considers it in terms of the *movement* as we find it in Maritain's life and work. That Maritain, in dealing with connaturality is in some ways similar to and performs the same act as the phenomenologist in virtue of his concern with the experiential, and with description rather than explanation, remains relevant. While it is a theme that stands in the background, it grounds the initial comparison with Heidegger and the investigation into the mystical. In this connection, it is helpful for us to remember these words of Maritain:

Whereas speculative language, because it considers the pure object of the intellect, is an essentially ontological language, practical and mystical language . . . must, of necessity, be predominantly psychological and affective, because it considers things in relation to, and even as inviscerated in, the acting subject.²⁵

Following Aquinas and St. John of the Cross, Maritain writes that 'contemplation is an experiential knowledge of love and union.'²⁶ And on this

²⁵ Ibid., p. 357.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 359.

point Maritain further quotes St. John of the Cross, who, in his *Spiritual Canticle*, warns: 'it would be ignorance to think that sayings of love understood mystically, such as those of the present stanzas, can be fairly explained by words of any kind.'²⁷ Maritain always insists on the radical difference between metaphysical and mystical propositions.

The question of the immanence of the mystical in Maritain required a fresh look at both the philosopher and the man behind the words. Corresponding to the biographical and philosophical elements of the study, it required asking what influences on him—events, people, philosophical preoccupations and doctrines—would confirm my hypothesis. Chapter 3 of Part I of the study sets out just this methodology in greater detail, as applying Caputo's deconstructive approach not just to the events in Maritain's life but also influential people. It identifies and discusses two inspirational figures in Maritain's life for study. The first is Léon Bloy, a Catholic novelist and prophet figure who was to become the primary inspiration for Maritain's conversion to Catholicism and become Maritain's godfather. The second, Georges Rouault, a Catholic painter and friend of Bloy's, for whose religious artworks Maritain was to give the highest praise in his writings on the philosophy of art. Both Bloy and Rouault were, to put it mildly, social outcasts and misfits, whose lives were defined by a radical, individual piety and, I argue, a spiritual bent akin to mysticism that was especially influential for Jacques Maritain and supremely relevant for his philosophical development.

After establishing a theoretical framework in the first chapter, Part II of the study includes three extensive treatments of Maritain's approaches to moral, artistic and mystical knowledge directed to the question of whether the source and summit of Maritain's philosophical enterprise is the mystical. In the first two chapters I argue that for Maritain, connatural moral and artistic knowledge amount to analogies of mystical knowledge. They are not synonymous with the mystical because, in Thomistic language, the *habitus*—the virtue or capacity—of the latter is distinct from the other two in virtue of its 'formal object': God, who is ultimate reality and experienced as such, rather

²⁷ St. John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, 'Prologue', quoted in *DK*, p. 357.

than a glimmer or mere aspect of it. It is the direct experience of ultimate reality afforded by mystical knowledge and the mystical life that is the 'element or quality in them', as William James writes, 'which we can meet nowhere else.'²⁸ Moral and artistic experiences can, like metaphysics, serve to inspire and cultivate mystical experiences and mystical life as a vocation in virtue of their intuitive, connatural modes of knowing and their affective qualities: namely, as we will see, the supremacy of love and a giving of the personality and being of the subject in the face of the good and the beautiful. As analogies, they often reflect and imitate mystical aspiration. Here, Bloy and Rouault and the determining events in Maritain's life become crucial. The event in Maritain's life that has most significance is Maritain's suicide pact with his wife Raïssa in 1902, when they were both students at the Sorbonne. This, as I suggest in the fourth and final chapter of Part II, marks the beginning of the mystical journey in Maritain that is echoed throughout his life and philosophical work.

3. Defining the Mystical: The 'Core/Contextualist' Debate

A critical issue which presents itself throughout all these considerations is the question of what, precisely, is meant by 'mysticism', 'mystical knowledge', 'mystical experience', 'mystical theology', the words which Maritain uses often with regard to experiences of God, 'mystical *contemplation*' and 'infused contemplation', as well as the quality which all of these share, which is the 'mystical'. The attendant methodological questions of how exactly one is to go about defining mysticism and what methodological assumptions one must take in doing so came to the surface at once. Was I to take Caputo's own definition of the mystical in virtue of the fact that my study was, for all intents and purposes, an extension of his? Or was I to take Maritain's own definition and from there, on his own terms, judge whether there is an overcoming of metaphysics in mysticism in his thought? Or perhaps I ought to research the literature on defining mysticism, provide a literature review, formulate a

²⁸ VRE, p. 62.

working definition for my purposes and then proceed to making my argument?

To understand the parameters and philosophical implications of both Caputo's and Maritain's conception of the mystical however, would in fact require a wider context, including the recent literature, in which to compare them to others. In attempting to provide that wider context and compose a literature review, I found that mysticism is, like so many other concepts, very much a contested one. If I did not arbitrarily decide on a definition of mysticism on the basis of a comparison and synthesis of current theories, I should, I reasoned, at least, first identify the contours and limitations of Caputo's definition, and secondly, do the same for Maritain, in order to see whether the latter's mysticism is the kind that the former claims for Aquinas (and if it wasn't, whether my thesis would still hold).

The publication of William James' Gifford Lectures as *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in 1902 attracted academic interest in mystical experience as a psychological phenomenon that could be empirically investigated. James' investigation, and many of those following him, primarily took the form of examining case studies of those claiming to have had mystical experiences, and particularly what are now known as 'peak' experiences—in James' words, 'cases where the religious spirit is unmistakable and extreme.'²⁹ James was concerned with the subjective experiences reported by individuals or their biographers, taking religion for the purposes of his lectures to be '*the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.*'³⁰ Distinguishing between 'personal' and 'institutional' religion, the latter being all other aspects of religion, such as scripture, ritual, clergy, and in fact all tradition, James writes that he chooses 'to ignore the institutional branch entirely'.³¹ As William Harmless points out, James' focus on the biographical and subjective appears to be a sharp break from traditional treatments of mystical experience as one important, though not the most important, part of religious life—the theological context and content of which

²⁹ Ibid. p. 57.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 50 (original emphasis).

³¹ Ibid., p. 49.

was called ‘mystical theology’³² by those such as St. John of the Cross, and later, also by Maritain.

In setting out his methodological and conceptual assumptions at the beginning of *The Varieties*, James continues that ‘Since the relation [between people and what they take to be the divine] may be either moral, physical, or ritual, it is evident that out of religion in the sense in which we take it, theologies, philosophies, and ecclesiastical organizations may secondarily grow.’³³ James therefore considers all extrinsic manifestations of religion as outgrowths of a primordial experience of which all mystics share—this primordial experience being a function of the ‘personal religion’ he speaks of. The mystical experience is identical for all mystics but is subsequently given (often incommensurable) interpretation(s) on the basis of their respective religious presuppositions and evangelical commitments. To support such a thesis, James offers four ‘marks’ of the mystical, four criteria by which an experience can justifiably be called a mystical experience. These are ‘Ineffability, a ‘Noetic quality’, ‘Transiency’, and ‘Passivity’.³⁴ In proposing such a thesis, James became a representative of those arguing that all mystical experiences—and all religions—despite outward differences of creed—have a common core, of origin and how exactly they are experienced. Well-known thinkers who have advanced a ‘core’ or ‘essentialist’ thesis of some kind include Aldous Huxley, Alan Watts, Walter T. Stace and John Hick, among others.³⁵

As Heather Erb suggests, core theorists, in claiming to have identified a common and universally experienceable heart of all religions, aim to establish three elements of mysticism as invulnerable to attempts at reduction and skeptical attack: ‘a comprehensive phenomenology of mysticism, a

³² *M*, pp. 5–9, 36.

³³ *VRE*, p. 50

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 367–368.

³⁵ See Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1945); Alan Watts, *This is It: And Other Essays on Zen and Spiritual Experience* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1960) and *Cloud-Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown: A Mountain Journal* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1973); Walter T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1960).

nonsectarian spirituality, and a robust ecumenism.³⁶ That all religions—and by extension, religious denominations—have a common, experienceable core is undoubtedly one of the central arguments used by those whose efforts are directed to not only interfaith and ecumenical dialogue—which is laudable—but also establishing a non-religious, personally-directed mystical ‘spirituality’ as distinct from religion and which is regarded as superior to it. I will show that what we find in Maritain’s discussions of mystical experience, particularly in his late works *The Peasant of the Garonne* and *On the Church of Christ*, echoes at least some of these interfaith and even Christian ecumenical concerns, while remaining committed to the truth claims of orthodox Catholicism.

Opposed to the core thesis is the view that mystical experiences are determined in both origin and content or manner of experience by the prior religious beliefs and available religious language of the mystic. This view, which has been most famously articulated by Steven Katz, is known as ‘contextualism’ or ‘constructivism’.³⁷ Katz argues that the beliefs of mystics in varying times and places are so different that it is false to the phenomena to attempt to find a common core among them, and that it is unlikely that the evident differences in the accounts of mystical experience are due to subsequent interpretation or, as Stace also suggests, an inability to distinguish between what are commonly called ‘pure states’ of consciousness and say, theistic interpretations.³⁸

Katz writes that it is ‘necessary in order to understand mysticism to ground the mystic in his polyform context so that one comes to realize what may well be the *necessary* connection between the mystic’s way and his goal, the mystic’s problematic and the mystic’s solution to this problematic; the mystic’s intentions and the mystic’s actual experiences’.³⁹ For Katz, the

³⁶ Heather McAdam Erb, ‘Natural Mysticism Gateway or Detour? Aquinas, Maritain, and the Core/Contextualist Debate’, in John J. Conley (ed.), *Redeeming Philosophy: From Metaphysics to Aesthetics* (Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association and The Catholic University of America Press, 2014), p. 27.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31.

³⁸ Walter T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan & Co, Ltd., 1961), pp. 102–104.

³⁹ Steven T. Katz, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, in Steven T. Katz (ed.) *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1983), p. ix.

beliefs and expectations that the mystic brings to his or her wider religious life determines what mystical experiences can be had, making them particular to each religious tradition. In virtue of this epistemological divergence, Katz is able to persuasively argue, concerning the experiences of the Buddhist in contrast with those of the Jew or Christian:

There is no intelligible way that anyone can legitimately argue that a 'no self' experience of 'empty' calm is the same experience of intense, loving, intimate relationship between two substantial selves, one of whom is conceived of as the personal God of western religion and all that this entails. The losing of self is not equivalent to the finding of another, especially when this other is conceived of as the God of Jewish tradition.⁴⁰

The wider religious context in which the mystic undergoes their experience encompasses religious cosmologies and narratives about the history and nature of human beings in relation to the divine, as well as distinctions between orthodox and heterodox conceptions of the nature of the divine itself and genuine experiences one might have of it. For Katz, the mystic brings all of this to the experience, such that there is no pre-given mystical phenomena that may be universally shared:

[I]n order to understand mysticism it is not just a question of studying the reports of the mystic after the experiential event but of acknowledging that the experience itself as well as the form in which it is reported is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape, his experience . . . [What] is being argued is that, for example, the Hindu mystic does not have an experience of X which he then describes in the, to him, familiar language and symbols of Hinduism, but rather he has a Hindu experience, i.e., his experience is not an unmediated experience of X but is itself the, at least partially, pre-formed anticipated Hindu experience of Brahman. Again, the Christian mystic does not experience some unidentified reality, which he then conveniently labels God, but rather has the at least partially prefigured Christian experiences of God, or Jesus, or the like.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Steven T. Katz, 'Language, Epistemology and Mysticism', in Steven T. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 39–40.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

As Harmless explains, contextualism is the dominant position among most contemporary scholars of comparative mysticism and has the advantage of utilising an empirical approach to the study of mysticism. Harmless nicely sums up the contextualist critique of the core approach by saying that ‘mystical experiences do not come out of the blue. They are the culmination of broader experiential pathways.’⁴² Elsewhere Katz expresses this fact that in their seeking experiences of the divine, mystics ‘seek different goals because their initial, generative, problems are different. The Sufi and the Christian mystic begin with the “problem” of finitude, sin, and distance from God, while the Buddhist begins with the problem of suffering and *anitya* or impermanence’.⁴³ Certainly, from this perspective, it seems like arrogance and the worst kind of intellectual or even spiritual elitism to suggest that the differences between what mystics report are merely verbal and not, in fact, experiential.

Other flaws of the core thesis can also be pointed out, for example that the studies used to support it are often confined to case studies mystics of only one or two religious traditions (usually Christian, as in Henri Bergson’s *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*), and that there is often a methodological bias in favor of mystics whose emphasis is apophatic—to the neglect of those whose mysticism also features cataphatic and/or liturgical aspects (for example D. T. Suzuki’s *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*, which takes Eckhart ‘as representative of Christian Mysticism’).⁴⁴ This is to say nothing of the post-Heideggerian and post-Derridean hermeneutic propensity toward textual analysis in contemporary theology and philosophy of religion, in virtue of which the attempt to derive a primordial, pre-conceptual nugget of mystical experience from the reports of mystics seems to many naïve at best.

Nevertheless, the contextualist view, while appearing to be more epistemologically sophisticated than the core view, has nevertheless also come under scathing attack. Philip Almond, for instance, argues that Katz has failed to show why there is a ‘*necessary*’ connection a between mystic’s

⁴² *M*, p. 256.

⁴³ Katz, ‘Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism’, p. 62.

⁴⁴ Daisetsu Suzuki, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. vii.

religious beliefs and their mystical experiences, rather than a 'strong *contingent* correlation'.⁴⁵ Almond agrees with the basic idea mystics emerging from within a tradition will most likely have experiences that correlate or can correlate to the beliefs and previously reported experiences by mystics of that tradition. Yet, 'experiential novelty is ruled out *a priori*' by Katz and this is a mistake because, Almond explains, just as our gastronomic experiences often reflect our culture, this does not prevent one trying dishes of a foreign culture and thereby having—as far as oneself is concerned—novel experiences. In addition, powerful mystical experiences are often interpreted by means of analogy and allegory in order to fit into theological moulds, yet in so doing, they can also 'lead to the creative transformation of religious traditions', which suggests that the experience that the mystic has is not *necessarily* or entirely determined by their religious beliefs.⁴⁶ Almond also points out that mystical traditions are often influenced by philosophical schools or even other mystical traditions, an instance being the influence of Neo-Platonism in the Christian mystical tradition.⁴⁷ For Almond, this shows that Katz's contextualism, as an empirical claim, demonstrates unfalsifiability, rendering it merely trivially true. But, as he says: 'While it is trivially true that the experience of a Christian mystic is formed by his cultural context, it is clearly not true that the experience of a Christian mystic is formed *solely* by a Christian context.'⁴⁸

This remark is particularly salient when it comes to the case of Maritain, for, as I will show, Maritain's mysticism is *immanent* throughout his life and work, and that while it corresponds to Christian belief and comes to be expressed and developed in explicitly Christian terms, it is not *necessarily* determined or contained by Christian beliefs. I argue that this element of Maritain's mysticism is easy enough to identify before his conversion to Catholicism. Such a case constitutes an anomaly for Katz's contextualism.

One more problem with Katz's view is that it risks religious and mystical

⁴⁵ Philip C. Almond, 'Mysticism and its Contexts', in Robert K. C. Forman (ed.), *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990) p. 213.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 213–214.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

relativism. In something of a Kantian manner, as Martin Adam demonstrates,⁴⁹ Katz claims that ‘all experience is processed through, organized by and makes itself available to us in extremely complex ways,’⁵⁰ and furthermore, that ‘the forms of consciousness which the mystic brings to an experience set structured and limiting parameters on what the experience will be, i.e., on what will be experienced’.⁵¹ If this is the case, it rules out any objective or extra-mental source of mystical experiences, which would be an unwarranted presupposition on Katz’ part. It would also mean that mystical experiences are entirely derived from the mystic’s prior belief and language structures and would share nothing in common. But we have seen that the former notion is false, and as we also have seen, ‘different mystical discourses are not totally incommensurable anymore than are different languages’,⁵² in virtue of their historical relationships, mutual influence, and in many cases, translatability of one into the other, and vice versa.

What has been the purpose of these considerations of the core/contextualist debate? It has made it possible to identify and situate Caputo’s conception of mysticism in a wider context, which then allows us to compare it to Maritain’s and ask whether the two are the same. In this, I do not intend to attempt to discern which of the two sides of the debate may be correct or more correct than the other. That said, I do believe it necessary to consider a mystic’s biography and broader religious or spiritual background contributes to their views about mysticism and mystical experience, and Katz’s example of the Buddhist and Jewish or Christian experience is sufficient to prove the validity of the argument.

With this, we ought to acknowledge with Almond, however, that if we reject the implication of Katz’s position that the content and context of mystical experiences are *necessarily* connected, what we are left with is description of the facts which is merely trivially true.⁵³ As such, we should not expect that

⁴⁹ Martin T. Adam, ‘A Post-Kantian Perspective on Recent Debates about Mystical Experience’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 70 (4) (2002), pp. 801–817.

⁵⁰ Katz, ‘Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism’, p. 26.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Almond, ‘Mysticism and its Contexts’, p. 217.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

the case of the mystic, in their religious experiences, subsequent interpretations and composition of their interpretative records of their experiences, should be any different in that there will at least very likely be a correlation between content and context, even while the mystic can also have novel experiences because theological structures and religious practices can be combined, ignored, transcended, or even, as Almond points out, reinvigorated precisely in virtue of the insights gained through mystical experiences.⁵⁴

I therefore share with William Harmless the conviction expressed in his wonderfully articulate and logically rigorous *Mystics* that in approaching mysticism one must 'situate individual mystics in their wider world, both historically and intellectually',⁵⁵ while also, for reasons just provided, preventing ourselves from entirely and deterministically reducing their experiences to the physical, religious and literary environment in which they occur and, as a result, falling into mere a psychological relativism of mystical experience. In the words of Harmless himself: 'I am concerned that too often mysticism gets presented as a network of psychological or theological abstractions, divorced from the life stories of those who have shaped it—as though it somehow takes place outside the bounds of time and space. Mysticism needs to stay embedded in the thicket of the history that created it.'⁵⁶

Again, this is not to claim that a mystic's experiences are *necessarily* determined by or confined within the conceptual framework of the particular religion they practice, but it is to claim that the mystic's mysticism will be largely shaped by their biography—their religious quest, their intellectual and spiritual propensities, and their influences, whether it be those of acquaintances or community—and, because of this, expressed in one 'mystical language' among many.⁵⁷ This must be taken as a methodological necessity in examining the mysticism of Maritain.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 214.

⁵⁵ *M*, p. x.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 236.

With this comes an acknowledgement of the difference between mystical 'experience' and mystical 'knowledge'. Harmless argues that the former, following James, is the focus of modern writers on mysticism, whereas mystical writings themselves concern themselves less with experiences of the God or the divine and more with illuminating ways for spiritual perfection, which include mystical experiences and using scriptural images to outline the contours of such experiences. All of this takes it for granted that mystical experiences are themselves not isolated events, but one element in the spiritual life and granting certain kinds of knowledge. For Christian writers, they lend themselves to knowledge about who God is and who we are as human persons in relation to God.⁵⁸ This, as I said, is what the mystical 'theology' of St. John of the Cross and Maritain consists in.

It also, as Harmless points out, means that whatever mystical knowledge may be, it is not just conveyed by mystics in autobiographical texts, but in a wide variety of genres, such as letters, journals, sermons, treatises, scriptural commentaries, poetry, proverbs, and hagiography. I am concerned to illustrate how Maritain's mystical theology is immanent in all his work, which crosses some of those genres but, as I explained in outlining my argument, I am persuaded that what makes this immanent mysticism in Maritain are mystical experiences and the influence of people exuding something akin to mysticism. I therefore hope to place equal emphasis on the approaches of both the 'core' and 'contextualist' schools in drawing out the mystical in Maritain.

4. Caputo and the Limitations of Apophaticism

So now we have an overview of the current debate on the nature and role of the mystical, where does Caputo stand? What is his operative definition in *Aquinas and Heidegger*? Caputo employs increasingly elaborate scholastic vocabulary and distinctions in spelling out what the mystical he identifies in Aquinas refers to. In distinguishing between Aquinas the scholastic doctor and

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 228–229, 232.

Aquinas the mystic, Caputo makes use of *disputatio* and *ratio* to characterize the former and *pietas*, *intellectus*, *pasi divina*, *raptus*, and *assimilatio*, and *unio* to characterize the latter. Caputo's central argument is that on the basis of a Heideggerian deconstruction of Aquinas' life, and in particular, how Aquinas appears in the painting by Justus of Ghent—deep in thought and yet serene, with his black Dominican habit draping over his arms—we can take a fresh look at key Thomistic doctrines and find in them an in-built tendency to reach beyond metaphysics and impel us to an apophatic mystical experience, of a letting-be of God (or to use Heidegger's term, *Gelassenheit*), which is evidenced by Aquinas' almost complete silence following his alleged mystical experience or revelation from God:

The painting discloses a world not of disputatious Scholastic argumentation but of composure, not of *disputatio* but of *pietas*, not of calculativeness but of meditation and *Gelassenheit*. When one hears the words of St. Thomas in the *Summa*, one may miss the silence. But the painting discloses the silence of St. Thomas, which gives the words their meaning.⁵⁹

Caputo says that a deconstruction of Aquinas 'must be carried out on two fronts: that of the interpretation of *esse* and that of the interpretation of *intellectus*' and that there is a unity of the two that mirrors the unity of 'thought' and 'Being' in Aquinas.⁶⁰ That said, *intellectus* is the most important, and because *esse* is the cornerstone of Maritain's philosophy and as such requires much elucidation, let us look at the second for now. Here the discussion actually concerns both the concepts of *ratio* (reason, or reasoning) and *intellectus* (intellect). Closely reading Aquinas' epistemological teaching, Caputo argues that *ratio* for Aquinas characterizes human science as a way of knowing that proceeds step by step, from gathering the many and grouping them into a unity, whereas the function of *intellectus* consists in immediate and holistic insight, *intellectus* being that 'unitative' faculty which is directed to the

⁵⁹ *HA*, p. 7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

unification between mind and things, and between God the soul.⁶¹ In contrast to human beings, whose mode of knowledge is primarily that of *ratio*, angels, whose cognition is entirely in the mode of *intellectus*, apprehend and comprehend all the aspects of metaphysical principles such as *esse*.⁶² *Intellectus* operates from the perspective of one overarching truth and on that basis understands the multiple. 'Thus, as reason moves backward, by way of "resolution," from the many to the one, intellect moves forward, by way of "composition," from the one to the many.'⁶³ How does this relate to mysticism? Caputo continues:

But it is the task of metaphysics to treat of that highest unity toward which all the sciences tend, and into which they are resolved, for metaphysics treats of the highest principles and supreme causes of all things. Though metaphysics, like every science, must make use of reason, and through it is permeated by rational and demonstrative argumentation, what is most distinctive about metaphysical knowledge is its character as the beginning (*principium*) and end (*terminus*) of reason . . . [M]etaphysics signifies . . . a simple insight into the highest principles and ultimate causes under which all other things are comprehended.

St. Thomas appears to say that although metaphysics is embedded in reason and must carry out its life within the framework of discursive argumentation, it nonetheless strives to extricate itself from *ratio* and transform itself into *intellectus*. . . .

Metaphysics [therefore] tends by its own nature to pass from the calculative to the meditative mode. But this remains forever impossible for metaphysics so long as metaphysics is a *Scientia* practiced by men whose characteristic mode of thinking is "rational." What is needed to carry out this inner tendency of metaphysics, of which metaphysics remains incapable, is for man to take up an altogether new way of thinking, that of *intellectus* itself. This is possible for Thomas in a thoroughgoing and complete way only after death. But it is possible in the present life, as a foretaste and foreshadowing, in mystical experience. Metaphysics thus points toward mysticism.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 265–267.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 260–262.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 263.

Mysticism is the terrestrial fulfillment of metaphysics, even as union with God is its celestial fulfillment.⁶⁴

Having here the essentials of one of Caputo's arguments, it is clear to me that Caputo, despite his situating Aquinas in his historical and religious context in which scripture, liturgy and prayer employed much cataphatic language about God, means by the 'mystical' (i) ineffable experiences and (ii) apophaticism in mystical theology. Apophatic theology involves a negation of positive attributions to or predication of God, describing God, not directly, but indirectly, by saying what God is *not* in light of an experience or revelation of His inner nature. In the Latin of Aquinas, this is theology *via negativa*, 'by way of negation'.

As previously mentioned, earlier studies on mysticism tend to be flawed because of an arbitrary emphasis on apophasis in mystical experiences and reports of experiences in the writings of mystics. Apophaticism has often been used by 'core' theorists of mysticism in arguing precisely for an ineffable, common core of profound mystical experiences in all times and places that is utterly other than the religions and theologies that grow up on the basis of them. Caputo's argument is that it is the same Eckhartian—that is, apophatic—mystical 'element' that we see in Heidegger that can be identified in Aquinas, and therefore his focus is on apophaticism:

[O]nce the depth dimension, the mystical element in St. Thomas; metaphysics, is wrested loose from this metaphysical encasement one finds a Thomas who eludes Heidegger's critique of metaphysics, for whom metaphysics is something to be overcome, a more essential thinker in whom Heidegger would have been compelled to concede that here too—and not just in Eckhart—there is a profound unity of mysticism and thought. The key to St. Thomas lies in the *non possum*. In the *non possum* there lies the most profound possibility of St. Thomas' thought.⁶⁵

I agree with Caputo and apply his argument to the case of Maritain in this study with much confidence in the latter's aforementioned statements, such as that

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 263–265.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 11.

'a mystical aspiration traverses every metaphysics' and metaphysics 'awakens a desire for supreme union, for spiritual possession completed in the order of reality itself and not only in the concept.' But I also do more than merely agree and recite Caputo's thesis, for Caputo, in his strong emphasis on the apophatic in Aquinas, neglects the cataphatic—the cataphatic which was necessary for most of Aquinas' religious life and writings. Harmless rightly argues that mysticism, insofar as it emerges from and utilizes a religious language, is also present in other forms precisely because it is another way of doing theology, including liturgy, spiritual and ascetic practices (such as the *Exercises* of St. Ignatius) and biblical commentaries. In all of these practices, it is not as if a religion and its theology is a mere appendage to mysticism. In fact, mysticism often includes these in its very exercise, and in a communal manner, often taking place in religious communities whose purpose is to promote spiritual perfection.⁶⁶ Maritain himself writes that when a record of mystical experience is handed down and shared among Christians, it 'awakens in hearts the desire for this recollection in God, and for the seeking of spiritual perfection'.⁶⁷ It should be said, moreover, that religious communities and the individuals composing them regard scripture as indispensable in their pursuits. Again, to quote Harmless:

Sometimes mystics appeal to scriptural verses, scriptural terminology, or scriptural images as a way to articulate, even map, the contours of their own (or others') most profound interior experiences. Other times mystics appeal to scripture as a public standard to judge their own (or others') experiences—to judge whether they be true or false, orthodox or heterodox, divinely inspired or demonic. The modern accent on experience distorts the usual mystical balance: scriptures measure experience, not vice versa.⁶⁸

In modifying and applying Caputo's thesis that what underlies Aquinas' thought is a movement toward *unio* to Maritain I am arguing two other things. The first is that both the apophatic and the cataphatic have roles to play in realizing

⁶⁶ *M*, pp. 231–242.

⁶⁷ *PI*, p. 49.

⁶⁸ *M*, p. 232.

such a unitive, ineffable mystical experience as Aquinas had—after all, the experience was had when Aquinas had finished celebrating mass. The second is that such unitive, ineffable mystical experiences need not, just because they are ineffable, imply only a secondary value to a mystic’s philosophy, theology, and general cataphatic means of contact with God or the divine, be it prayer, worship, liturgy or scriptural exegesis. While Caputo points out that Aquinas’ experience and consequent silence was never used against him but rather as a validation of his saintly life,⁶⁹ it seems to me that because Caputo is so concerned to meet the Heideggerian critique of Thomism that he relegates the cataphatic to second place in virtue of an apparent ontotheological interpretation, and places undue emphasis on the apophatic as found in Eckhart (and, as he claims, Heidegger and Aquinas himself). While it is not wrong, Caputo’s thesis suffers the limitation of the one-sidedness of earlier studies of mysticism. Caputo seems to argue for the core view that the mystical in Aquinas is an experience of the divine that is completely unrelated and uninfluenced by the mystic’s wider religious life, and that the proper mystical way to approach the divine is solely by apophatic means.

In this study, I argue that in the case of Maritain, we can meet the Heideggerian critique without necessarily relegating the cataphatic to the realm ontotheology and second-rate religious life, and that, in the case of Maritain, both the apophatic and cataphatic have roles to play in determining just *what* mystical experiences Maritain had and *how* these fit in his wider thinking. I offer a composite of core and contextualist arguments, as it pertains to the mysticism of Jacques Maritain. I argue that we can identify animating mystical experiences which are (to use James’ ‘marks’) ineffable, possessing a noetic quality, transient, and only possible in virtue of passivity on the part of the mystic, which underly Maritain’s deepest philosophical principles and insights. Yet, I also argue that the mystical experiences Maritain had and interpreted precisely for the purposes of a mystical ‘theology’ were in part determined by a specific kind of religious sentiment and religious practices that required a rich spiritual life. Maritain’s Catholic life, as we shall see,

⁶⁹ HA, pp. 255–256.

encompassed quite literal beliefs in supernatural realities and miracles, Catholic prayers and devotions, liturgy (namely, the Catholic mass), an intensely active part in the Catholic Church itself, an oblate and taking vows in smaller religious communities and orders, spiritual apprenticeships, and spiritual exegesis. With regard to the latter, Harmless argues that for many whom we regard as mystics, 'the very act of exegesis is itself mystical experience',⁷⁰ and I argue that this is indeed the case for Maritain as we find in his first and last example of biblical exegesis, which is also one of his most important texts: a translation and commentary of the Song of Songs named *Le Cantique des Cantiques*. As Harmless argues: 'Theology lies at the very heart of the mystical enterprise. Mystics often set forth their (or others') experiences as the *experience of doctrine*. This sets mystical theologies apart from other ways of doing theology.'⁷¹

We begin to see that at the heart of apophatic mysticism is a lived paradox: that of simultaneous Christian *belief*—that is, belief in the *Christian conception of God*—and the assertion that that God is unnamable, that all concepts and predications fall by the wayside when it comes to talking about God as He really and truly is (how one experiences Him). This paradox makes itself known whenever Catholics refer to the 'Mysteries' of the Christian faith—so-called 'revealed truths' from God that transcend human understanding such as the nature of Holy Trinity, the Virgin Birth of Christ, and the Passion, death, and Resurrection of Christ (the Paschal Mystery). The term 'Mystery' is also used in the Catholic Church to refer to events in the life and death of Christ that are contemplated in praying the Rosary. The apophatic paradox or element of mystery is evident in the mysticism of Maritain as he takes his inspiration from Aquinas and St. John of the Cross—the latter being infamous for his apophaticism—and, as I will show, goes all the way back to and mirrors the conflict that Maritain saw between the necessary propositions of faith that he held God uses to communicate truth to human beings and the Bergsonian claim of the obvious inability of concepts to grasp reality as it is experienced.

⁷⁰ *M*, p. 232.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

All of this, I will argue, was the life-blood of Maritain's philosophy and mystical theology. As I will illustrate, Maritain's mysticism—or what he also often called 'contemplation'—is multi-faceted, many-layered, resistant to essentialization. It is both poetic in spirit and scripturally anchored. It is as much about self-effacingly entering the mystery of Being as it is communing with Christ. Like the mysticisms of Aquinas and St. John of the Cross, it has its origin and terminus in *caritas*—the bottomless and supremely mysterious divine love of God and God's love for us—and it is present throughout Maritain's life and work as he grapples with the meaning of Being and the hard road of spiritual perfection. It is present in Maritain's frequent personal and theological reflections on the experience and contemplative significance of suffering in the light—or shadow—of the Cross of Christ. In this regard, Maritain quotes St. Paul in expressing his 'supreme desire: "*cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo*" [meaning] I desire to be dissolved and be with Christ."⁷²

Consequently, in the seventh and final chapter of this study I show that Maritain's mysticism calls for a balancing of core and contextualist occupations and methodologies, of apophatic mystery and Catholic affirmations of faith and prayer. At the highest point of mystical contemplation, I suggest, is an indissoluble paradox that reflects the aforementioned mysteries of Catholic faith, that, as Maritain says, God 'is actually known—while remaining unknown and inscrutable.'⁷³ One novel suggestion I offer in the final chapter is that this calls for entertaining the possibility that, considered in its both biographical and theological aspects, it is complex enough to transcend the terms of the core/contextualist debate.

⁷² *PI*, p. 71.

⁷³ *MAG*, p. 36.

PART I

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

Maritain and Bergson

1. The Sorbonne

At the time Henri Bergson was appointed Chair in Greek and Latin philosophy at the Collège de France in 1900, the French philosophical scene was dominated by the three broad philosophical traditions of positivism, founded by Comte and carried forward without Comte's political emphases by Durkheim at the Sorbonne, idealism, led by Brunschvicg also at the Sorbonne, and third, spiritualism, which had its origins in Maine de Biran, and to which Bergson brought his own doctrines and style.

As students of French philosophy know, the channels by which one becomes a professional philosopher in France were and still are highly centralized. Analogous to the historical rivalry of the Café de Flore and the Deux Magots, there was, at the time, between the Sorbonne and the Collège de France—the two seats of institutional philosophical power in France—a 'mountain of distrust of prejudice . . . particularly so on the part of the Sorbonne philosophers with respect to Bergson's teaching.'¹ As Raïssa Maritain relates, when she and her fiancé Jacques, who were students at the Sorbonne, decided to attend Bergson's famous lectures in 1902, 'These feelings were so strong that it was almost as difficult for the young students to think of going from the Sorbonne to the Collège de France as from the Sorbonne to the Church of Saint Genevieve, its near neighbour.'²

Responding to the positivist rejection of metaphysics and the idealists' hyper-intellectualism and discounting of the epistemological significance of the

¹ *WHBF*, p. 79.

² *Ibid.*

body and the emotions, Bergson offered a unique challenge to the historically dominant metaphysical position that privileges being over becoming. For Bergson, ultimate reality is constituted of neither discrete, atomistic simples nor a static One; rather, ultimate reality is conceived as mobility or 'pure duration', known through pre-linguistic and therefore pre-conceptual intuition. With regard to animate life forms, this mobility is manifested for Bergson in the *élan vital*—a 'vital impulse' which spontaneously pushes for novel and increasingly complex forms, and which was thought by Bergson to explain the emergence of consciousness better than other evolutionary theories.

While of the highest quality with respect to the sciences (with the teaching and friendships of eminent scientists such as Felix Le Dantec),³ the intellectual environment of the Sorbonne at which Jacques and Raïssa Maritain studied at the turn of the twentieth century was for them, as it was for Bergson, sterile, fundamentally atheist and epistemologically skeptical. Raïssa recalled:

At the Sorbonne, as we knew it, the scientists, insofar as they philosophised at all, were generally partisans of such philosophical theories as mechanism, epiphenomenalism, absolute determinism, evolutionary monism—doctrines which deny the reality of the spirit and the objectivity of all knowledge which goes beyond the cognition of sensible phenomena. All these theories constituted a more or less acknowledged system which Jacques, several years later, in one of his first books was to designate by the name of *Scientism*.⁴

In what is one of the great stories of Western intellectual and spiritual biography, the Maritains' paradoxical resigned acceptance of and disillusionment with the scientific and skeptical teaching of the Parisian intellectual elite reached a crisis point, culminating in their suicide pact in 1902. Raïssa relates that at the time they determined:

If we must also give up the hope of finding any meaning whatever for the word truth, for the distinction of good from evil, of just from unjust, it is no longer possible to live humanly . . . I would have accepted a sad life, but not one that was absurd. .

³ *WHBF*, pp. 63–66.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 61.

. . . Either the world could be justified, and this could not be if real knowledge did not exist; or else life was not worth the trouble of a moment's further notice.⁵

Jacques and Raïssa determined that if they could not somehow find or realize the ability of the intellect to reach truth and discover immutable values on which to base their thought and lives within a year, they would commit suicide. This moment in the Maritains' lives is of great philosophical and theological consequence, and as I will show, directly relevant in examining the relationship between Maritain and phenomenology. It was, however, only by attending Bergson's famous lectures at the Collège de France at Péguy's suggestion that the Maritains did not end up acting upon their pledge.

For Jacques and Raïssa, Bergson's philosophy offered the possibility of reaching ultimate reality, of discovering truth, to everybody:

Bergson freed the mind in calling it back to the inward activity wherein is its real life, back to the entirely qualitative depths of consciousness. He forcefully and successfully combatted the tendency of the philosophers of his time to reduce everything—even the qualitative, the unique and the incomparable—to number and space, to quantities which may be measured, superposed and reversed after the fashion of the externality and homogeneity of physico-mathematical relations . . .⁶

While renouncing socialism after his conversion to Catholicism, Maritain remained a Bergsonian for some time. By 1908, however, he keenly felt what he believed was Bergson's misconstrual of conceptual knowledge and an incompatibility between Bergsonism and Catholic doctrine concerning the viability of concepts in attaining and expressing knowledge of ultimate truths. At the suggestion of Raïssa, Maritain became acquainted with the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas and spent several years in study before his article 'Les Deux Bergsonismes' was published in *Revue Thomiste* in 1912 and his first book, *La Philosophie bergsonienne: études critiques (Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism)*, was published in 1914.

⁵ Ibid., p. 76.

⁶ Ibid., p. 87.

This book was, as Maritain regretfully recalled, a thorough but unnecessarily harsh critique of his former master. Maritain was to claim that Bergson was an anti-intellectualist, that he defined the intellect too narrowly as that which merely creates concepts based on utility and that he consequently pits the intellect against the faculty of intuition, only the latter of which was able to access reality.⁷ Maritain would, nevertheless, be forever in debt to Bergson for his notion of intuition to the extent, Peter Redpath argues, that ‘What we find in Maritain is an “inverted” Bergsonianism translating into the language of later scholastic Thomism and speculative metaphysics the major principles of Bergsonian thought.’⁸

2. Bergson’s Intuition

Bergson is significant in this enquiry into the immanent mysticism of Maritain not just because of his influence on Maritain but also because his example helps us to discern the basic philosophical motivations at play in Maritain’s mystically-directed project by serving as a foil revealing the philosophical motivations in direct opposition to the mystical.

Historically, Bergsonism was replaced by phenomenology as the dominant stream of philosophy in France from the 1930s onwards, following the publication of Bergson’s *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, whose tone was considered too religious for upcoming philosophers influenced by Husserl, namely Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Gary Gutting relates that twentieth century French philosophy often had anti-religious overtones and that Bergson was the last major philosopher in France in that century sympathetic to religious belief. His defense of religion in the *Two Sources* was one of the

⁷ Jacques Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1955), pp. 159–171.

⁸ Peter Redpath, ‘Bergsonian Recollections in Maritain’, in John Knasas (ed.), *Jacques Maritain: The Man and His Metaphysics* (Ishawaka, IN: American Maritain Association, 1988), p. 105.

reasons why he was quickly eclipsed in French intellectual life.⁹ In this connection, Gutting remarks:

Bergson, for all his flair and brilliance, was too much of a pre-war figure, a philosopher . . . of 'final serenity' through communion with nature. The terrors of two world wars made such optimism unpalatable if not ludicrous, and philosophers of the second half of the twentieth century turned to thinkers like Heidegger with a sensibility for the tragedy and absurdity of existence.¹⁰

Bergsonism received something of a revival through the work of Gilles Deleuze in the 1960s, but that was in part because Deleuze argued that Bergsonism was a credible alternative to phenomenology, particularly regarding intentionality, writing that for Husserl, the founder of the most distinct and significant school of phenomenology, consciousness is intentional (that is, always about or of an object), whereas for Bergson consciousness *is* its own object.¹¹ More importantly, Maritain remarks that Bergson,

really was a philosopher and holds no place in the line of descent. . . . After Bergson, everybody readily re-entered the Cartesian lineage, at the thin end of it: with Husserl first . . . and for whom, whatever the catastrophe he caused, I have a great intellectual respect. I also have intellectual respect for some of those who take after him, Heidegger in particular, [whereas] I have none for Jean-Paul Sartre, who seems to me too artful. . . . But he has offered a testimony we would be quite wrong to neglect.¹²

From this we learn not only that Maritain himself thought that Bergson broke with the Cartesian tradition so dominant in French philosophy but also that he thinks that Husserl and the phenomenologists after him actually regress in their returning to Cartesianism. In fact, for reasons that will be made clear, Maritain considers the advent of Cartesian philosophy as singularly disastrous for

⁹ Gary Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy Since 1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 149.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: the Movement-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (London: Athlone, 1986), p. 56.

¹² *PG*, p. 101.

Western thought and religion, refusing to grant Descartes and those following in his footsteps, such as Husserl, the status of true philosophers.¹³ This suggests a fundamental divergence between what I claim is Maritain's mystically-orientated philosophy and Cartesian philosophy. From the above quote we also get a taste of what Maritain thinks of Heidegger and Sartre. More on all of this shortly.

As Descartes was the principle enemy of Maritain, so Kant, in the same vein as a rationalist, was Bergson's. Bergson concedes to Kant the limits of knowledge by rational cognition, but does not rest there, arguing instead for another mode of cognition able to access reality, or things 'in themselves'. This mode or faculty of cognition is intuition, a concept which Bergson rescues from everyday parlance and brings to supreme metaphysical and epistemological value, and as William Fossati writes, like 'the trunk of a tree', intuition 'supported any number of subordinate principles as though they were branches. His positions on duration, perception, biological evolution, and faith all bore on his treatment of intuition.'¹⁴ Bergson's metaphysic is one of motion and change, and his underlying method and principle is intuition.

Bergson's aim, then, was nothing less than to re-establish metaphysics after Kant had placed on it seemingly impenetrable epistemological constraints,¹⁵ Reclaiming metaphysics—and thereby recovering the metaphysical defense of *deity* and a *cosmic* universe as opposed to a universe contained within the limits of human thought—was, for Maritain, not only philosophical salvation, but in the end, also literal salvation.¹⁶ It is reasonable to believe that Bergson, in proving to Maritain that the mind was able to access real being, as opposed to mere phantasms of thought, also provided the philosophical foundation of Maritain's Catholic faith, that is, the metaphysical and epistemological realism just alluded to, allowing for the objective reality of

¹³ Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁴ William Fossati, 'Out Of The Shadow: Henri Bergson and Three French Philosophers', in Douglas Ollivant (ed.), *Jacques Maritain and the Many Ways of Knowing* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), p. 277.

¹⁵ *IM*, pp. 56–60.

¹⁶ Jacques Maritain, *De Bergson à Thomas d'Aquin: essais de métaphysique et de morale* (Paris: Paul Hartmann, 1947), p. 57, 127; *WHBF*, pp. 79–82.

which the saintliness of Léon Bloy was a sign and which Maritain claimed that Bergson grasped—albeit perhaps reservedly—such that it spoke to him on its own terms:

[W]hen Jesus teaches the disciples and says to them, for example, 'I and the Father are one', or 'when the Paraclete comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, he will bear a witness to me,' do the terms of these propositions come from *a priori* synthetic judgements subsuming the data of experience (no, that won't do), or do they express an Idea of Reason in which a postulate of practical Reason obliges us to believe? (That won't do either.) In what drawer of the Critique, then, must we put the terms of the assertions uttered by the Lord? . . .

The Judeo-Christian revelation is the strongest, the most insolently self-assured testimony rendered to the reality *in itself* of being—the being of things, and Being subsisting by itself—I say being dwelling in the glory of existence in total independence of the mind that knows it. Christianity professes with a tranquil impudence what in the philosophical vocabulary is known as *realism*.¹⁷

Bergson argues that the intellect is a tool in the service of evolution, and given that the value of such a tool is the guaranteeing of survival by detection and manipulation of entities animate and inanimate, the intellect perceives the world as a conglomeration of things in space.¹⁸ As such, our thinking about things is primarily quantitative rather than qualitative, and our language deals in spatial metaphors, discrete units such as miles, pounds and most tellingly, minutes of time—which, like rhythm in musical notation, can only be conceived of, Bergson says (in agreement with Kant), by drawing or imagining a geometrical line. Common sense and everyday language and practical life, Bergson says, '*proceeds, on the one hand, by solid perceptions, and, on the other, by stable conceptions.*'¹⁹ Motion or movement, like time, is therefore analyzed as 'points' or 'instants', as when we say: 'At this (or that) point in time'. What we fail to see, in virtue of our practical preoccupations, is that what we *call* time and motion are both pure 'mobility', or change,²⁰ the experience

¹⁷ *PG*, pp. 99–100 (original emphasis).

¹⁸ *IM*, pp. 50.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 50 (original emphasis).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27, 49.

of which Bergson calls 'duration'. Peter Redpath writes that for Bergson, concepts are 'wholly practical instruments ([that is,] they are wholly utilitarian signs)' and 'for him the human intellect is not made for truth—it is made to fabricate.'²¹

Bergson famously describes two ways of knowing a thing, that of analysis and that of intuition. Analysis always proceeds from outside the given object, from a certain perspective in relation to it. We are then forced to represent the object using an image, sign, or symbol and then reconstruct the object on the basis of the representations which possess only a resemblance to one another but which can never give us the *whole* or what we might call the *being* of the object.²² Examples Bergson gives are a translation of a passage in Homer, the identification of psychological states of a person by the psychologist, and an artist's sketch of the towers of Notre Dame in Paris.²³ All these, Bergson says, are symbols and parts isolated from the whole and incapable of re-constituting the whole.²⁴

The second way of knowing a thing—intuition—consists of entering into the thing by means of an 'intellectual sympathy.'²⁵ Other than becoming one *with* motion, as opposed to translating into points and instants, Bergson offers the example of identifying ourselves with a character in a novel, rather than merely attempting to construct an image of the character on the basis of the very limited knowledge that we get of them for the purposes of story.²⁶ Another example Bergson gives is that of the many meanings of a poem, often folded within one another and which, in their singular significance for the reader, defy intersubjective expression and rational explanation.²⁷ Only coincidence with the person or the meaning that presents itself in literature, can give us the 'absolute', Bergson says, going on to argue that 'It is in this sense, and this

²¹ Redpath, 'Bergsonian Recollections in Maritain', p. 104.

²² *IM*, pp. 28–29.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 31–33.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²⁵ Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, tr., F.L. Pogson (Kila: MT: Kessinger Publishing Company, 1910), p. 122; *IM*, p. 12.

²⁶ *IM*, p. 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22–23.

sense only, that *absolute* is synonymous with *perfection*.²⁸ Furthermore, because with intuition we know the original and not its representation, '[i]t is doubtless for this reason that the *absolute* has often been identified with the *infinite*.'²⁹ Entering into the object as opposed to analysing it from outside, we are able to comprehend that '[t]hat which lends itself at the same time both to an indivisible apprehension and to an inexhaustible enumeration is, by the very definition of the word, infinite.'³⁰

For Bergson it is direct, non-mediated intuition which allows us to grasp the pure, qualitative nature of duration. What Bergson calls 'duration' is perception of the self, of the constant, irreducible and self-subsistent mobility and of qualitative 'multiplicity of expanding states', including of the self's conscious states, continuously permeating one another.³¹ As such, he was opposed to philosophical 'systems' and the concepts upon which they are built, as they are necessarily static signs and symbols arbitrarily isolating and reifying a piece of a thing, offering only relative and incomplete knowledge of it.³² Bergson says that the 'inner life' is 'all this at once: variety of qualities, continuity of progress, and unity of direction.'³³ Bergson argues forcefully:

In this way, as many different *systems* will spring up as there are external points of view from which the reality can be examined. . . . Simple concepts have, then, not only the inconvenience of dividing the concrete unity of the object into so many symbolical expressions; they also divide philosophy into distinct schools, each of which takes its seat, chooses its counters, and carries on with the others a game that will never end. Either metaphysics is only this play of ideas, or else, if it is a serious occupation of the mind, if it is a science and not simply an exercise, it must transcend concepts in order to reach intuition.³⁴

All this, however, did not mean that Bergson quit philosophy or ceased writing. While Bergson did believe that it was only by means of intuition that we can

²⁸ Ibid., p. 22 (original emphasis).

²⁹ Ibid., p. 23 (original emphasis).

³⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

³¹ Ibid., p. 27.

³² Ibid., p. 24, 31.

³³ Ibid., p. 27.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 29–30.

come into touch with the Real, he was by no means an anti-intellectualist—a charge which Maritain later regretted. As Thomas Gwozdz argues, Maritain did not intend to claim that Bergson sought to destroy the intellect, but rather, that by critiquing the pre-eminence of the intellect and of analysis, ‘destroy the notion that scientific knowledge is the only paradigm of knowledge.’³⁵ As related earlier, Bergson sought to end the dominance of positivism, which not only introduced Maritain to the possibility of a realist philosophy—his own brand of which Maritain was later to call ‘critical realism’—but which also led Maritain on a similar life-long struggle against positivism. For Bergson, intuition and philosophical analysis function together. This is first because the intuition must inevitably be interpreted and articulated in some manner, second because Bergson insisted that *new* concepts can be fashioned to express such a metaphysical intuition, and third because Bergson himself insisted on the complementarity of intuition and analysis for philosophical knowledge—intuition being expressed in analysis and analysis serving to deepen and clarify what is given in intuition, with the philosopher always referring back to the intuition to prevent or minimize misinterpretations.³⁶ Bergson writes:

On no point, whatever, then, do we diminish the intelligence; we do not drive it away from any of the territory it has occupied up to the present. . . . Only beside it, we note the existence of another faculty capable of another kind of knowledge. Thus we have on one hand science and mechanical art, which have to do with pure intellect; on the other hand, metaphysics, which calls upon intuition. . . . But intuitive, or intellectual, knowledge will be stamped with the seal of precision.³⁷

Bergson argued that philosophy could no longer rely on familiar concepts built on the basis of practical utility, inevitably static in nature, but had to employ metaphor and craft new, image-laden concepts and in order to indirectly express intuition and duration:

³⁵ Thomas L. Gwozdz, *Jacques Maritain and the Centrality of Intuition* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Fordham University, 1996), p. 36.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 22–27.

³⁷ Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2007), p. 62.

[Metaphysics] must transcend concepts in order to reach intuition. Certainly, concepts are necessary to it, for all the other sciences work as a rule with concepts, and metaphysics cannot dispense with the other sciences. But it is only truly itself when it goes beyond the concept, or at least when it frees itself from rigid and ready-made concepts in order to create a kind very different from those which we habitually use; I mean supple, mobile and almost fluid representations, always ready to mold themselves on the fleeting forms of intuition.³⁸

Bergson famously chose the examples of winding thread into a ball and an indefinite stretching of a piece of elastic to express mobility and duration and of moving one's hand to express direct, non-discursive knowledge, or intuition. The new concepts for the expression of the metaphysics were 'duration, qualitative or heterogenous multiplicity, unconsciousness—even differentiation, if one considers the notion such as it was to begin with.'³⁹ Bergson also clearly favors qualitative nouns over quantitative nouns, such as 'elements', 'aspects', 'notes' and 'expressions' over the notion of 'part'.⁴⁰ Bergson does not, therefore, do away with *concepts*, but with what he considers as *merely static* representations or signs of reality. For this reason, Bergson writes that '*Metaphysics, then, is the science which claims to dispense with symbols.*'⁴¹

As Redpath relates, for Maritain, the underlying problem with Bergson's philosophy was that it approached the immediate character of intuitive knowledge in the wrong manner.⁴² Maritain claims that

it supposed that all knowledge truly attaining the real be a lived coincidence, *without subjective intermediary*, of the subject and object, thus known, it is thought, in all the plenitude of its reality, thus exhausted to the very root; Bergsonism then opposes its intuition to the idea, to the concept, to abstract knowledge—and to reason, to discursive knowledge.⁴³

³⁸ *IM*, p. 30.

³⁹ Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, p. 23.

⁴⁰ *IM*, p. 30–37.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24 (original emphasis).

⁴² Redpath, 'Bergsonian Recollections in Maritain', p. 106.

⁴³ Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy*, p. 155.

As we have seen, Bergson claimed that true knowledge of the absolute must be intuitive, which as direct, non-discursive sympathy, cannot have the intermediary of a concept inevitably produced by external analysis. Before going into detail about Maritain's solutions to Bergson's opposition between intuition and the concept, it is worth noting with Redpath that Maritain's overall approach is

to consider knowledge of the real to be a lived coincidence, not without subjective intermediary but with it. Knowledge of the real does not occur without ideas; it occurs with them. Thus intuition is not opposed to conceptualization, abstraction, reasoning, or discursive knowledge; it is naturally joined to them.⁴⁴

Maritain sought to incorporate Bergsonian intuition in what he will call the 'intuition of being'—a notion which will provide one of the main focusses of this study. As Gwozdz writes, Maritain spent his whole life clarifying and deepening his understanding of intuition, and, particularly, of the intuition of being and its implications for metaphysics, the inception of which he owes to Bergson.⁴⁵

Maritain wrote early on in *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*:

The intellect . . . produces, as long as truth requires it, new concepts, in the measure and likeness of things, which well up from the depths of its activity and which contain exhaustible riches; for it is true as Bergson has expressed it, perhaps exaggerating a little, that each of the great philosophers has spent his whole life in developing, in every possible direction, a single intuition, in reality the intuition in question has been an *intellectual* intuition, a living intellectual perception expressible in ideas or concepts.⁴⁶

Maritain also aims to incorporate the Bergsonian notion of intuition as sympathy in productive knowledge (*poieton*). The intuition of duration in the latter terminates, Maritain writes,

⁴⁴ Redpath, 'Bergsonian Recollections in Maritain', p. 106.

⁴⁵ Gwozdz, *Jacques Maritain and the Centrality of Intuition*, pp. 43–44.

⁴⁶ Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy*, p. 158 (original emphasis).

in a fusion of the mind in the thing, it transports us into the object and identifies us by an intense and even painful effort of sympathy with what is unique, inexpressible, incommunicable in the thing . . . with matter itself—which united to form, makes the singularity of the thing.⁴⁷

The particular way in which Maritain reconstituted Bergsonian intuition as sympathy was to determine his fundamental notion of connaturality as applied in art, morality and mystical experience. In *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, a very early work, Maritain writes of the ‘creative invention’ of the artist⁴⁸—which was to become ‘poetic intuition’ and ‘creative intuition’ in later works. Maritain writes that the effort of intuition ‘remains intellectual but, because it is a question of penetrating the contingent singular, the intelligence in it is “pushed out of doors,” into the domain peculiar to sense.’⁴⁹ This relates to Maritain’s other solution to Bergson’s opposition between intuition and the concept, the notion of intentionality, of the mind *becoming* its object even through the concept.⁵⁰ Intentionality, with Maritain’s intuition of being, will receive some attention later in this study and I will argue that it is also one source of Maritain’s affinities with Heidegger.

However, for now, let us observe with Gwozdz that Bergsonian intuition was a principal inspiration for Maritain’s own philosophy. It provided Maritain with the following insights:

[F]irst, that metaphysics [is at all] possible; second the basic insight that metaphysics must have its foundation in an intuition; third, that conceptual knowledge and intuition are two different kinds of knowledge; fourth that knowledge of the absolute and truth is possible; fifth, that there is an intuition that is in the mode of sympathy (Maritain’s connatural knowledge); sixth, that to be a metaphysician entails a certain contemplative stance in life; seventh, that methodologically, intuition and philosophical analysis work hand in hand.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 108–109.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 29.

⁵⁰ Redpath, ‘Bergsonian Recollections in Maritain’, pp. 109–111.

⁵¹ Gwozdz, *Jacques Maritain and the Centrality of Intuition*, p. 42.

The application of intuition in the practical order, specifically concerning moral experience and artistic knowledge and inspiration in the creation of art works, will be subjects of considerable importance for mapping out the contours of what I argue is the immanent mysticism in Maritain's life and philosophy, given his indebtedness to Bergson and his development of Bergsonian insights. I will argue, however, that this is most apparent concerning the 'intuition of being', as the foundation of Maritain's philosophy and Catholic faith. This, writes Raïssa Maritain, who Jacques always quotes concerning the intuition of being, she felt as a 'powerful intuition', the 'violence' of which, she says, 'sometimes frightened me, and first gave me the knowledge of a metaphysical absolute'.⁵² The intuition of being, it will be argued, provides for Maritain a metaphysics that is permeated with mystical aspirations. Bergson wrote to Maritain in 1932, after reading Maritain's newly published *Distinguish to Unite*: 'It seems to me that about certain questions, notably, about mysticism, the distance which separates us is less great than one first believed.'⁵³ Toward the end of Bergson's life, Maritain and Bergson had, in Bergson's own words, 'moved toward each other, and we have met in the middle of the way.'⁵⁴ Maritain saw in Bergson's last book, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* Bergson's veiled conversion to Catholicism,⁵⁵ with Bergson's treatment of the Christian mystics as the source and key of his coming to faith.⁵⁶

3. Bergson and Maritain *Versus* Cartesianism and Kantianism

I said at the beginning of this chapter that Bergson's philosophy is significant in this enquiry into Maritain's mysticism not just because of his influence on Maritain but also because he helps us to discern the philosophical motivations at play in Maritain's mystically-directed project by serving as an antithesis to

⁵² *WHBF*, p. 144..

⁵³ « Il me semble que sur certaines questions, notamment sur celle du mysticisme, l'intervalle qui nous sépare est moins grand qu'on ne le croirait d'abord. » Paris, 6th November 1932.

⁵⁴ *AIG*, p. 198.

⁵⁵ Maritain, *De Bergson à Thomas d'Aquin*, p. 70.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

the philosophical motivations in direct opposition to the mystical. These, I suggested, were Cartesianism, and, in virtue of its denial of metaphysical knowledge, Kantianism, to which Bergson was opposed. I want now to go into further detail of Maritain's critique of these two philosophical traditions in order to bring into sharper focus his underlying preoccupation with the human ability to come into contact with Being and, moreover, to know Being intuitively.

According to Maritain, Descartes is 'the father of modern idealism',⁵⁷ and as such, any phenomenologist that is Cartesian in point of departure or principles remains in fundamental opposition to Maritain in terms of the purpose or end of philosophy. In the case of Husserl, who, in his later work—especially the *Cartesian Meditations*—sets out a method explicitly based on Descartes' radical doubt, he becomes, according to Maritain, 'more Cartesian than Descartes'.⁵⁸

From the time of his early work *Logical Investigations*, in which he follows Franz Brentano in describing phenomenology as a 'descriptive psychology',⁵⁹ to what we may regard his 'intermediate' and transitional phase marked by *The Idea of Phenomenology*,⁶⁰ Husserl's phenomenological project was characterized by the realist struggle, as with Bergson, against scientism and skepticism. Husserl characterized the view to which he was opposed as that '[w]hatever is belongs to psychophysical nature, which is to say that it is univocally determined by rigid laws', and which brings with it 'the sort of absurdity that characterises every theory of skepticism'.⁶¹ This is because we are then faced with the epistemological problem of how the mind can know objective truth and the ground of those very scientific laws positivists take for granted.

We are forced to turn to epistemology, says Husserl, as a science of consciousness and a first philosophy providing the foundations for the

⁵⁷ *PG*, p. 100.

⁵⁸ *DK*, p. 112.

⁵⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume 1*, trans. J. N. Findlay (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 176.

⁶⁰ Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. William P. Alston (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), p. xiii.

⁶¹ Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, trans. Quentin Lauer (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1965), pp. 79–80.

sciences.⁶² Husserl argues that the objects of mental acts are mind-independent and that we have an intuitive awareness of particulars, universals, causal connections and the states of affairs which they constitute.⁶³ Husserl aims to isolate and describe the essential features of conscious experience—the ‘meaning’ or ‘essence’ of or what it is to perform mental acts such as perceiving, judging, remembering, desiring and willing, and the essence of the objects of mental acts, which include the particulars, universals and causal structures that they are and are built up from.⁶⁴ Maurice Natanson explains that ‘meaning’ here ‘is not designative or referential; it is precisely that which is presented as the correlate of intentional [or directed mental] activity.’⁶⁵ This intentional activity—what is called by Husserl, after the philosopher and psychologist Franz Brentano—the ‘intentionality’ of the mind, is particularly important for our purposes. Brentano characterizes intentionality in the following manner.

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction towards an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity. In presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on.⁶⁶

In other words, every mental act has an object; consciousness is ‘intentional’ in that acts of consciousness are always concerning or *about* something—such as an idea, a physical object, or feeling or emotion. It is important to note that by ‘intentionally in-existent’, Brentano does not mean that the object of a mental act does not literally exist, but rather that the object, in *being* the object,

⁶² Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. Lee Hardy (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), pp. 37–43.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40, 41–52.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 41–52.

⁶⁵ Maurice Natanson, ‘Phenomenology and Existentialism: Husserl and Sartre on Intentionality’, in Joseph Kockelmans (ed.), *Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Its Interpretation* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1967), p. 342.

⁶⁶ Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. A. C. Rancurello, D. B. Terrell and L. McAlister (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 88.

need not be either physical or existentially mind-dependent. In differentiating between the object of a mental act and the content that is to be found in the mental act by which we can refer to the object, the notion of intentionality, seems then, to be allied to a realist position. Phenomenological analysis consists in a retrospective, intuitive ‘seeing’ of the modalities of the intentional activity of the mind,⁶⁷ and in this validation of knowledge through an intuitive ‘seeing’, Husserl aims to refute the epistemological constraints of scientism and skepticism. He thus famously writes that in its description of modalities of intentional activity, phenomenology allows us to ‘go back to the “things themselves”’.⁶⁸

In this connection, Maritain argues in the *Degrees of Knowledge* that the medieval notion of intentionality is indeed strongly allied to a realist position. He also argues, however, that in his later *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl misconstrues intentionality as a property or constituent of objects cognized by the mind and, as such, more or less ‘spatial’ in the Cartesian setting up of mind confronting object.⁶⁹ Maritain argues that intentionality is not just a property of consciousness, but more fundamentally, ‘a property of thought, a prerogative of its immateriality’.⁷⁰ Intentionality, I will show, is an indispensable principle in Maritain’s epistemology as it pertains to moral experience, love, and mystical experience.

In proclaiming at the start of the *Cartesian Meditations* that it is in the spirit of Descartes’ turning inward and of Cartesian doubt that ‘we make a new beginning, each for himself and in himself’,⁷¹ Husserl sets out, like Descartes, to discover a first philosophy, an absolute ground for knowledge and for the constitution of objects as they appear to consciousness. The first and most essential step of Husserl’s later phenomenological method is the *epoché*, or ‘phenomenological reduction’, which is the suspension of judgements about

⁶⁷ Hanne Jacobs and Trevor Perri, ‘Intuition and Freedom: Bergson, Husserl and the Movement of Philosophy’, in Michael Kelly (ed.), *Bergson and Phenomenology* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 101.

⁶⁸ Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume 1*, p. 168.

⁶⁹ *DK*, p. 90, 110.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 109–110.

⁷¹ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1960), p. 7.

the existence of everything external (or ‘transcendent’) to the subject which may be doubted, such that one begins with the cognizing *ego*, whose existence is ‘apodictic’—that is, evidence of ‘*absolute indubitability*’ and ‘which discloses itself, to a critical reflection, as an absolute unimagineness (inconceivability) of the seen object’s non-being’⁷²—and whose mental processes are ‘immanent’.⁷³

In the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl argues that the continuous stream of or synthesis of all possible experience that is visible upon performing a phenomenological reduction implies the existence of a ‘transcendental Ego’, and characterizes phenomenology as ‘transcendental idealism’⁷⁴—a tradition most associated with Kant. The ground of phenomenology itself as first philosophy, therefore, is the Ego as unifying source of ‘the constituting intentionality itself’.⁷⁵ As such, the operation of the *epoché* is now called the ‘transcendental-phenomenological epoché’.⁷⁶

The epoché can also be said to be the radical and universal method by which I apprehend myself purely: as Ego, and with my own pure conscious life, in and by which the entire Objective world exists for me and is precisely as it is for me. Anything belonging to the world, any spatiotemporal being, exists for me—that is to say, is accepted by me—in that I experience it, perceive it, remember it, think of it somehow, judge about it, value it, despise, or the like.⁷⁷

In his critique of Husserl’s transcendental ‘turn’, Roman Ingarden—one of Husserl’s students—writes:

Just as Kant had insufficient grounds for accepting ‘things in themselves’ and had to limit himself to the recognition of ‘phenomena’ then here we have to reject—Husserl would say—the allegedly autonomously existing objects and content

⁷² Ibid., pp. 15–16.

⁷³ Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. William P. Alston, p. 31.

⁷⁴ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 86.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 86.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

ourselves with the recognition of intentional correlates of sets of cognitive acts.⁷⁸

In the fourth meditation of the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl states that the phenomenological enterprise both culminates in and is sufficient proof for his idealism, of a necessarily existent, grounding and constituting Ego, writing:

[W]e have here a transcendental idealism that *is* nothing more than a consequentially executed self-explication in the form of a systematic egological science, an explication of my ego as subject of every possible cognition, and indeed with respect to every sense of what exists, wherewith the latter might be able to *have* a sense for me, the ego.⁷⁹

The precise nature or version of Husserl's 'transcendental idealism' is a matter of philosophical dispute. However, in *The Degrees of Knowledge* and *The Peasant of the Garonne* some thirty years later, Maritain argues that Husserl, having been of a realistic philosophical orientation partly thanks to Brentano's reintroduction of the notion of intentionality, falls into a metaphysical idealism beyond those of Descartes and Kant. '[I]n spite of all the philosopher's [Husserl's] efforts', writes Maritain, 'in spite of the realistic tendency which gave birth to phenomenology, it remains radically incapable of furnishing anything but an illusory idealistic substitute for the real.'⁸⁰ Maritain is exceptionally clear in his writings about phenomenology that Husserl is an idealist and a 'victim of Descartes and Kant',⁸¹ and as such, is in fundamental opposition to Thomism and Christian realism.

Nothing is more instructive than the way phenomenology, after being finally vanquished by the false 'radicalism' of Cartesian principles, ends up today by returning in a most decided fashion, proud of its rediscovered bonds, to the Kantian tradition and by declaring itself to be a new transcendental idealism different, it is true, from Kantian idealism, but chiefly in that it

⁷⁸ Roman Ingarden, *On the Motives which led Husserl to Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Arnór Hannibalsson (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), p. 63.

⁷⁹ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 86.

⁸⁰ *DK*, p. 210.

⁸¹ *PG*, p. 105

refuses to 'leave open the possibility of a world of things-in-themselves, be they nothing more than concept-limits.'⁸²

Husserl writes of the constituting character of the transcendental Ego:

That the being of the world 'transcends' consciousness in this fashion (even with respect to the evidence in which the world presents itself), and that it necessarily remains transcendent, in no wise alters the fact that it is conscious life alone, wherein everything transcendent becomes constituted, as something inseparable from consciousness . . .⁸³

Intentional analyses, as revealing the operations of consciousness, are supervenient upon the objects which are themselves now ontologically dependent on particular types of operations performed by consciousness as constitutive and synthesizing.⁸⁴ Husserl appears to give the transcendental ontological rather than merely epistemic priority, positing a relationship of existential dependence of the world on the transcendental Ego:

By phenomenological epoché I reduce my natural human Ego and my psychic life—the realm of my *psychological self-experience*—to my transcendental-phenomenological Ego, the realm of *transcendental-phenomenological self-experience*. The Objective world, the world that exists for me, that always has and always will exist for me, the only world that ever can exist for me—this world, with its Objects, I said, derives its whole sense and its existential status, which it has for me, from me myself, *from me as the transcendental Ego*, the Ego who comes to the fore only with transcendental-phenomenological epoché.⁸⁵

For Maritain, Husserlian phenomenology is bereft of being as 'the first thing given to the mind',⁸⁶ and makes the mistake of '*thinking of being while refusing to think of it as being*'.⁸⁷ It was after reading *The Peasant of the Garonne* that Thomas Merton remarked to Maritain 'It had not occurred to me—yet it is so

⁸² DK, p. 111; Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 72

⁸³ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 62.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 99.

⁸⁵ Cartesian Meditations, p. 26 (original emphasis).

⁸⁶ DK, p. 106.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 108 (original emphasis).

obvious—that the phenomenologists by and large have no sense of being.’⁸⁸ In his brief treatment of phenomenology in that book, Maritain writes that Husserlian phenomenology, in replacing extra-mental being with (the) idea(s) of being, is thereby a

lineage of idealist origin, which from mutation to mutation more and more radically impugns extra-mental reality and the absolutely primary foundation of philosophic knowledge, could not possibly be called a philosophic lineage. Whoever is careful to be precise in his language should consider it an *ideosophic* lineage.⁸⁹

With Heidegger, however, the picture is quite different. While emerging from Husserlian phenomenology, Heidegger strives just as much as Maritain to end the dominance of Cartesianism in Western philosophy and society at large. Maritain sees in Heidegger a philosopher ‘obsessed with anxiety for being’, but argues that, for the reasons just elucidated, phenomenology prevents him from realizing in a genuine intuition of extra-mental being.⁹⁰ That said, I nevertheless claim that Heidegger, especially as he moves from phenomenology to the rejection of philosophy and the affirmation of what he calls ‘thinking’ (*Denken*), has deep affinities with Maritain in the search for and contemplation of Being. For this reason, Caputo claims that in his later works, which focus on the meditative ‘letting-be’ (*Gelassenheit*) of Being, ‘Heidegger moves into the proximity of the German mystics’ and he regards Heidegger’s *Denken* as at least analogous to Eckhartian, apophatic mysticism.⁹¹

In fact, the underlying connection between Maritain, Bergson and Heidegger, is their common preoccupation with demonstrating that contact between the human being and Being as such—that is, the extra-mental reality of all things—is actually possible, in contradistinction to scientism and both absolute idealism and Kantian idealism, which for Maritain have their origin in Descartes. Maritain says in a little-known lecture that the existentialism of

⁸⁸ Thomas Merton, *The Courage for Truth*, ed. Christine M. Bochen (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc., 1993), p. 49.

⁸⁹ *PG*, p. 102 (original emphasis).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁹¹ *MEHT*, p. 39.

Heidegger and Sartre, is in fact ‘a sign of a certain deep want to find again the sense of Being.’⁹² This sense of Being, for Maritain, is absent in Husserl and Cartesianism. For Husserl, the transcendental Ego is that upon which *all else* supervenes, being the absolute, non-contingent, ontological ground of all else.⁹³ To this Maritain responds that though I can be certain of my existence, I can also be certain that I, as self, am contingent. Recognizing myself as actual but not *necessary*, I must ground *myself* upon that which is ‘pure Act’, or necessary.⁹⁴ As such, science cannot begin with my own existence as the prime datum of the speculative intellect, but rather with the principle of identity,⁹⁵ which, also difficult to express, may be defined as the law that a thing or being is, and is itself.⁹⁶ The principle of identity, I interpret Maritain to mean, because I *intuitively* recognize I *am* or another thing in relation to me *is* existent, as moving, doing, living, *being* absent—as opposed to a mere blankness or absence of any intentional content. This intuition, which is the intuition of being, is fundamental to Maritain’s entire philosophy, demonstrating not only that Maritain is absolutely opposed to Cartesian and Kantian or transcendental philosophy, but also that for Maritain *all* human cognition involves intuition and first of all concerns a dynamic relating to extra-mental Being on the part of the human being. As Maritain writes in *A Preface to Metaphysics*, the mind ‘sees intuitively the first principle of all which it will formulate thus: *each being is what it is.*’⁹⁷ And, more importantly:

To exist is to *maintain oneself and to be maintained* outside nothingness; *esse* is an act, a perfection, indeed the final perfection, a splendid flower in which objects affirm themselves. Moreover, the formula [of the principle of identity] also means ‘being is not non-being’. . . .

What an excellent thing it is that we are compelled to stammer, debate, and dispute, that we meet with technical difficulties in formulating the first self-evident intellectual principle. It is indeed proof that is not a matter of formulas but a

⁹² *MAG*, p. 18.

⁹³ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 146.

⁹⁴ *DK*, p. 109.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Jacques Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics: Seven Lectures on Being*, trans. unknown (London: Sheed & Ward, 1945), pp. 91–93.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92 (original emphasis).

living intuition whose purely spiritual light incomparably transcends all the words in the dictionary.

The principle of identity is concerned with being outside the mind, with the implications of being at least possible, and is thus not a law of thought but the first law of objects outside the mind apprehended in the intuition of being.⁹⁸

In speaking of a 'living intuition whose purely spiritual light incomparably transcends all the words in the dictionary', Maritain is speaking of an immediate and non-discursive relation between the human mind and Being in which reality both 'is' and 'is not', an alternation between existence and non-existence.

While Maritain's language is dominated by a Thomistic occupation with *esse*, the act of existence, and with causality when he speaks of oneself being 'maintained outside of nothingness', we gain four crucial insights. The first is that the apprehension of Being is, first of all, not conceptual but intuitive. The second is that this intuition does not preclude laws pertaining to the nature of reality, given that Maritain is a metaphysical and epistemological realist (such that Being takes on positive attributes). The third insight is that what Maritain calls the 'intuition of being', with all its immanent and implied metaphysical principles, is in fact the retrospective articulation of an even more primordial experience, which is the meeting, or confrontation, between the human being and reality to express which one must 'stammer, debate, and dispute'—and this, I claim, is the foundation of his mysticism. We therefore see—and this is the fourth insight—that Maritain's metaphysical articulations of pre-conceptual experiences of reality reveal both 'core' and 'contextualist' elements, and that these are, in fact, not opposed, because the primordial experience of Being, while it resists articulation, does not thereby totally preclude it. When Being is given the name of God, this amounts to the same paradox immanent in Christian mystical experience that I alluded to in the introduction, that, as Maritain says, God 'is actually known—while remaining unknown and inscrutable.'⁹⁹

Even so, if one wishes to avoid the relativistic implications of Katz's

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 93–94.

⁹⁹ *MAG*, p. 36.

Kantian-motivated contextualism of mystical experience while conceding the epistemological relevance of the mystic's wider context, one must affirm some form of metaphysical realism so that mystical experiences can, at least in principle, have as their object some extra-mental, divine reality, rather than an object which is constructed by, and in Husserl's terminology, immanent to, consciousness. In this philosophical realism, I claim that Maritain, Bergson and Heidegger are allies, even if Heidegger would reject the term as objectivizing reality, as an instance of ontotheology. As we shall see later, it was this immanent dynamism between metaphysical realism and mysticism that the young Heidegger saw in the medieval scholastics before he argued that the philosophy Aquinas was paradigmatic of ontotheology. It is this dynamism which I find in Maritain and it has its philosophical roots in both Aquinas and the intuition of Bergson.

Maritain and Heidegger

1. Heidegger's Existential Phenomenology

Martin Heidegger is perhaps the most influential phenomenologist of the twentieth century. Heidegger's spiritual biography is that of a journey from Catholicism (first enrolling in theology and intending to enter the Jesuits) to Protestantism, followed by atheism. His intellectual biography is that of a journey from scholasticism to a 'hermeneutic' phenomenology, followed by what is referred to as a 'turn' (*Kehre*) defining his later career, such that some scholars differentiate between an early and later Heidegger, or Heidegger 'I' and 'II'.¹ George Pattison proposes that the 'themes, methods, topics and even stylistics' in Heidegger's works considered to be of the later phase 'taken together, define a distinctive body of writing that can be read and studied in relative independence from the Heidegger of *Being and Time*'.² Madga King argues that in Heidegger's later work, 'Being is no longer approached through man's understanding, but rather it is man's understanding which is approached through the manifestations of being.'³ I will not attempt to determine whether what is reported to be such a clear divide in Heidegger's career is in fact justified, but it is necessary to be aware of what is at least a change in Heidegger's preoccupations as a thinker. And what needs to be noted for the purposes of this study is that Maritain himself recognizes a shift in Heidegger's thought amounting to Heidegger giving pride of place to poetry over

¹ William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), p. 22.

² *TLH*, p. 6.

³ Magda King, *Heidegger's Philosophy* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1964), p. 33.

philosophy. Maritain suggests that this is a culmination of Heidegger's project, rather than a radical break.⁴

Becoming Husserl's assistant in 1920 and working with him for three years, Heidegger was greatly influenced by Husserl and dedicated his first and most famous book *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*) to Husserl in 1927. Even so, Heidegger deviated from Husserl's conception of the phenomenological enterprise from very early on. In contrast to Husserl's Cartesian point of departure for philosophy—the reflective subject juxtaposed to the objects of its constituting cognitions—Heidegger's point of departure is an 'ontological difference—the differentiation being and beings' and 'surmounting beings in order to reach being.'⁵ Heidegger is obsessed with what he calls 'the question of the meaning of being' (*Sein*),⁶ beginning *Being and Time* with a quote from Plato's *Sophist*: 'For manifestly you have long been aware of what you mean when you use the expression "being". We, however, who used to think we understood it, have now become perplexed.'⁷ But this is not metaphysics as traditionally understood. While the central problem for Husserl is the problem of constitution, that being how the world as phenomenon is constituted in and by our consciousness, instead of asking how something must be given in consciousness in order to be constituted, Heidegger goes further than this and questions the mode of being of that being in which the world is constituted. As John Sallis relates, the historical origins of Heidegger's thought are Husserlian phenomenology as method and Greek ontology as issue.⁸ Phenomenology, thoroughly radicalized by Heidegger, is

our way of access to what is to be the theme of ontology, and it is our way of giving it demonstrative precision. *Only as phenomenology, is ontology possible.* In the phenomenological conception of 'phenomenon' what one has in mind as that which shows itself is the Being of entities, its meaning, modifications

⁴ *UT*, pp. 324–325.

⁵ *BPP(R)*, 4/17.

⁶ *BT*, 39/227 (original emphasis).

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19 (untitled page).

⁸ John Sallis, 'The Origins of Heidegger's Thought', *Research in Phenomenology*, 7 (1977), p. 49.

and derivatives.⁹

Heidegger writes that “*phenomenology*” is the name for the method of scientific philosophy in general.¹⁰ His first ‘law’ of phenomenology is ‘the law of proximity’,¹¹ which dictates that what is obvious is precisely that which is likely to escape our notice. The paradigmatic case of this our understanding of actuality, expressed in the copulative verb ‘is’: ‘Whenever it is said of beings, the tiny word “is” names the *being* of beings’.¹²

This being the case, however, being is understood or revealed to that agent which is able to recognize and question it, which Heidegger calls ‘Dasein’—best translated as ‘being-there’. Dasein is the unique being which is able to question being, and more specifically, the meaning of being for itself and of itself. Being is uniquely ‘disclosed’ to Dasein and Dasein is able to question the meaning of its own being as it presents itself to itself. Given that Dasein is ‘already-in-the world’ as the pre-condition for its questioning, however, Dasein, must always interpret being according to Dasein’s own modalities:

Something like being reveals itself to us in the understanding of being, an understanding that lies at the root of all comportment toward beings. Comportments toward beings belong, on their part, to a definite being, the being which we ourselves are, the human Dasein. It is to the human Dasein that there belongs the understanding of being which first of all makes possible every comportment towards beings. The understanding of being has itself the mode of being of human Dasein. . . .

The analysis of the understanding of being . . . presupposes an analytic of Dasein ordered to that end. This analytic has the task of exhibiting the basic constitution of the human Dasein and of characterizing the meaning of the Dasein’s being.¹³

⁹ *BT*, 7C/60 (original emphasis).

¹⁰ *BPP(R)*, 1/3.

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, quoted in Iain Thomson, ‘Ontotheology? Understanding Heidegger’s Destruction of Metaphysics’, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 8 (3) (2000), p. 304.

¹² Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 125.

¹³ *BPP(R)*, 4/16.

Heidegger's claim, prior to the *Kehre* spoken of earlier, is that to understand being it is necessary to understand the being of that being (Dasein) to whom being discloses itself. This being of Dasein as a being and which discloses itself to Dasein is hereafter capitalized for clarification. Heidegger's 'existential analytic' of Dasein will consist in the analysis of Dasein's *modes* of being as they present themselves in actual experience or 'everydayness' as constitutive of 'being-in-the-world'¹⁴—what Heidegger calls 'modes of encounter' and which include 'readiness-to-hand', 'presence-at-hand', 'un-readiness-to-hand', 'spatiality', 'being-with', 'Care', 'being-towards-death' and many more phenomena, which will be discussed in Part II of this study. The important point for now, is that given that Dasein is always already involved in the world, phenomenology for Heidegger must therefore be hermeneutic, or interpretive.¹⁵ Like Maritain, Heidegger early on identifies Descartes and Kant as his principal targets of philosophical critique,¹⁶ and one important consequence of this methodological approach, according to Calvin Schrag, is that

Heidegger's accentuation of the 'pre-conceptual understanding of Being' constitutes an explicit rejection of the isolation of the epistemological subject or the *res cogitans* as formulated in the Cartesian tradition. There is never an isolated 'I' given without a world, which is then confronted with the task of formulating a theory of knowledge for its own existence as well as the existence of an 'external' world. Prior to the rise of the epistemological question there is already a pre-conceptual disclosure of man's relation to his world.¹⁷

Again, in my estimation, this relatedness between the human being and the world—in contrast to the opposition between or mutual exclusion of the Cartesian *cogito* and the extramental world—is necessary for an immanent mysticism or mystical element to be present. It is the most basic kind of

¹⁴ *BT*, 4/33–35.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8/63–64.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6/44–46.

¹⁷ Calvin Schrag, 'Phenomenology, Ontology, and History in the Philosophy of Heidegger', in Kockelmans (ed.), *Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Its Interpretation* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1967), pp. 282–283.

common ground between Maritain and Heidegger that allows for a species of mysticism in the former and at least a mystical 'element' in the latter.

Heidegger rejected the label of 'existentialist' (for reasons which will be detailed later), but it is, nevertheless, usually claimed that he provided the impetus of the twentieth century's existentialist movement that gained popularity in post-war France and the United States. For the purposes of this study, I follow the common labelling of Heidegger as an existentialist, while acknowledging that his later thought does not fall into this category.

In fact, the name that most often springs to mind when existentialism is mentioned, other than Nietzsche, is not Heidegger, but rather Jean-Paul Sartre. In post-war France, Sartre received something of a cult following, and the values and preoccupations of French existentialism were absorbed by wider society, in time becoming integral to popular culture. Of existentialism and existentialists, Sartre famously said that 'What they [existentialists] have in common is simply their belief that existence precedes essence; or . . . that subjectivity must be our point of departure.'¹⁸

Sartre is the culmination of what can be taken as an existentialist trajectory or 'movement', a movement towards which Maritain reacted strongly from the late 1940s onwards. Sartre drew extensively from Heidegger's *Being and Time*, dedicating his own *Being and Nothingness* (1943) to Heidegger. It was in the light of the popularity of Sartre's seductive philosophy that Maritain wrote *Existence and the Existent* (1948), aiming in that work to help recapture the idea of 'existentialism' from atheistic existentialists such as Sartre, whom he took to be corrupting the notions of existence and essence. Maritain believed Aquinas to be the original and true existentialist and argued both that authentic Thomism must be existentialist, and that atheistic existentialisms, such as those of Sartre, were incoherent in their denial of essence—with Sartre placing freedom as the source and end of all human action and other human values in particular.¹⁹ Maritain saw no contradiction in God's existing, his giving us a nature or essence, and human beings living free and unique

¹⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. C. Macomber (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 20.

¹⁹ *EE*, pp. 3, 125–143.

existences. True Thomism, for Maritain, enabled authentic existence.

Whether Maritain's distinctive brand of Thomism can accurately be called 'existentialism' is a question that will be touched upon later. However, defining existentialism is, despite Sartre's remarks, a difficult task. As a start I shall follow Robert Solomon when he writes that existentialists 'shift the emphasis away from Husserl's question, "What is knowledge?" to the very different question, "What is it to be a person?"'²⁰

Existentialism, or existential phenomenology, seeks to describe what it is to be a human being, as an individual and as a member of the species. One might hark back to Kierkegaard in his insistence on the irreducible value of individuality and of embracing one's existence as an individual, as opposed to following custom or common practice uncritically. In his *Existentialist Philosophies* (1947), Emmanuel Mounier, a friend and one-time colleague of Maritain's, does indeed place Kierkegaard and his reaction against Hegelianism at the center or 'trunk' of the 'existentialist tree', writing that existentialism generally is

*a reaction of the philosophy of man against the excesses of the philosophy of ideas and the philosophy of things. For it, the fundamental problem of philosophy is not so much existence in its widest sense as the existence of man. It accuses orthodox philosophy of having far too often ignored him in favour of philosophy about the world or about products of the mind.*²¹

Whereas Husserlian phenomenology seeks epistemological foundations, existential phenomenology seeks *existential* foundations, that is, of *meaning* or *significance* of the life that is lived by the individual—what Gabriel Marcel calls 'ontological weight'.²² Providing existential foundations involves addressing questions of self-identity and self-determination—how to characterize the human in its most primordial dimensions of experience in the

²⁰ Robert C. Solomon, 'Introduction', in Robert C. Solomon (ed.), *Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1972), p. 29

²¹ Emmanuel Mounier, *Existentialist Philosophies: An Introduction*, trans. Eric Blow (London: Rockliff, 1948), p. 2 (original emphasis).

²² Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, trans. Katharine Farrer (Glasgow: The University Press, 1949), p. 103.

world and the meaning of one's own life, as opposed to totalizing systems which are seen to undermine or even vitiate human freedom and uniqueness, thereby also trivializing the quest for meaning that is significant to the singular individual.

Existentialists are generally not in the business of providing deductive arguments and often merely assert their views on the basis of experience. They may make use of implication and suggestion. One of the reasons why existentialism is so different from conventional Western philosophy and why some are inclined to deny that is in fact philosophy is, as Zaretsky says, that 'They may be trying to do something else: to make us think, to give us a vision, to inspire us to change our lives by way of many different devices, only one of which is argument.'²³

Like Bergson, and, as we shall see in Part II with the case of mystics, existentialists often use a variety of images or impressions, as well as narratives and mythical figures to convey their messages. Intimately related to the methodology of existentialists is the medium in which they work and express their thought. While existentialism is evidently a way of doing philosophy and perhaps also a set of doctrines, it is by no means confined to academic philosophy, or even to what one might call philosophy at all. The mediums through which existentialists express their ideas are as diverse as philosophical treatises, news editorials, novels, imaginary dialogues and plays, such as Sartre's novel *Nausea* and the play *No Exit* and Heidegger's dialogue 'Conversation on a Country Path About Thinking' and philosophical poems in the short work 'The Thinker as Poet'.

The subject matter, problematics and the methodology of the tradition of existentialism broadly construed therefore constitute a break with most philosophy ancient and modern and encompass both cognitive and affective aspects of human discourse. These are problems for thought, says Swenson in his introduction to Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*, that have been

²³ Robert Zaretsky, *A Life Worth Living: Albert Camus and the Quest for Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 51.

generally neglected by philosophers, or at most half-heartedly pursued. They have had much more to say about the enviroing conditions of life and about the abstract problems of being and knowledge, than about life in its inner core, and they have expended a finer workmanship upon objectivities than they have condescended to bestow upon subjectivities.²⁴

As Caputo relates, it is precisely because Heidegger came to see the priority of existential problems over logical problems that he moved away from dialogue with Catholicism and became much more interested in Protestant thinkers at the heart of modernity—that is, the rise of the subject as the source and end of worthwhile contemplation.²⁵ Caputo writes:

The detached objectivism of Scholasticism was rejected in favor of concrete existential-phenomenological investigations. This is to say that the problem of being for Heidegger was no longer the problem of the Being of meaning . . . but the problem of the meaning of Being. [Heidegger comes to argue that] . . . the meaning of Being can be investigated only by means of an existential analytic which will work up the implicit understanding of Being embedded in the entirety of Dasein's concrete life.²⁶

At first glance, the approach of modern existentialism to philosophy as a discipline and to human being so delineated seems to be in sharp contrast with that of Aristotle and therefrom, Aquinas and scholasticism, who doubtlessly take a definite cosmological or 'objective' perspective and perhaps even disinterested approach, reflected in the style of their texts. In his later writings, Heidegger will repudiate the Western philosophical tradition as it unfolds after the pre-Socratics, marking Western philosophy as 'ontotheological'—with the moderns employing a largely unacknowledged metaphysics of subjectivity and domination that typifies the technological age, and conceptual moral systems which are a degradation of a more 'original ethics' or *ethos* found in the ancient Greek world.²⁷

²⁴ David F. Swenson, 'Translator's Introduction', in Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. xvii.

²⁵ *HA*, p. 62

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63.

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959). p. 16.

With Maritain seeing his own work as both continuing and renewing Thomism and claiming that Thomism is a genuine existentialism as distinct from a phenomenological existentialism, I am concerned to find out whether Maritainian Thomism accommodates the life of the individual, with the problems that existentialism addresses of meaning or purpose, solitude, authenticity and death. A preoccupation with such existential problems, in my estimation, unites Maritain and Heidegger. And such problems are surely what give rise to religions and mystical life in the first place.

2. Thomism as a Philosophy of *Sein*

At the beginning of his study of Heidegger and Aquinas, Caputo states that the two are ‘philosophers of being *par excellence*,’²⁸ arguing that Gilson’s concern—Gilson, with Maritain, representing the ‘existential’ school of modern Thomism as opposed to the ‘transcendental’ school represented by Maréchal and Lonergan aiming to reconcile Thomistic metaphysics and Kantian epistemology—was at bottom the same as Heidegger’s, i.e. to counteract the tendency of metaphysics to ‘make Being something conceivable and definable. . . . something entitative’.²⁹

The relationship between Maritain and Heidegger is fascinating not only because of the general connections already identified, but also because of the conspicuous lack of engagement with Heidegger on the part of Maritain, given just how much of a leading figure Heidegger was in twentieth century thought, perhaps being that century’s most important phenomenologist and existentialist thinker. As John Deely observed, in contrast with transcendental’ Thomism, in the existential Thomism of Maritain and Gilson, ‘Heideggerean thought of Being has found little resonance or deep sympathy.’³⁰

That said, while Maritain’s writings on Heidegger are extremely brief, what we find is an apparent recognition of Heidegger’s importance over time.

²⁸ *HA*, p. 1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁰ John Deely, ‘The Situation of Heidegger in the Tradition of Christian Philosophy’, *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, 31 (2) (1967), pp. 159–160.

This is reflected in an increase in things that Maritain has to say about Heidegger, as well as a change of tone in his remarks. In contrast to Maritain's views on Husserl, which did not change, there is evidently some change that occurs between what amounts to little more than acknowledgement of Heidegger's existence in *The Degrees of Knowledge* to a thorough analysis of the concept of *Dasein* in *Untrammelled Approaches* forty-one years later. In *The Peasant of the Garonne*, Maritain quotes Gilson at length regarding Heidegger:

Thomism . . . is a philosophy of *Sein* insofar as it is a philosophy of *esse*. When young people invite us to make the discovery of Martin Heidegger, they invite us, without knowing, to make them rediscover the trans-ontic metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas. . . . they are urging us to follow those we have left behind.³¹

This argument from Gilson is significant because Gilson, a philosopher close to Maritain and also like Maritain, an 'existential Thomist', is claiming that contrary to Heidegger's critique of scholasticism—which is that it operates on too shallow a level, of the *merely ontic*—the scholastic metaphysics of Aquinas (and therefrom Maritain and himself) uniquely touched upon something deeper which Heidegger either missed or barely recognized. Maritain himself agrees and writes: 'St. Thomas did not stop short at *ens*—the "be-ing" ("*das Seiende*", "*l'étant*")—but straight to *esse* ("*Sein*", "*l'être*"), to the *act of existing*. (A pity . . . that Heidegger couldn't see that.)'³² On this most fundamental question, contemporary commentators are very divided, with some, such as John Caputo, arguing that Thomistic metaphysics, taken in itself as a system of doctrines, does indeed operate on the merely ontic level, and others, such as John Knasas, as we shall see later, arguing that the distinction between *esse* and *ens* suffices to meet the demand of acknowledging the difference between Being and beings. My argument in this study follows that of Caputo, and as Caputo seeks a pre-metaphysical, mystical tendency which is immanent in

³¹ Etienne Gilson, quoted in *PG*, pp. 107–108.

³² *PG*, p. 133.

Aquinas, so I see the same, if not more pronounced immanent mystical tendency in Maritain.

3. Intentionality, Intuition and Time

Given that for Heidegger Dasein is always already related to the world, he does not accept Husserl's conception of intentionality as constitutive of the phenomena of consciousness and is also therefore fundamentally opposed to Husserl's phenomenological reduction given that it consists for Husserl in freeing subjectivity from ontic constraints (that is, being caught up in the midst of the realities and passively accepted beliefs of normal, everyday life) and thereby for Heidegger brackets the very condition in which Dasein finds itself relates to every other being, namely *Being*.³³ It follows that Heidegger is, moreover, opposed to Husserl's notion of the transcendental Ego, given that Dasein is always already involved with the world, always finds itself in a condition of 'finitude', necessarily interpreting beings of the world based on available language(s), concepts and knowledge(s).³⁴

For Heidegger, intentionality is not conceived as a property of consciousness but a relating to that which is, intrinsic to the nature of Dasein and present not just as an operation of knowing and thing-as-known of 'pure consciousness', but present in all of Dasein's 'pre-cognitive awareness'.³⁵ As Joseph Kockelmans remarks, 'With this in mind we can easily understand that Heidegger's intentional analysis can never take the form of a constitutive analysis as we find in Husserl.'³⁶ Husserl's transcendental Ego is, for Heidegger, a pure abstraction from Dasein's concrete existence. Heidegger rejects the Cartesian presumption of the possibility of a disinterested observer, capable of a universal or global reflection beyond the limitations of language

³³ Joseph Kockelmans 'Husserl's Phenomenological Philosophy in the Light of Contemporary Criticism', in Joseph Kockelmans (ed.), *Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Its Interpretation* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1967), p. 229

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 229–232.

³⁵ Schrag, 'Phenomenology, Ontology, and History in the Philosophy of Heidegger', in Kockelmans (ed.), *Phenomenology*, p. 281.

³⁶ Kockelmans, 'Husserl's Phenomenological Philosophy', in Kockelmans (ed.), *Phenomenology*, p. 229.

and culture.³⁷ The notion of 'spatiality' in *Being and Time* denotes Dasein's relatedness to the world, not as an object in Cartesian space—what Heidegger refers to as the characteristic of objects merely 'present-at-hand'—but as that which is capable of 'de-severance' and 'directionality';³⁸ in other words, making objects *available* to it regardless of physical distance (*severing* any distance between it and objects).³⁹ Again, Heidegger argues that '*fundamental ontology*, from which all other ontologies can take their rise, must be sought in the *existential analytic of Dasein*.'⁴⁰ As we have already seen, this existential analytic consists in the phenomenological analysis of the modes of being of Dasein.

These considerations of intentionality and Dasein's relatedness to the world allows us to go deeper and reach Heidegger's theory of intuition. Unlike Bergson, Heidegger does not consider intuition and intellect as two distinct faculties of mind or two distinct operations in intellection. Whereas for Bergson non-conceptual and non-discursive intuition or 'intellectual sympathy' is the genuine source of metaphysical knowledge and is prior to subsequent conceptualization of experience, for Heidegger there can be no perception without interpretation. Heidegger writes that 'We see not so much primarily and originally the objects and things, but rather we first speak about them; more precisely, we do not say what we see but rather, vice versa, we see what one says about the matter'.⁴¹ And again: 'The concrete intuition that explicitly yields an object is never an isolated sensory perception with a single layer, but rather is always a layered, that is to say, categorically determinate intuition'.⁴²

Heidegger, unlike Bergson, is not skeptical about the ability of language to denote or express the real. Description is not alien to what is given in experience, and experience is not, therefore, inexpressible. Dan Zahavi interprets Heidegger's position thus: 'experiential life is imbued with meaning,

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ *BT*, 23/144.

³⁹ Ibid., 23–24/144–148.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 4/34 (original emphasis).

⁴¹ Martin Heidegger, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*, quoted in Daniel O. Dahlstrom, *Heidegger's Concept of Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 85.

⁴² Ibid.

is intentionally structured, has an inner articulation and rationality and is comprehensible because it always spontaneously expresses itself.⁴³ In a passage that seems remarkably similar to Maritain's own thinking on the matter, Heidegger writes:

The categories are nothing invented, no 'framework' or independent society of logical schemata; they are rather in an originary fashion in life itself of life; of life, in order to 'cultivate' it. They have their own mode of access which, however, is not such as would be foreign to life itself, imposed upon it arbitrarily from without, rather it is just the eminent way in which life comes to itself.⁴⁴

In his later writings, Heidegger also famously says that 'Language is the house of [B]eing.'⁴⁵ While in phenomenology the notion of 'meaning' is not usually to be taken semantically, as when we ask the meaning of a word and proceed to look it up in the dictionary, for Heidegger language is, in fact, an intrinsic preoccupation in the question of the meaning of being. It seems, then, that for Heidegger it is as much a matter of etymology concealing being as it is a matter of a more primordial rupture in our relationship with being:

[W]e must above all take an absolutely serious view of *the fact* that gives the question [of being] its immediate necessity, the fact that for us being has become little more than a mere word and its meaning an evanescent vapor. . . .

But the emptiness of the word 'being', the total disappearance of its appellative force, is not merely a particular instance of the general exhaustion of language; rather, the destroyed relation to [B]eing as such is the actual reason for the general misrelation to language. . . .

Because the destiny of language is grounded in a nation's *relation to [B]eing*, the question of [B]eing will involve us deeply in the question of language.⁴⁶

⁴³ Dan Zahavi, 'Life, Thinking and Phenomenology in the Early Bergson', in Michael R. Kelly (ed.), *Bergson and Phenomenology* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 125.

⁴⁴ Heidegger, *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles*, quoted in Dan Zahavi, 'Life, Thinking and Phenomenology in the Early Bergson', in Michael R. Kelly (ed.), *Bergson and Phenomenology* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 125.

⁴⁵ *BW*, p. 217.

⁴⁶ Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, pp. 50–51.

While Maritain nowhere makes such a strong claim—amounting to the mutual dependence of language and being⁴⁷—he does always stress the importance of correct linguistic distinctions. Throughout Maritain's writings we see a stress on the etymology of English and French concepts, usually with their origins in the Latin terms used by Aquinas. Much of the time Maritain aims to expound these terms and correct modern misunderstandings. We see precisely this in *Existence and the Existent*, in which Maritain attempts to reclaim the language of existence and essence (or lack thereof) that he believes Heidegger and Sartre have appropriated and deformed.⁴⁸ Here I shall quote Maritain at length, not only to demonstrate the importance of language to the philosopher but also to highlight again Maritain's own position on existential phenomenology:

I am quite aware that the notion of essence, like every other notion contained in the lexicon of metaphysics, has been recast in an entirely phenomenological perspective. Precisely because of this, if we are to call things by their right names, we are obliged to say that in phenomenological existentialism that originates in Heidegger there is a radical *bad faith* which consists in appropriating to itself all the notions that we owe to the great metaphysicians of being . . . Those notions were appropriated for the purpose of exploiting them in the universe of phenomenological thought, the universe of the 'appearance which is essence' (*L'Être et le Néant*, p. 12), where, in reality, they cease to possess meaning, but where, since the aim is to remain a metaphysician, they will continue to be corrupted in such a way that they may endlessly yield anti-natural meanings.⁴⁹

Maritain argues that in what is an irony of history, the metaphysical language of scholasticism (in other words, Aquinas and Thomism, for Maritain) is in part retained in philosophical discourse because of this appropriation and corruption:

⁴⁷ Silvia Benso, 'On the Way to an Ontological Ethics: Ethical Suggestions in Reading Heidegger', *Research in Phenomenology*, 24 (1994), pp. 170–171.

⁴⁸ *EE*, pp. 1–6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6 (original emphasis).

[P]henomenology, under its existentialist aspect, is no more than a scholasticism corrupted at its root. Incidentally, this is what constitutes its undeniable historical interest. The metaphysics of being and scholasticism, though it be only in this corrupt form, is back in the main stream of modern philosophy, or rather, it makes plain to modern philosophy that a certain cycle has been completed. . . . this corrupt scholasticism may perhaps be manuring the soil for a new germination of authentic metaphysics, at least wherever the earth shall have been vigorously enough ploughed.⁵⁰

It is in virtue of the distant kinship between scholastic metaphysics and existentialism which Maritain perceives that he expresses respect for Heidegger and regret that he appears to have missed an opportunity to find in Aquinas the thinker in whom he can find his model. The key, for Maritain, is the commitment to some form of metaphysical realism, which he later calls the 'philosophic' or 'metaphysical' eros'. He writes that, judging from his later writings, there is in Heidegger 'an ardent metaphysical eros, but enchained too, [which] relentlessly torments, and who, obsessed with anxiety for being, carries on a tragic struggle against the emptiness of thought implied by phenomenology, only to go and seek help now, it seems, from the poets and the theogonic powers of their language'.⁵¹

In identifying phenomenology as the method of fundamental ontology, Heidegger—that is, the Heidegger of *Being and Time*—is in agreement with Husserl that phenomenology allows the philosopher to return 'to the things themselves', that is, realities which are given in, or present themselves as basic facts of experience. However, when it comes to the precise nature of those realities, Husserl and Heidegger part ways. For Husserl, the 'things themselves' are only conceivable in virtue of the prior constituting synthesis of consciousness (i.e. as *phenomena*). Heidegger, by contrast, asks what remains unthought in the very appeal to return 'to the things themselves'. That which has remained unthought is nothing less than Being. If phenomenology is concerned with things as they show themselves, as Sallis, writes, 'What remains unthought is the ground of the possibility of such showings as those

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *PG*, p. 107.

to which phenomenology demands we attend.⁵²

Here we come to the crucial Heideggerian notion of ‘disclosure’ or ‘disclosedness’—which in his later writings will rather be referred to as ‘original truth’ or the Greek *aletheia* (ἀλήθεια)—as well as notions of the ‘oblivion of [B]eing’ and ‘ontotheology’. Admittedly, the number of concepts and notions which Heidegger articulates with his own idiosyncratic meanings, as well as the organic relationships between them, can initially be overwhelming. The complexity and number of Heidegger’s terms, then, demand that one approaches them steadily and with caution, being willing to follow Heidegger in ‘thinking’ that spirals, rather than proceeds by steps.

Heidegger claims that the meaning of being—or Being—has been forgotten. He therefore writes that that “‘Disclosure of [B]eing” means the unlocking of what forgetfulness of being closes and hides. And it is through this questioning that a light first falls on the *essence* of metaphysics that had hitherto also been hidden.⁵³ Enquiring about the meaning of Being for Dasein is enquiring about that mode of comprehension which allows Dasein to apprehend beings in the first place. It is, as Sallis says, that ‘understanding which constitutes the ground of the possibility of things showing themselves. It is to ask about the opening up of the open space for such showing, about the disclosure of world, about disclosedness.’⁵⁴ Calvin Schrag seems to suggest that the posing of question of the meaning of Being for Heidegger is synonymous with Dasein’s own disclosedness to itself, at least in the first half of Heidegger’s career—before the *Kehre*—and ontology as issue and phenomenology as method both converge on the problem of Dasein’s disclosedness.⁵⁵

If we recall the story of Maritain’s youth, from the very beginnings of his intellectual life he too sought to escape the confines that Kant had placed on the intellect such that it was incapable to access extra-mental reality. To reiterate a fundamental point of Heideggerian methodology adopted in the

⁵² Sallis, ‘The Origins of Heidegger’s Thought’, p. 49.

⁵³ Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 19.

⁵⁴ Sallis, ‘The Origins of Heidegger’s Thought’, p. 51.

⁵⁵ Schrag, ‘Phenomenology, Ontology, and History in the Philosophy of Heidegger’, in Kockelmans (ed.), *Phenomenology*, pp. 284–288.

introduction of this study, we must refer to what remains ‘unthought’ in Maritain’s philosophy as ‘the greatest gift that thinking can bestow.’ I claim that for Jacques and Raïssa Maritain it was nothing less than an *existential necessity* for them both to experience for themselves and commune with, as Heidegger would put it, the *Being* of beings, and to constantly return to the question of what Being is and what it means, in relation to human life as disclosed to us. This is why for the Maritains, Bergson’s thought, which promised that both things in themselves and Being itself can be accessed by the mind was so attractive (at least initially). The existential necessity of experiencing Being and pursuing the meaning of Being is the ‘unthought’ in both Maritain and Heidegger, which determines their respective philosophical projects. And in Maritain’s case at least, it is the source and end of an immanent mysticism.

To return specifically to intuition, for Maritain, too, as we have seen, there is no conflict or *temporal* ordering between the intuition of sense perception and abstraction or conceptualization—there is instead a *logical* ordering. Maritain provides a detailed account of his philosophy of perception in *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, in which he offers the teleological claim that the more ‘perfect’ powers of the soul of intellect and imagination, while being *temporally* subsequent to the develop of the nutritive powers of the soul, are the *ontological* principle and reason for being of the lower powers of the external senses, such that the senses ‘proceed from the essence of the soul through the intellect.’⁵⁶ Every capacity of the human soul is infused with intellect.⁵⁷

Maritain and Heidegger therefore seem to have a common understanding of the role of the senses and of intuition in the formation of metaphysical knowledge as distinct from artistic or moral knowledge. In metaphysics, intuition and abstraction are both present, whereas artistic and moral experience for Maritain, are first and foremost pre-conceptual, instances of connatural knowledge. Of moral knowledge by connaturality, Maritain writes

⁵⁶ *CI*, p. 76

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 78–79.

that it 'is through connaturality that moral consciousness attains a kind of knowing—inexpressible in words and notions—of the deepest dispositions—longings, fears, hopes or despairs, primeval loves and options—involved in the night of the subjectivity.'⁵⁸ And the artist, he says, has an 'experience-knowledge' through the senses in intuiting or divining the 'secret meaning' of things, in virtue of emotion.⁵⁹

With this distinction between metaphysical knowledge and other forms of knowledge (artistic and moral), we can agree with but also qualify Redpath's argument that, in appropriating Bergsonian intuition, 'Maritain's own meaning of intuition is a direct knowledge of a thing which does not result from reasoning.'⁶⁰ This is because Maritain also distinguishes between intellect and reasoning, such that to intuit correct moral behavior in a given circumstance is employing the intellect but not in form of conceptualization and abstraction, as if we were to consult Kant's categorical imperative before making any decision. This, for Maritain, is a distinction that rationalists like Descartes and Kant especially, could never recognize.⁶¹

Other than Heidegger's views on art and ethics, what remains to be investigated, however, is the very *condition* for any experience whatsoever, or the 'horizon' or 'field of presence' of both Dasein itself and objects experienced in the world.⁶² We find here that for Heidegger time is this very horizon of experience and of the being of Dasein itself. For Heidegger, time is the condition of the being of the subject, as Elliot says, 'with respect to which the relation of concrete human existence to the things of its world is at all possible.'⁶³ Time is the 'field of existential possibilities'⁶⁴ that undergirds Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein in the second part of *Being and Time*. Heidegger, modifying Kant's notion of pure intuition and differentiating

⁵⁸ *RR*, p. 26.

⁵⁹ Jacques Maritain, *The Situation of Poetry*, trans. Marshall Suther (New York, NY: Philosophical library, 1955), pp. 44–51; *CI*, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Redpath, 'Bergsonian Recollections in Maritain', p. 108.

⁶¹ Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics*, p. 48.

⁶² *BT*, 5/39.

⁶³ Brian Elliot, *Phenomenology and Imagination in Husserl and Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 92.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

between the non-sensible 'pure intuition' of time as phenomenological horizon and ontic or empirical intuition of the senses writes:

Dasein as finite is referred to a subsistent being it encounters . . . This ontic [i.e. empirical] intuition is only possible on the basis of pure intuition. Space and time as the pure forms of intuition are conditions of the finitude of intuition and thereby the most acute indices of the finitude of *Dasein*, precisely insofar as they must be realized in advance . . .⁶⁵

For Heidegger, time or temporality is the horizon or *a priori* or transcendent condition of *Dasein*'s being, and *Dasein*'s own modalities must be interpreted in terms of time: 'In this ontological analytic of *Dasein*, the original constitution of the *Dasein*'s being is revealed to be *temporality*.'⁶⁶ It is the temporality or finitude of *Dasein* that engenders 'anxiety' in the face of the possibility of one's (*my*) death (that possibility which prevents the actualization of all other possibilities), which is in turn the condition for *Dasein*'s 'authenticity'—that is, a taking hold of one's own being, a conscious 'being-towards-death'.⁶⁷ Time is both the condition for all understanding of being and the essential constitution of the meaning of *Dasein*'s being:

If temporality constitutes the meaning of the being of the human *Dasein* and if the understanding of being belongs to the constitution of the *Dasein*'s being, then this understanding, too, must be possible only on the basis of temporality. Hence there arises the prospect of a possible confirmation of the thesis that time is the horizon from which something like being becomes at all intelligible. We interpret being by way of time (*tempus*).⁶⁸

For Maritain, whereas Bergson substitutes Being *for* time, Heidegger places Being *on* time,⁶⁹ which he opposes, probably in virtue of Aquinas' notion of the *esse subsistens* as immutable. This is significant for an analysis of Heidegger's

⁶⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* (25): *Phänomenologische Interpretation von Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, quoted and translated in Elliot, *Phenomenology and Imagination in Husserl and Heidegger*, p. 91 (original emphasis).

⁶⁶ *BPP(R)*, 4/16.

⁶⁷ *BT*, 52–53/299–311.

⁶⁸ *BPP(R)*, 3–4/16–17.

⁶⁹ *DK*, p. 114.

later claim that the metaphysics of Aquinas contributes to the ‘oblivion’ of Being as an instance of ‘ontotheology’, for it will be shown that in the highest mystical experience for Maritain, that of the beatific vision, God is experienced beyond time, as eternal.

To return to a prior theme for now, however, phenomenology, for Heidegger, must be hermeneutical, or interpretive, as opposed to being merely descriptive. We have seen that this is precisely because of Dasein’s situation as finite and always already in the world, incapable of impersonal and universal knowledge. The way Dasein conceives the world is considerably determined by a linguistic, cultural and religious context, and when conflicts between societal norms and personal preferences arise, Dasein is likely to fall back on the norms as a source of stability.⁷⁰ This hermeneutical attitude, characteristic of most phenomenology after the Second World War—influenced more by Heidegger than Husserl—says Kockelmans,

can be described as that attitude in which the philosopher no longer maintains the pretense of being an a-cosmic, a-historical, and a-social consciousness. The attitude can be positively defined as one in which the philosopher must consider his own ek-sistence and all its essential characteristics as previously given. He then must try to clarify the essential structures of his ek-sistence and to understand their ontological meaning. The hermeneutic postulate arose when the phenomenology of the post-war period rejected the Cartesian ideal of an absolute beginning, which Husserl always maintained.⁷¹

In conceiving Dasein, Heidegger aims to undermine the dualisms that have plagued philosophy—such as that between subject and object, knower and known, mind and body, consciousness and experience—and have created intractable skeptical dilemmas. For Heidegger, the existence of the ‘external world’ is not a genuine philosophical problem:

⁷⁰ *BT*, 6/42–43.

⁷¹ Kockelmans, ‘Husserl’s Phenomenological Philosophy’, in Kockelmans (ed.), *Phenomenology*, p. 232.

All access to such entities is founded ontologically upon the basic state of Dasein, Being-in-the-world; and this in turn has care as its even more primordial state of Being (ahead of itself—Being already in a world—as Being alongside entities within-the-world).

The question of whether there is a world at all and whether its Being can be proved, makes no sense if it is raised by *Dasein* as Being-in-the-world; and who else would raise it?⁷²

For Maritain and Thomism generally, while metaphysics as first philosophy is not necessarily where we begin in thinking as such, all thought, especially philosophical, presupposes a foundational metaphysical realism and the operation of the mind on immanent and self-evident first principles (such as the law of identity) which allow us to cognize reality as something intelligible. This we saw at the end of the previous chapter. As such, the question of the existence of the external world is also meaningless for Maritain. Furthermore, for the above reasons, what we now call ‘epistemology’ or the theory of knowledge, is considered by Maritain as dependent upon and a sub-discipline of metaphysics, denoting the correct methods of attaining accurate correspondences between thought and extra-mental reality, and is therefore otherwise known as ‘criticism’.⁷³ For Maritain, *contra* Descartes and Husserl, epistemology can be neither first philosophy nor a discipline separate from metaphysics.

For Heidegger, then, the transcendental *epoché* cannot be done because the relationship between Dasein and other beings belongs to the nature of Dasein itself. In Heidegger’s terminology, Dasein is necessarily both ontically and ontologically involved with the world. One might say, that Dasein is an aperture through which Being is addressed, demanding and providing the possibility of an ontological grounding of all science through an analysis of Dasein’s own being and the being of its areas of knowledge. As being-in-the-world, there is also an ontic imperative to explore the meaning of Dasein’s own

⁷² *BT*, 43/246–247.

⁷³ Jacques Maritain, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, trans. E. I. Watkin (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), pp. 126–127; see also: Gerald McCool, *The Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994), p. 84.

being.⁷⁴

For Maritain, too, the transcendental epoché cannot be done because it consists for him in bracketing that extra-mental reality which makes any knowledge possible. The notion of intentionality is important for Maritain in this regard, for the knower, he argues, ‘becomes the known’ in an activity which is necessarily spiritual.⁷⁵ How it does this—what Maritain calls *esse intentionale* and *esse spirituale*—will be very significant in the analyses of connatural knowledge in Part II. Suffice it to say here that for Maritain, as for Heidegger, the mind is also an aperture through which being is addressed, and this is in fundamental opposition to Cartesianism and any idealism for him.⁷⁶

4. The *Destruktion* of Metaphysics

On the basis of a shared quest for Being, a shared repudiation of the Cartesian and Kantian projects—and consequently Husserl’s *epoché*—of a shared notion of intentionality which extends far beyond conscious cognition to the pre-conscious relation between human beings and the world, it seems that we already have much to go on in comparing Maritain and Heidegger, even perhaps at this point being tempted to claim they share a common philosophical project overall.

It is, however, too early to make such a claim, and as we have seen, there are arguments in the literature on Heidegger and Thomism to the effect that Heidegger’s project bears little resemblance to either Aquinas or Maritain, at least explicitly. This is especially true when it comes to Heidegger’s ‘destruction’ (*destruktio*) of metaphysics and the claim that Western metaphysics is ontotheological. This is precisely the point on which Caputo argues that Aquinas’ metaphysics is in fact an instance of ontotheology and we must seek beyond or beneath it to retrieve a mystical tendency.

Heidegger’s later career is characterized by a move away from an

⁷⁴ *BT*, 3–5/28–36.

⁷⁵ *DK*, p. 393.

⁷⁶ Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible*, p. 56.

analytic of being to a stepping back to allow Being to reveal itself. As such, Heidegger describes his work no longer as 'philosophy' but as 'thinking' (*Denken*),⁷⁷ and specifically thinking what is left *un*-thought in Western philosophy (metaphysics in particular). Heidegger claims that Western philosophy since Socrates has brought about an 'oblivion of [B]eing'⁷⁸—a forgetting of the meaning of being as Heidegger said earlier in *Being and Time*—and this for the principal reason that ever since the pre-Socratics, Western metaphysics has uncritically taken as its point of departure a distinction within being when it first manifested itself at the beginning of Western history. 'Thinking' is opposed to 'calculation' in Heidegger's writings. I will go into detail about just what Heidegger means by the idea in Part II.

This distinction is between the being of beings (entities) in their *whatness* and Being as highest cause of all beings (*thatness*). Being has, since the beginning of Western metaphysics, been posited as 'ground' or 'foundation' of everything else—has been a foundationalist' project—and has been so dualistically. Philosophers have posited an ontological ground, or that which all beings must share to *be* (what Iain Thomson calls a 'bottom-up' grounding) and a theological ground or justification of their being (*that* they are, and '*from where*'?)⁷⁹ in terms of a highest kind of being or entity (a 'top-down' grounding). According to Thomson, this difference (*Differenz*) has its roots in the pre-Socratics Thales and Anaximander, given that Thales posits water as that being which all beings share and Anaximander posits a highest being (*apeiron*) as the origin of beings.⁸⁰ Heidegger characterizes metaphysics as ontotheology succinctly:

[I]f we recall once again the history of Occidental-European thought, then we see that the question about being, taken as a question about the being of the existent, is double in form. It asks on the one hand: What is the existent, in general, as existent? Considerations within the province of this question come, in the course of the history of philosophy, under the

⁷⁷ Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, pp. 4–6, 41.

⁷⁸ Martin Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 85.

⁷⁹ Thomson, 'Ontotheology?', p. 312.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 311–318.

heading of ontology. The question 'What is the existent?' [or 'What is that which is?'] includes also the question, 'Which existent is the highest and how does it exist?' The question is about the divine and God. The province of this question is called theology. The duality of the question about the being of the existent can be brought together in the title 'onto-theo-logy.'⁸¹

Heidegger argues that it is with Aristotle's *Metaphysics* that metaphysics as ontotheology is formally inaugurated, but he also argues that between the pre-Socratics and Aristotle is the determining influence of Plato, in whom the ontotheological difference was implicit. According to Heidegger, Plato's Forms or Ideas are both the paradigms which beings only imperfectly copy and instantiate (making the Forms the 'highest' kind of beings and the theological ground of beings) and also the universals which are common to beings (making the Forms the ontological ground of beings). With Plato we see an implicit distinction between 'whatness' (the essence, or ontological grounding of beings, when we ask 'what' a thing is) and 'thatness' (the existential grounding, or condition of existence, of a thing).⁸² Aristotle was to make this distinction explicit, and in so doing, set the ontotheological framework for Aquinas' distinction between the act of existence (*esse*) and essence (*essentia*).

It is . . . easy to establish historically the connection of the distinction between *essentia* and *existentia* with the thinking of Aristotle, who first brought the distinction to a concept, that is, at the same time to its essential ground. This occurred after Plato's thinking had responded to the claim of Being in a way that prepared that distinction by bringing its establishment out into the open.⁸³

As we saw in the introduction, the distinction between *esse* and *essentia* was fundamental for Aquinas. For Aquinas, though, the former has ontological precedence over the latter. If we ask how a thing or 'substance' actually exists in the world, says Aquinas, it is clear that we cannot refer to the substance

⁸¹ Martin Heidegger, 'Kant's Thesis about Being', trans. Ted E. Klein and William E. Pohl, *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy*, 4 (3) (1973), pp. 10–11.

⁸² Thomson, 'Ontotheology?', p. 313. Here I rely on Thomson's gathering and interpretation of many of Heidegger's works.

⁸³ Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, p. 4.

itself in answering the question because nothing in the substance itself can explain its own (actual) existence. In other words, there is nothing in any material substance's essence, which is the 'that which it is' that explains or gives reason for its actual existence, the 'that *by which* it is'.⁸⁴ As such, essences stands in 'potency' or potentiality to *esse* to be *actuated* and *actual*—hence Aquinas calls *esse* the 'act of existence'.⁸⁵ Maritain repeats this doctrine in his works on metaphysics.

In some of his remarks of Aquinas, Heidegger seems to argue that in his doctrine of the transcendentals of the 'one', the 'good', the 'true', and the 'beautiful'—which Maritain calls 'properties of [B]eing'⁸⁶ and with which we shall be very much concerned with in Part II in the analysis of connatural knowledge—Aquinas also makes explicit the previously implicit bottom-up and top-down groundings that Plato's Forms provided. This is because, as Heidegger says in *Being and Time*, the transcendentals posited by Aquinas are

those characters of Being which lie beyond every possible way in which an entity may be classified as coming under some generic kind of subject-matter (every *modus specialis entis*), and which belong necessarily to anything, whatever it may be. Thomas has to demonstrate that the *verum* is such a *transcendens*. He does this by invoking an entity which, in accordance with its very manner of Being, is properly suited to 'come together with' entities of any sort whatever.⁸⁷

While Heidegger goes on to say that for Aquinas (following Aristotle), this entity is the soul as the ground of all experience, we can very easily see that this line of thought regarding Aquinas' transcendental ground of beings taken in *Being and Time* is soon to be followed by the insight that the soul itself requires a ground. And that ground, making explicit the implicit ontotheological tendency in such causal thinking, is God. This seems to be correct if we consider the fact that *On Being and Essence*, Aquinas argues that a substance's act of

⁸⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, trans. A. Maurer (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1949), p. 46, 48.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24, 25, 47.

⁸⁶ *IBPMP*, p. 30.

⁸⁷ *BT*, 4/34.

existing itself has a cause—an efficient cause and ‘the original source of change or rest [of a thing]’,⁸⁸ as Aristotle says—to give a contingency argument from efficient causation for God’s existence. God, for Aquinas is a being ‘existing in virtue of itself [and being] the cause of the existing of all things because it itself is the act of existing alone [*ipsum esse subsistens*]’,⁸⁹ and, as Maritain says, because God is *ipsum esse subsistens*, he is the source of all the properties of Being even while transcending them.⁹⁰ We can, then, be quite sure that Heidegger regards Aquinas (and would regard Maritain) as standing within the metaphysics of ontotheology. Pattison sums things up nicely when he says:

In his [Heidegger’s] view the Christian tradition, through Augustine’s Christian Platonism and Thomas Aquinas’ adaptation of a Latinised Aristotle for Christian purposes, had allowed its God to be absorbed into the Supreme Being of metaphysics. In Heidegger’s own terms, the Christian Creator God had become identified with onto-theology. The result of this was that theology had become incapable of speaking of God’s radical otherness, since, by construing God metaphysically, it had placed him on a continuum with beings and trapped him within the reifying system of enframing.⁹¹

The notion of ‘enframing’ mentioned by Pattison brings us to another, deeper aspect of Heidegger’s thought. In his *Destruktion*, Heidegger further characterizes the ontotheological difference in Western metaphysics phenomenologically as ‘presencing’ and ‘presence’, between that process whereby beings come into existence or are shown, remain, and pass away (*thatness, existentia*), and that aspect which remains (*whatness, essentia*). Yet it is with Aristotle, Heidegger says, that *thatness*, existence, or presence has taken precedence in Western metaphysics in the understanding of being, such that to be is to *be present*—before we know *what* a thing is, we know *that* it is, and *is here* or *there*.⁹² This the heart of the ontotheological conception of Being as ontic—as a reduction and commodification to beings which can be

⁸⁸ Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. R. Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 39.

⁸⁹ Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, p. 47.

⁹⁰ *MAG*, p. 30.

⁹¹ *TLH*, p. 198.

⁹² Thomson, ‘Ontotheology?’, p. 314.

totally known and totally mastered, with no sense of mystery as they emerge from Being.

Heidegger goes on to propose an alternative to ontotheology, of a pre-metaphysical comprehension—as he puts it, phenomenologically—of the first ‘opening’ (sometimes also translated as the ‘clearing’) of Being, provided by two other pre-Socratics: Heraclitus and Parmenides. Heidegger argues:

In the beginning of its history, Being opens or clears—*Lichtung*] itself out as emerging (*physis*) and unconcealment (*aletheia*). From there it reaches the formulation of presence [*Anwesenheit*] and permanence [*Beständigkeit*] in the sense of enduring (*ousia*). Metaphysics proper begins with this.⁹³

Being, rather than being understood as *mere* presence, can be understood in non-foundational, non-grounding terms as dynamic, ‘self-opening’, ‘self-blossoming emergence’ from Heraclitus and as ‘unconcealment’ and ‘disclosure’ from Parmenides.⁹⁴ The emergence of Being, as a temporal emergence (Being, as we saw in Heidegger’s earlier work, is only experienced with time as its horizon), Heidegger calls *Ereignis* (‘the event of appropriation’ or, one might say, the *event* of the *happening* of Being), but the opening which allows for this very event, of happening, is *aletheia*.⁹⁵ What is unconcealed and discloses, also conceals and closes off from sight, and *aletheia*, as the ‘truth’ of the unconcealedness of beings, Heidegger writes, ‘is never itself but, viewed dialectically, is always also its opposite.’⁹⁶ This means that beings, as much they emerge into presence, also withdraw from our understanding.

Now why is this significant? It is because Heidegger’s claim, which is nothing less than monumental, is that ever since being has been taken as presence—what Heidegger calls ‘present-at-hand’ in *Being and Time*⁹⁷—it has taken on the characteristic precisely of *object*, which, for human beings, has been exemplified in the modern period especially, in the tool or, more broadly,

⁹³ Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, p. 4.

⁹⁴ Martin Heidegger, quoted in Thomson, ‘Ontotheology?’, p. 319.

⁹⁵ *HA*, pp. 171–172; John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 21–22.

⁹⁶ *PLT*, p. 53.

⁹⁷ *BT*, 9/67.

what Heidegger calls 'equipment':⁹⁸ something made and used by *subjects*. What Heidegger calls 'enframing', is 'the way of revealing that holds sway in the essence of modern technology and that is itself nothing technological', a 'producing and presenting' which is the way beings come to be present, or unconcealed, for us.⁹⁹ The problem, as Heidegger sees it, however, is that with the mastery and commodification of nature that modern technology brings, everything in the world, including the human being, has become an object for exploitation and consumption, such that now 'In enframing, the unconcealment propriates in conformity with which the work of modern technology reveals the actual as standing-reserve.'¹⁰⁰ What Heidegger calls 'standing-reserve' means standing as available for calculation, manipulation, or as Pattison says, 'technological management'.¹⁰¹ Connecting the previous remarks concerning Christianity and ontotheology, Heidegger therefore writes in the essay 'The Origin of the Work of Art':

The realm of beings thus opened up was then transformed into a being in the sense of God's creation. This happened in the Middle Ages. This kind of being was again transformed at the beginning and in the course of the modern age. Beings became objects that could be controlled and seen through by calculation.¹⁰²

Heidegger fears that all too often this is so even for art—about which he does not aim to provide an aesthetics or theory of *aesthesis* (of sensuous experience of the beautiful), but rather an understanding of art as a matter of truth insofar as it can express and tell of the concealment and 'unconcealment' of Being as related throughout history. Art in this sense reveals 'ontological historicity'—that, for Heidegger, as Thomson says, 'ontology is a temporally dynamic construct'. This will be a subject of discussion in Part II concerning art and mystical experience, but it is worth noting that this ontological historicity is, as Thomson relates, a 'central doctrine of the later Heidegger', and in

⁹⁸ *PLT*, pp. 28–30.

⁹⁹ *BW*, pp. 325–326.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

¹⁰¹ *TLH*, p. 122.

¹⁰² *PLT*, p. 74.

Heidegger's later writings 'now forms a taken-for-granted point of philosophical departure for virtually every major practitioner of post-structuralism, post-modernism, and deconstruction.'¹⁰³

Yet for art to be a matter of truth requires what Heidegger calls 'comportment'—an openness, a standing back, or certain respect for the dignity of the work. This standing back characterizes Heidegger's later work, going beyond philosophy and utilizing the poetry of Rilke and Hölderlin. It is what Heidegger calls 'meditative' thinking, in contradistinction to 'calculative' thinking.¹⁰⁴ Heidegger goes so far as to say that 'Poetry is nothing other than the elemental way in which existence as Being-in-the-world is discovered.'¹⁰⁵ This meditative standing back that art demands will be a crucial point of contact between Maritain and Heidegger and I will in fact argue that for Maritain, artistic creation, undertaken in such a manner and with the Christian conception of the divine as its subject-matter, amounts to a species of mysticism.

In relating all of this to Maritain we should recall that Aristotle says in the *Posterior Analytics* that 'our capacity for discovering *what* a thing is depends upon our awareness *that* it is'.¹⁰⁶ Maritain echoes this and builds his whole philosophy—not just his metaphysics—on this primacy of existence, or *esse* over *essentia*, and it is why he regarded himself as an existentialist.¹⁰⁷ The awareness of *esse* is the core of Maritain's notion of an 'intuition of being' for he writes that 'What counts is to have seen that existence is not a simple empirical fact [i.e. that something exists] but a primitive datum for the mind itself, opening to the mind an infinite supra-observable field—in a word, the primary and super-intelligible source of intelligibility'.¹⁰⁸ Again, God for Maritain, as for Aquinas, is *ipsum esse subsistens*, and for their own existences, creatures participate in God's own existence. Heidegger identifies

¹⁰³ Thomson, 'Ontotheology?', p. 298.

¹⁰⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 46.

¹⁰⁵ Martin Heidegger, quoted in David Halliburton, *Poetic Thinking: An Approach to Heidegger* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 11.

¹⁰⁶ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 93a28–9 (my emphasis).

¹⁰⁷ *EE*, pp. 3, 125–143.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

the Christian doctrine of God as creator and Aquinas' 'real distinction' between essence and existence as determining factors in the history of the movement of subjectivization of Being in the image of the human being and human equipment, for as Matthew Pugh writes, according to the history of Being provided by Heidegger, 'Thomas understands *esse* as act, *actualitas*, or cause, as that which makes a thing actual, or real in the sense of hardened presence.'¹⁰⁹

Again, God is understood as highest being and cause, but more importantly, and historically speaking, we are given the paradigm of the craftsman, who, in Aristotelian terms, gives form to, or informs, inert matter according to the images in his or her mind.¹¹⁰ We, who have 'killed God', as Nietzsche said, have taken on this role of self-subsistent subjects, calculatingly converting the earth into raw materials for production, which is why Heidegger identifies the driving question of Nietzsche's thought as the following: 'Is the man of today in his metaphysical nature prepared to assume dominion over the earth as a whole?'¹¹¹ If Maritain's project is capable of transcending ontotheology and cease to be regarded as contributing to the oblivion of being spoken of earlier, at the heart of Maritain's philosophy must be a pre-metaphysical meeting with being, and there has to be sustained in a similar 'meditative' mode of thinking that which is not defining and controlling but appreciative. Moreover, this must be what Caputo calls an 'alethiological' experience of Being, in which Being is not mere presence, but also concealing and concealment; there must, in Caputo's own words, be a 'religious alethiology'.¹¹²

At the end of his life, Aquinas had a mystical experience of such power and profundity that he afterwards claimed all that he had written was only straw compared to what he had felt and seen—thereafter writing almost nothing until his death. Maritain's final book, *Untrammelled Approaches*, published in 1973

¹⁰⁹ Matthew Pugh, 'Deconstruction, Onto-theology and Thomas's Via Negativa', in Brendan Sweetman (ed.), *The Failure of Modernism: The Cartesian Legacy and Contemporary Pluralism* (Mishawaka, IN: American Maritain Association, 1999), p. 200.

¹¹⁰ *PLT*, p. 29

¹¹¹ Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, p. 65. See also: *TLH*, p. 122.

¹¹² *HA*, p. 216, 283.

shortly after his death, features essays and lectures in which Maritain similarly admits defeat on the part of the philosopher in approaching God—whether it be concerning conceptualizing God’s necessary capacity to suffer in love with his creatures as does a Father, or indeed any positive analogical categorization whatsoever. In the essay ‘No Knowledge Without Intuitivity’, Maritain writes of a ‘veil on unknowing’.¹¹³ I believe that in Maritain’s metaphysics, in what will be shown to be a person-focused ethics, and in his philosophy of art, what we find is precisely an openness to the disclosure of being which quietly tells of an immanent mysticism—not a ‘mystical element’ as in Heidegger but a fully-fledged mysticism which has its source in a religious yearning for meaning and its end in a religious yearning for union with God in love.

But in *Heidegger and Aquinas*, Caputo makes this argument:

[A]ll attempts to carry out a confrontation of Heidegger and St. Thomas have failed because they remain lodged on the level of St. Thomas’ metaphysics. And I am arguing further that once the depth dimension, the mystical element in St. Thomas’ metaphysics, is wrested loose from this metaphysical encasement one finds a Thomas who eludes Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics, for whom metaphysics is something to be overcome, a more essential thinker in whom Heidegger would have been compelled to concede that here too—and not just in Eckhart—there is a profound unity of mysticism and thought.¹¹⁴

I believe the same argument can be made for Maritain—and in fact the argument is much easier given Maritain’s very explicit concerns with intuitive and mystical knowledge, to the extent, as we saw in the introduction, that he claims metaphysical knowledge is imbued with mystical aspirations.¹¹⁵ It is precisely, in ‘the light of the alethiological’, Caputo argues, that for Aquinas his philosophical tomes ‘appear as straw; that is to say, the texts need to be deconstructed in the light of the experience of Being . . . to which they give

¹¹³ *UT*, p. 344.

¹¹⁴ *HA*, p. 11.

¹¹⁵ *DK*, pp. 284–285.

way.¹¹⁶ I will argue that this is not only the case for Maritain's metaphysics, but also the case for his philosophy of art. For while the experience of the artist in creating works of art and the experience of the intended audience are indeed subjects of analysis in works such as *Art and Scholasticism* and *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, Maritain's focus is undoubtedly what art—both what he calls the 'virtue' of art and the artefact or performance itself—can reveal about Being. As we shall see, Maritain's writings on art are perhaps his richest in terms of depth and originality, and there is present in Maritain's thought a dialectic between the intuition and emotions of the subject and beauty as a 'transcendental' of Being as such—a dialectic in which Being can be both revealed and concealed. As such, for Maritain, art, both in terms of activity and artefact or production, is more a matter of revealing truth than a matter of producing aesthetic experiences.

¹¹⁶ *HA*, p. 9.

Truth Among Saints

1. Resources for a Deconstruction

While he acknowledges the ontotheological character of Aquinas' systematic thought, Caputo aims to demonstrate that ontotheology is not *all* that there is to Aquinas. He aims to refute the commonplace view of Aquinas as only a cold rationalist, whose Aristotelian philosophical machinery leaves no room for the wonder or experience of being as inexhaustible mystery. In this pursuit, Caputo draws attention to the fact that while Aquinas came to see the *Summa Theologiæ* as 'straw' following his revelation from God, this was never something held against him, but was rather something that was held to be evidence of a fully religious life which merited saintliness.¹ It was not as if Aquinas' inability to write further refuted what he had written prior to the vision. Rather, Caputo argues, it was taken to edify Aquinas' life, such that he 'was held by his contemporaries to be a man endowed with contemplative gifts, with religious and mystical grace, and not merely with theological intelligence.'² Describing Aquinas' religious context and decisive mystical experiences prepares the ground for and illuminates the pre-metaphysical significance of *esse* and *intellectus*.

In this chapter, I follow Caputo's method in highlighting the major religious events and influences in Maritain's life before going on to the key terms in Maritain to be considered, bringing out the deeper meaning and (as Caputo says regarding Aquinas) 'possibilities' latent in Maritain's metaphysics.

¹ *HA*, p. 255.

² *Ibid.*

Unlike Caputo, however, I will stress the importance of both the people and events of Maritain's earlier years (pre-conversion and post-conversion) in addition to his later years in demonstrating what I believe is the *unthought* in Maritain's colossal philosophical enterprise—the mystery of the meaning of Being and the existential and religious need to commune with Being as *mystery*. I want to show that other than being a philosopher employing and renewing the philosophical tools of Thomism, Maritain is a contemplative. I also want to show that the unthought in his philosophy and wider life is the foundation for his immanent mystical tendency. It is true that in much of Maritain's writing there is 'calculative thinking', but there is also clear evidence in both his writings and his life not just of what Heidegger calls 'meditative thinking', but also of a kind of Christian mysticism that is capable of appreciating mystery beyond the conceptual instruments employed even by the existential Thomism of which Maritain is perhaps the lead representative.

In this endeavor, Maritain's tortuous existential struggles in his university days are of utmost concern because they reveal his most fundamental motivations and aspirations as a human being and as a philosopher who would come to fly the Thomist flag later on. It is before the Maritains' conversion, at around the time of Jacques and Raïssa's suicide pact, that we get a sense of what it is that Maritain most desired in his very being, as it were—in other words, what he lived for, and literally so, before the red-hot philosophical gold, extracted from extraneous matter, cooled and settled into discreet philosophical categories. The people who were most influential in his life at this time, other than the faculty at the Sorbonne, were Henri Bergson and Léon Bloy and they should therefore be given priority. I hasten to add that in addition to Bergson and Bloy, there is Raïssa, to whom he will acknowledge much debt. Determining the precise philosophical content of Maritain's thought for which she is partly responsible, however, is a task that requires and deserves a full-length study itself, with reference to the posthumously published *Journal de Raïssa* (1963) as well as any correspondence and unpublished material that may be available. Consequently, it is rather her influence on Jacques in terms of his spiritual life

that I will discuss in later chapters. Given the biographical nature of these explorations, I make use of Maritain's own Notebooks, his correspondence and Raïssa's autobiographical works *We Have Been Friends Together* and *Adventures in Grace* as well as his philosophical work. Maritain's private reflections and Raïssa's records are important precisely because they are not necessarily attempts to systematize or, we might say, 'ontotheologize', being instead accounts of existential development and searching. As Maritain writes in December of 1905:

It is not for their intrinsic value that I have drawn these notes of youth from the jumble of my old notebooks. It seems to me that they give some idea of the state of a soul which searches in the night, and of the spiritual journey of a young man hungry for the absolute who, until his meeting with Léon Bloy (1905), believed himself an atheist or completely agnostic (if he then happened to sometimes use the word 'God,' the meaning of this word remained for him merely poetical or mythical).³

Maritain's later life, following Raïssa's death in 1960, is also informative in a number of ways. The period from Raïssa's death in 1960 up until his own death in 1973 was Maritain's most difficult period.⁴ Yet it was also one of profound transformation and creativity. Almost immediately after Raïssa's death, Maritain moved to Toulouse to live with the *Petits Frères de Jésus*, becoming a brother in 1970. Maritain worked further on the problem of evil, deepening his previous insights, and wrote books on the divinity of Christ and the mystery of the Church. His articles and lectures given to the *Petits Frères* are wide-ranging, and include subjects such as negative or 'dark' knowledge of God and the possibility of making predications of God. Maritain also returns to Bergson in *Moral Philosophy* (completed before Raïssa's death and published after) and discusses mysticism as Bergson and Aquinas conceived it respectively, such that, Barré writes, 'his [Maritain's] work as a philosopher seemed to find once again its primary sources at the moment it was drawing to a close.'⁵

³ *N*, p. 22.

⁴ Jean-Luc Barré, *Jacques and Raïssa Maritain: Beggars for Heaven*, trans. Bernard E. Doering (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 411–413.

⁵ Barré, *Beggars for Heaven*, p. 414.

I believe it can be rightly said that as Maritain endured this new kind of suffering and despair—new because he believed firmly in God and now faced intense loneliness—he took a religious and mystical direction. It is the same movement, albeit stretched over thirteen years, as that of Aquinas’ following his revelation. As far Maritain was concerned, he had nothing else to lose, and as such held back no punches in his criticisms of modern philosophy and liberal Catholicism, beginning with *The Peasant of the Garonne*—which, like *The Two Sources* of his previous master, destroyed his standing and popularity with his contemporaries. Caputo writes that ‘The life of St. Thomas’, for Rousselot, ‘bears testimony to his increasing distrust of merely earthly knowledge and an increasing recourse to contemplation and mystical prayer.’⁶ However, whereas Aquinas only authored one work after his final mystical experience and before his death, a commentary on the *Song of Songs* that has since been lost, there are many works of great value written during this final, excruciating period in Maritain’s life, and these should be considered along with the more well-known works of earlier years. Amazingly, these include the ‘Song of Songs’, again a translation of and commentary on the Biblical Song of Songs, originally published privately as *Le Cantique des cantiques* in 1971 and republished posthumously in Maritain’s final work in 1973. John Dunaway writes that ‘it is most certainly not happenstance that the twentieth century’s greatest disciple of Saint Thomas wrote the very last chapter of his very last book on the very same subject.’⁷

In support of my thesis, I will not only use well-known works of Maritain’s such as *The Degrees of Knowledge* and *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, but also lesser-known works such as the very early *Prayer and Intelligence* (written with Raïssa), the Introduction to *Pilgrim of the Absolute* (a selection of Léon Bloy’s writings), and essays and lectures in Maritain’s final and posthumously published work *Untrammelled Approaches*, such as ‘Reflections on Theological Knowledge’ and ‘Song of Songs’.

⁶ HA, p. 269

⁷ John Dunaway, ‘Maritain on the Song of Songs’, in Douglas A. Ollivant (ed.), *Jacques Maritain and the Many Ways of Knowing* (Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association, 2002), p. 315.

2. Encountering the Absolute

Heidegger writes that ‘the understanding of being has itself the mode of being of the human *Dasein*.’⁸ It is the nature of the human being to know being through its own being. It is, Heidegger writes, ‘in a certain sense *earlier* than the experience of beings’,⁹ meaning that a pre-conceptual awareness of being (an *a priori* horizon of all presencing and withdrawing) is necessary in order to know the modes of being of all other beings. Yet *Being and Time* teaches us that our very attitude to the question of the meaning of being determines who and what we become. For our enquiry, Heidegger’s most significant insight is that most of us, most of the time, fall into the ontotheological rut of classical philosophy and religion. The mystery of being, for Heidegger, as we have seen, does not need to be ‘solved’, but taken for what it is and lived, and this requires an attitude of openness and letting-be (*Gelassenheit*). I claim that as much as Maritain wanted to know the truth of things from an early age, his life is defined by a surrender to mystery in the face of what both Maritains felt as an overpowering need for meaning—to what is nothing less than a Kierkegaardian ‘leap of faith’. I will argue that this leap of faith is both congenial to Bergson’s intuition and the source and end of Maritain’s philosophical system building such that, by probing this essentially mystical movement, we can find what Caputo found impelling the philosophical and theological system of Aquinas, namely, something like the mystical or contemplative attitude that Heidegger calls for in his later years.

In his last public lecture, Yves Simon says of Maritain:

Although there have been considerable changes in the attitudes and ideas of Maritain, one feature is present in all periods of his life: he has always been in warm contact with the existential man, and his excellence in the rational analysis of the soul has never interfered with his intuitive relation to men such as they are here and now, such as they have been shaped by history,

⁸ *BPP(R)*, 4/16.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2/11.

by grace and be suffering, and such as they behave by their eternal destiny.¹⁰

What makes Maritain both unique and persuasive in both his work and life is that for him the question of existence, of its meaning for human beings, is not first of all a philosophical question *per se*. It is not, in Thomist terms, merely possessed by means of abstraction on the basis of an explicit or even implicit notion of causality in Maritain (the latter of which will nevertheless be important), but rather *felt* as imposing upon the human person an inescapable need for meaning. This is why he writes in *A Preface to Metaphysics* of multitudinous ‘metaphysical intuitions which are a natural revelation to the soul, invested with the decisive, imperious and dominant character, of a “Substantial word” uttered by reality.’¹¹ Maritain makes clear that these intuitions need not have the character of mystical grace, or that they must be interpreted as what he calls the ‘intuition of being’. Nevertheless, Maritain claims, in order for it to be an intuition of being, we must ‘become sufficiently disengaged, sufficiently empty to *hear* what all things whisper and to *listen* instead of composing answers.’¹²

For Maritain, if one can somehow cease the internal chatter that seeks to dissect the world into manageable conceptual chunks and become sufficiently appreciative and responsive to extramental reality as a pulsating, living, undivided, whole, one can (to put it somewhat anthropocentrically), recognize that it speaks to, or *addresses* the individual. The information imparted does not take the form of words or even images. Nevertheless, it bears directly upon the meaning of the life of the individual, capable thereafter of being imperfectly expressed as the individual becomes acutely aware of their all too evanescent place in the world. On this particular mode of experience of the intuition of being (Maritain makes clear that it is not the only possible experience),¹³ I shall quote Maritain at length, for what he says allows

¹⁰ Yves Simon, ‘Jacques Maritain: The Growth of a Christian Philosopher’, in Joseph W. Evans (ed.), *Jacques Maritain: The Man and his Achievement* (New York, NY: Sheed & Ward, Inc., 1963), p. 5.

¹¹ Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics*, p. 48.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 49–51.

us to have a flavor of what he means, and the difficulty of putting the experience into words:

I will not try and describe what escapes any restraint and is beyond any word (although the simplest of concepts and simplest of words are a valid sign of it), nor to lead someone where access is given only in purest solitude of soul. But is it not possible to resort to the language of metaphor, as inadequate as it is, to convey, not, to be sure, that which the intelligence grasps, but an inkling of the experience of this grasping? . . . What I perceive is like a pure activity, a consistency, but superior to the whole order of the imaginable, a vivid tenacity, at once precarious . . . and fierce . . . by which things surge up against me and triumph over a possible disaster, stand there, and not merely there, but in themselves, and by which they shelter in their thickness, the humble measure meted out to what is perishable, a kind of glory demanding to be recognized.¹⁴

Maritain is clearly trying to arrive at a position between total apophaticism and naïve metaphysical conceptualization of this mysterious experience, but what he makes clear is that extramental reality is not a dumb mass but rather filled with intelligibility which, if we are disposed to recognize it, can be existentially overpowering. This imposing address to the individual on the part of being Heidegger calls the ‘call of conscience’, which is also connected with the notion of the ‘*uncanny*’, the feeling of the dislocation of Dasein from the world, a feeling of not knowing what or why we are and a feeling of being “*not-at-home*”.¹⁵ Heidegger writes that ‘This uncanniness pursues Dasein constantly, and is a threat to its everyday lostness in the “they”, though not explicitly.’¹⁶ This ‘they’ of which Heidegger writes is the public mass, in which the question

¹⁴ *PG*, p. 111.

¹⁵ *BT*, 54–59/314–335, 40/233.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 40/234.

of the individual's existence is not raised in virtue of the fact that what I am and what I do I leave to the accepted norms of the community I live in, precisely without question.¹⁷ However, Heidegger writes that the 'call of conscience, existentially understood, makes known for the first time . . . that uncanniness pursues Dasein and is a threat to the lostness in which it has forgotten itself.'¹⁸

Central to Sartre's existentialism is a similar notion to the 'call of conscience' upon a feeling of 'not-being-at-home' but whereas, as we shall see, for Heidegger, the call is instigated by the realization of Dasein's immanent death, for Sartre the call is rather had through a spontaneous and mind-bending intuition of the arbitrariness and apparent meaninglessness of existence as such. Sartre illustrates this intuition most powerfully through the experience of the character Roquentin in his novel *Nausea*. In the novel, Roquentin suddenly becomes aware of the objective meaninglessness of the world and of his own existence most keenly upon gazing at a tree root.

For Sartre, the world is meaningless because meaning can only be given by a human intelligence and because God, who would otherwise provide a moral and metaphysical grounding to human life and decisions, does not exist. The central insight is this: there is no necessity in anything or anyone's existence, and therefore all is *contingent*.¹⁹ The estrangement of oneself from the world, vividly conveyed in image as a gluey mass of dumb objects in *Nausea*, is indeed the 'nausea' that the novel is named after. Things first exist, and I exist as aware of my distinctness from the external world toward which my consciousness is intentional, without necessity or meaning. This intuition of existence is pre-reflective, and not deduced. In his philosophical work, Sartre follows Heidegger in describing the human situation as being 'thrown into the world', and 'abandoned',²⁰ without purpose and without one's prior consent (Heidegger calls this 'thrownness'). Sartre argues that with this intuition of the gratuitousness of the existence of the world and oneself, as lacking any meaning or purpose given by God or a teleology, it is in light of

¹⁷ Anthony Camele, 'Heideggerian Ethics', *Philosophy Today*, 21 (3) (1977), pp. 285–286.

¹⁸ *BT*, 57/322.

¹⁹ Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, pp. 28–29.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 34.

becoming aware of one's freedom and one's own desires that one must give the world and one's self one's own meaning, casting off as arbitrary the social and moral norms of our society and peers.²¹ This conviction Sartre famously sums up as 'existence precedes essence'²²—'essence' here referring to the meaning that one gives to one's life in the face of a dumb and indifferent external world.

Now, Raïssa relates that when she first met him, 'Jacques Maritain had the same profound concern as I; the same questions tormented him, the same desire for truth wholly moved him. . . . He was entirely without prejudice: his soul was as though brand new, and seemed constantly to discover for itself its own law. He was not in the least a respecter of persons, because he had the greatest respect for his own conscience.'²³ Maritain's disdain for received opinion, for the uncritical existence of what Heidegger calls the 'they', is evident throughout his life, but is particularly stark in his early years, from socialist activist to Catholic convert. As the Maritains progressed through their education at the Sorbonne, which was saturated, as they claim, by atheistic and scientific currents of thought, the question of the meaning of life and of reality itself similarly pressed in on them. It was what Raïssa Maritain aptly called a 'metaphysical anguish'²⁴ that led them to make a suicide pact in 1902, vowing to end their lives if they could not find meaning—or if meaning would not find them—within a year.

Thus we decided for some time longer to have confidence in the unknown; we would extend credit to existence, look upon it as an experiment to be made, in the hope that to our ardent plea, the meaning of life would reveal itself, that new values would stand forth so clearly that they would enlist our total allegiance, and deliver us from the nightmare of a sinister and useless world.²⁵

²¹ Ibid., pp. 22–31.

²² Ibid., pp. 22–24.

²³ *WHBF*, p. 42.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 74.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

The degree to which this sounds similar to Heidegger's notion of the uncanny and Sartre's 'nausea' is remarkable and I argue in Part II that this consonance is one of the most direct routes to Maritain's immanent mysticism. There is in Maritain, a similar intuition but with different parameters—what he calls the intuition of [B]eing and which he regards as a superior and more global type of contemplative experience of Being that makes the true metaphysician—which occurs upon the violent confrontation between the human person and what was before perceived as an indifferent extra-mental reality. On multiple occasions when discussing the intuition of being and the consciousness of one's own finite existence it induces, Maritain quotes Raïssa:

It also often happened, before I knew the things of faith, that I experienced through a sudden intuition the reality of my being, of the profound, first principle which placed me outside of nothingness. The violence of this powerful intuition sometimes frightened me, and first gave me the knowledge of a metaphysical absolute.²⁶

As well shall see, for Heidegger, it is the conscious recognition of one's finitude and inevitable death that brings the feeling of uncanniness to a head, culminating in the call of conscience that allows Dasein to begin to take up an authentic, self-directed existence. While Maritain acknowledges this experience as one instance or aspect of the intuition of being, again, he argues that for the content of the intuition to come to fruition as a genuine insight into the nature of reality, a leap into the contemplation of being must be taken.²⁷

Yet metaphysical contemplation differs essentially from mystical experience, and here my thesis needs to be stated, that what we see in Maritain's youth as well as in his older years, it is his existential need to know and align himself with the meaning and mystery of Being that is the source of what I claim is an immanent mysticism in his life and philosophy. We thus see

²⁶ *WHBF*, p. 144.

²⁷ Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics*, p. 50–54.

in a clearer manner the underlying connection between the existentialisms considered here and the question of the mystical in Maritain; it is simply the preoccupation with the meaning of life.

Now, to return to the Maritains' suicide pact made in light of the perceived meaninglessness of the world, Raïssa relates that at this time Jacques still thought it worthwhile to fight for socialism, but eventually his despair reached the level of her own.²⁸ The Maritains held out for 'some true light on existence.'²⁹

What saved us then, what made our real despair still a conditional despair was precisely our suffering. That almost unconscious dignity of the mind saved our minds through the presence of an element which could not be reduced to the absurdity into which everything seemed to be trying to lead us.³⁰

This simultaneous resistance to meaninglessness and surrender to whatever meaning may come to them, is, I believe, also crucial for the argument I present in this study. For, as we see in Heidegger's later works, *Gelassenheit*, the meditative attitude that he promotes, does not require total quietism and the cessation of reflection. In fact, Heidegger believed that the move from phenomenology to *Denken* meant that he was able to participate in the mystery of being at a deeper level. Of this paradoxical seeking and surrendering, Raïssa Maritain continues:

From instinct we fought against a relativism that led nowhere, against a relationship to nothingness, for no absolute was admitted. Despite all that might have turned us from it, we persisted in *seeking the truth* . . . in continuing to bear within ourselves the hope of the possibility of a full adherence to a fullness of being.³¹

As I said earlier, it was then that the Maritains attended the lectures of Bergson, which staved off despair at least for a time. And as argued earlier, Bergson

²⁸ Ibid., p. 76.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 77.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 75.

³¹ Ibid., p. 80.

served to revive the possibility of attaining truth for the Maritains. Again, Raïssa writes:

This philosophy of truth, this truth so ardently sought, so invincibly believed, was still for us only some sort of unknown God. We kept an altar for it in our hearts, we loved it ardently even though we did not know it; we acknowledged beforehand all its rights over us, over our lives. But what it would be, by what road, by what means it might be attained, we knew not.³²

It was after reading the novel *La Femme Pauvre* that the Maritains first met Léon Bloy, their future godfather, in 1905. The meeting with Bloy, who was a writer living in almost desperate poverty, was to change their lives forever, and in my estimation, served to shape Maritain's conception of mystical knowledge to a great extent. Maritain came to define his life according to the personal example set by Bloy, rather than merely on the philosophical doctrines of Bergsonian intuition or Thomism. In a famous passage, he writes:

June 1905, two children of twenty mounted the sempiternal stairway which leads up to the Sacre-Coeur. They carried in themselves that distress which is the only serious product of modern culture, and a sort of active despair lightened only (they did not know why) by the inner assurance that the Truth for which they hungered, and without which it was almost impossible for them to accept life, would one day be shown to them. . . . Meanwhile they were cleansing from their minds, thanks to Bergson, the scientific superstitions on which they had been nourished at the Sorbonne—although they were well aware that Bergsonian intuition was but a too flimsy refuge against the intellectual nihilism logically resulting from all modern philosophies. . . . They were going toward a strange beggar who, distrusting all philosophy, cried divine truth from the rooftops. . . . Not a shade of curiosity was in them, but another and graver feeling filled their souls: compassion for unsheltered greatness. . . . Once the threshold of this house was crossed all values were dislocated, as though by an invisible switch. One knew, or one guesses, that only one sorrow existed here—not to be of the saints. And all the rest receded into the twilight.³³

³² Ibid., p. 82

³³ Jacques Maritain's preface to *Letters of Léon Bloy to his Godchildren*, quoted in *WHBF*, pp. 118–119.

It is significant that in the previous year, 1904, Maritain's father, Paul Maritain committed suicide. The Maritains had been saved from despair, but Maritain's father had not, and this event undoubtedly influenced Maritain's actions. Maritain's conversion to Catholicism had scandalized his mother, who was in fact anti-religious, and who, for Jacques, had been overly-controlling during the years before he met Raïssa. The immediate rapport between Jacques Maritain and his future Godfather, Bloy, with his religious orthodoxy and prophetic urgency, was undoubtedly made possible by Maritain's dire family circumstances. C. A. Tsakiridou writes that 'Bloy's apocalyptic, anti-modern, and anti-bourgeois ideas, his conflicted personality, and claims of divine election and extreme suffering, gave him unprecedented psychological authority over the young couple and captured their imaginations for years to come.'³⁴ Raïssa Maritain herself writes that, soon after meeting Bloy, they soon felt 'enriched by a unique friendship, so gentle on the part of this violent man, that all fear had left us from the day of our first meeting, and our respect became daring and familiar, like that of children who feel that they are loved.'³⁵ It is very reasonable to judge that Maritain saw in Bloy a father figure, someone who not only endured suffering but offered it to God for the sake of his sanctification.

3. Conversion and The Early Catholic Years

(i) Faith and Philosophy

Perhaps Claude Lorentz puts it best when he writes: 'Returning from the heights of the Sacré-Cœur, Jacques and Raïssa not only feel enriched by a friendship both familial in closeness and utterly novel with the mystical savage

³⁴ Cornelia. A. Tsakiridou, 'Spiritual Expressionism: Léon Bloy, the Maritains, and the Mystery of Israel', in John J. Conley (ed.), *Redeeming Philosophy: From Metaphysics to Aesthetics* (Washington, D.C., American Maritain Association and The Catholic University of America Press, 2014), p. 203.

³⁵ *WHBF*, p. 120

of Montmartre. It is the question of God that poses itself to them.’³⁶ Jacques Maritain gives scant details on this period of his life, so to learn more we will also have to draw on Raïssa Maritain’s accounts. Nevertheless, what we see in Maritain is not a coming to new religious conviction on the basis of having been rationally or philosophically persuaded, but conversion after having been deeply impressed by the sheer presence of character of someone quite other-worldly. Bloy’s language was unadorned at best, and in the name of divine truth he would lambast and insult his contemporaries in letter and speech with a viciousness that became quite famous among French literary and Catholic circles. But Raïssa Maritain writes that they were not just fascinated by the literary ability and Bloy’s bizarre way of living: ‘We had to go further, we had to consider the principles, the sources, the motives of such a life. This time we were brought face to face with the question of God’.³⁷ Bloy was nothing less than a prophet for the Maritains. They felt that through Bloy’s example, they ‘were shown heroic Catholicism—sanctity in its terrible trials, in its humility and its divine charity, in its asceticism, in the beatitude wherein it reaches its fulfilment, in its pure harmony, in its power, in its beauty.’³⁸

It interesting to note that, according to Raïssa’s testimony, both the Maritains attempted to integrate the act of faith with Bergsonian intuition, allowing for the subsequent systematization of which Bergsonism itself was incapable:

We thought that Faith itself could be considered as higher gift of intuition, and that invoking the idea of an absolute truth, faith would also imply and permit the elaboration of a doctrine of knowledge which would assure the human intelligence its grasp on reality.³⁹

³⁶ « En redescendant des hauteurs du Sacré-Cœur, Jacques et Raïssa ne se sentent pas seulement enrichis d’une amitié fraternelle et inédite avec le mystique sauvage de Montmartre. C’est la question de Dieu qui se pose à eux. » Claude Lorentz, ‘Jacques et Raïssa Maritain : origines, itinéraires’, in Claude Laurentz (ed.), *Maritain et les artistes : Rouault, Cocteau, Chagall*. . . , (Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire de Strasbourg, 2016), p. 27.

³⁷ *WHBF*, p. 120.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

Yet we have the clearest possible evidence demonstrating that Maritain's life as a Catholic was not determined by philosophy, but rather by a need for meaning that reached down to the depths of his being, and was expanded to such a power that it overwhelmed him in the example of Bloy and the sufferings of Raïssa in what was a lifetime of constant ill health. Raïssa records two decisive moments in Maritain's leap of faith. She tells of the first, that 'thinking it was fair to put to a test by an act of the soul the promises of the unknown God, he started praying in the following way: "My God, if you exist, and if You are the truth, make me know it," and then one day decided to kneel down to recite the Lord's prayer for the first time.'⁴⁰ The second key moment was one during which Raïssa was particularly ill:

My illness, which last for several weeks, was for Jacques especially the occasion of decisive reflections and gave him the feeling that the time had come to awake from sleep. It was during those days of anguish that he had thrown himself on his knees. . . and had for the first time said the Lord's Prayer. His resistance gave way, and he felt himself ready to accept Catholicism, if he must.⁴¹

It was then in 1906 that the Maritains received baptism. In regard to Maritain's relationship to philosophy at this time, what we find is quite surprising, but most relevant for the argument presented in this study. At least for a brief time, Maritain actually saw faith and philosophy as quite opposed to one another:

To ask for Baptism was also to accept separation from the world that we knew in order to enter into a world unknown: it was, we thought, to give up our simple and common liberty in order to undertake the conquest of spiritual liberty so beautiful and so real among the saints. . . . Jacques remained despite everything so persuaded by the errors of the 'philosophers,' that he thought that in becoming Catholic he would have utterly to forswear the intellectual life.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 145.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 171.

⁴² Ibid., p. 174.

As Maritain found himself wrestling with conflicting claims of allegiance from the Bergsonism that had saved his life and the Catholicism of propositions and declarations of faith that had saved his soul, he entered a phase of what may be fairly judged as the fanaticism of the new convert. He writes:

This same Sunday I resolved to abandon all 'personal inquiry' in philosophy, all desire to know by myself, being sure to know everything essential and everything necessary by the Word of God, and trusting for the rest on the blessed night of faith. I am in the night, I know in an absolute manner what the Lord Himself has told me, and I will know also at such or such moment what it will please Him to show me for the refutation of error.⁴³

These records are significant because they reveal that what was most important to Maritain—at that time twenty-six years old—was not the construction of a philosophy or the synthesis of ideas to form an overarching framework of truth, but rather religious faith. And we know that that religious faith was itself instigated by personal examples rather than philosophical argumentation. Raïssa Maritain therefore writes:

For two years, ever since our baptism, the starting point of all our thinking, whether about philosophy or life—and for us the one has always been inseparable from the other—the starting point had been the faith by which we now lived . . . whose power to give order to all things we ceaselessly admired. . . . we left the philosophers for the time being to argue among themselves. . . . we set aside all their philosophies until further notice. . . . to let our human reason grow strong again, to let it repair itself in the sunlight of eternal truths.⁴⁴

Later in life, Maritain would always refer to himself as a 'mere philosopher', conceiving philosophy, following Aquinas, as possessing its own method and dignity while remaining in service to theology.⁴⁵ As he writes in his relatively

⁴³ *N*, p. 46. The note is from 21st January 1908. Maritain adds: 'At this time I thought that the essential task of philosophy was to refute error. I have made headway since, I have understood that refutation is only a secondary task, and one most often fruitless and useless (and which has so harmed Thomism). One must not refute, but "enlighten" and forge ahead.'

⁴⁴ *AIG*, p. 14.

⁴⁵ Jacques Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, trans. Edward H. Flannery (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1955), p. 40.

early but extremely significant *The Degrees of Knowledge*, theology is a wisdom of a higher degree than philosophy, with higher epistemic veracity:

Inasmuch as it [theology] proceeds according to the method and sequences of reason but is rooted in faith (from which it gets its principles—themselves borrowed from God's knowledge), its proper light is not the light of reason all by itself but the light of reason illumined by faith. For that very reason, its certitude is, of itself, superior to the certitude of metaphysics.⁴⁶

Furthermore:

It [theology] does not have as its object God as expressed by His creatures, nor God as the first cause or author of the natural order, but, rather, God in the guise of mystery, as inaccessible to reason alone, in His own essence and inner life.⁴⁷

Returning to Maritain's very early intellectual development, however, it was only after Father Clérisac, the Maritains' first spiritual director, recommended Aquinas' *Summa Theologiæ* to Raïssa and she had in turn recommended it to Jacques that Maritain became fully aware of the medieval Doctor and began his lifelong attempt to *retrospectively* systematize, justify, and deepen the faith that he arrived at in his twenties—a movement about which much has been noted in the literature on mysticism and which will be included in the subjects for discussion in Part II of this study. When Maritain came to grips with the *Summa*, there was, he believed, a choice to be made between the secular philosophy of Bergson and the Catholic faith, and he chose the latter:

It was in 1908—while I was deliberating, in the country around Heidelberg, whether I could reconcile the Bergsonian critique of the concept and the formulas of revealed dogma, that the irreducible conflict between the 'conceptual' pronouncements of the religious faith which had recently opened my eyes, and the philosophical doctrine for which I had conceived such a passion during my years as a student and to which I was indebted for being freed from materialistic idols, appeared to me as one of those only too certain facts which the soul, once it has

⁴⁶ *DK*, p. 265.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

begun to admit them, knows immediately it will never escape. . . . The choice had to be made, and obviously this choice could only be in favour of the Infallible, confessing therefore that all the philosophical toil which had been my delight was to be begun again. Since God gives us, in concepts and conceptual propositions (which reach us dripping with the blood of martyrs. . .) truths transcendent and inaccessible to our reason, the very truth of His divine life, that abyss which is His, it is because the concept is not a mere practical instrument incapable of transmitting the real to our mind. . . . in thus completely accepting . . . the authentic reality value of our human instruments of cognition I was already a Thomist without being aware of it. When a few months later I came upon the *Summa theologica* [or *Theologiae*] its luminous flood was to find no opposing obstacles in me.⁴⁸

Aquinas, and the priests with whom Maritain shared a passionate interest in Aquinas, such as Father Clerrisac, served as a tempering influence on Maritain. The implication of this is that while he was indeed heavily influenced by Bloy as far as personal spirituality and mysticism is concerned, in his early years Maritain appears to remain within orthodox teaching when it came to classifying and validating mystical experience(s). This is confirmed by Raïssa Maritain, who, in reflecting on Jacques' philosophical development, writes that 'At the time Jacques published his first articles and his first book, the ardour of the intellectual combat and of the Thomistic "apostolate" covered over everything else.'⁴⁹ She records Jacques as proclaiming in an early lecture on Bergson:

There is but one region where the soul and the intellect can live in the peace of God and grow in grace and truth: it is in the light of Thomism. . . . In destroying Intelligence and Reason . . . one destroys the foundations of Faith. That is why a philosophy which blasphemes the intellect will never be Catholic.⁵⁰

Yet, as I will show, Maritain's views on mysticism became ever more complex, and we come to see that there is less emphasis on reason and more emphasis

⁴⁸ Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy*, p. 16–17.

⁴⁹ *AIG*, p. 215.

⁵⁰ *WHBF*, p. 202.

on intuition in its many forms, including the intuition of being, connatural knowledge, and love as a formal means of knowledge. In this connection, it will be seen that Bergson is in fact crucial in Maritain's understanding of the mystical.

(ii) Angels and Saints

In *Aquinas and Heidegger*, Caputo's first step in deconstructing Thomas Aquinas' metaphysics is to bring to the forefront the religious context and motivations of Aquinas as a Dominican of the 13th century. Aquinas was first of all a Catholic, then a Dominican, and then a philosopher and theologian, and as such, his world and his thought is concerned first of all with God and the Catholic faith. It is a world and a system inhabited by angels, saints, demons, replete with heaven, hell, purgatory, miracles, charisms and divine revelations—the latter of which, as we have seen, was to define Aquinas' life work in his eyes.

It is no overstatement to say that while Maritain was living and writing in the secular France of the twentieth century, and over the course of two world wars, his post-conversion life was just as singularly directed toward God and just as full of angels and saints as that of Aquinas. As Trapani writes, 'While it is true that Maritain always referred to himself as a philosopher, it is helpful to remember that the primal source of energy and inspiration that propelled his life's work derived from his burning love for, and unassailable confidence in, the truth of Jesus Christ and His Gospel.'⁵¹ Raïssa Maritain, in fact, relates that at around the time of the Second World War, the Maritains decided to orientate their lives 'toward the work of contemplation', withdrawing from the normal aims in life that laypeople pursue and living 'like a little religious community, in which the study of spiritual things was given first place.'⁵² The Maritain household was ran on a tight schedule and Jacques, Raïssa and Raïssa's sister, Vera, who lived with them, all became oblates of Saint

⁵¹ *PBC*, p. 141

⁵² *WHBF*, p. 199.

Benedict, with the motto '*Ora et Labora*': work and pray.⁵³ The Maritains, it was well-known, got permission from the Church to install a chapel in their house in Meudon, at which mass, devotions, and perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament were held.⁵⁴ Ralph McInerny puts it well that the Maritains' rationale for their highly regimented life consisted of a 'dual purpose—the pursuit of truth and the pursuit of sanctity.'⁵⁵ Here we see in full display the role of the devotional and the liturgical in the religious life of Maritain that I argued was essential to the cataphatic element of his mysticism. Jacques takes up the issue of the role the liturgy in this regard in a collaborative work with Raïssa simply entitled *Liturgy and Contemplation*—a work which I will return to in chapter seven in building up a complete picture of Maritain's mysticism. The precise meaning of the term 'contemplation' and its relationship with mysticism will also be a subject of later discussion in Part II.

For now let it be said on the basis of these considerations that despite the vast array of subjects covered in Maritain's work, there is always a thread leading back to God, whether through the doctrine of analogical being in metaphysics, connatural knowledge and natural law in ethics, or the transcendental of beauty in aesthetics. With Maritain, faith implied uncompromising acceptance of the reality of miracles such as apparitions of Mary (Maritain spent years writing a book about the much-disputed apparition at La Salette, in which he believed strongly), faith healing (as we see repeatedly in his statements about Raïssa's repeated recoveries in her health following earnest prayer) and, indeed, the intercession of saints.

Raïssa Maritain relates that 'From Léon Bloy to Father Clerissac we had been led from one man of the Absolute to another man of the Absolute',⁵⁶ but after the Maritains' baptism, the saint to which Jacques and Raïssa came to model their lives on above all was Thomas Aquinas, whose thought, with the

⁵³ Ralph McInerny, *The Very Rich Hours of Jacques Maritain: A Spiritual Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2003), 'Prime (1918-1923)'. Available via: <https://maritain.nd.edu/jmc/etext/RichHours4.html> (accessed 10/12/17).

⁵⁴ Barré, *Beggars for Heaven*, p. 219.

⁵⁵ Ralph McInerny, 'Maritain as Model of the Catholic Philosopher', in Alice Ramos and Marie L. George (eds.), *Faith Scholarship, and Culture in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association, 2002), p. 194.

⁵⁶ *AIG*, p. 10.

call of Leo XIII, was to be reanimated for the re-Christianization of modern France. In 1919, after Maritain had taken up a position at the *Institut Catholique de Paris*, he and Raïssa sought to establish a lay organization for the study and propagation of the philosophy and theology of Thomas Aquinas.⁵⁷ This group, whose members varied from time to time, met as the '*Cercles d'études thomistes*', created in Maritain's words, for 'propagating in the world, and particularly among laymen, the doctrine of St. Thomas in its purity.'⁵⁸ Inspired by one title of Aquinas, Doctor Angelicus, Jacques and Raïssa decided to call one of their early collaborative works on Aquinas the '*Angel of the Schools*'. So strong was the Maritains' intention to dedicate the intellectual life in service of the spiritual life that they established statutes for the organization under the auspices of the Catholic Church, which included a total commitment to the teachings of Aquinas and a vow of prayer: 'The members would have to declare themselves resolved to follow the guidance of St. Thomas with an entire fidelity, to read the *Summa* at least a half-hour a day'.⁵⁹

The result, in Maritain's philosophical work, was a marriage of commentary on Aquinas' doctrines and radical innovation in light of the influence of the subjective turn of modern philosophy, Bergson's philosophy of intuition, the witness of the human subject in modern art, and Bloy's extraordinary personal spirituality in particular. These influences made Maritain not only a thoroughly 'modern' philosopher, despite being a disciple of the medieval Doctor, but also more aware of the contemporary centrality of the human subject and the pre-eminence of mystical knowledge. Yves Simon continues in his appraisal of Maritain:

At this point it is relevant to note that the great epistemological work of Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, which includes long chapters on the natural sciences, ends with studies on mystical experience. This association—infrequent in the history of epistemology—expresses a disposition which has been that of Maritain ever since his early progress in philosophy and in faith. He knows St. John of the Cross as well as St. Thomas

⁵⁷ *N*, pp. 133–147.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

Aquinas.⁶⁰

This curious amalgamation of influences and interests was apparent at the meetings of the *Cercles d'études thomistes* at the Maritains' home. Simon recalls that '[t]he living room was generally crowded, less by teachers or students than by writers, poets, painters, musicians, persons interested in mysticism, missionaries and friends of the missions. Most of the artists were of the vanguard description.'⁶¹ We see here, in the most concrete way possible, the 'composition' of *intellectus* of which Caputo spoke, the movement from the one to the many in an all-encompassing resolution which began not with demonstration proper to *ratio*, but insight.⁶² Maritain writes of the central importance of intuition as befitted the diversity of the gatherings:

[I]t was understood instinctively that the whole carapace of words is absolutely nothing when the words are employed to facilitate some intuitive discovery. I must add that the experience of our study meetings taught me a very precious thing: namely, that discursive and demonstrative argumentation, doctrinal erudition and historical erudition are assuredly necessary, but of little efficacy on human intellects such as God made them, and which first ask to see. In actual fact, a few fundamental intuitions, if they have one fine day sprung up in a mind, mark it for ever (they are intemporal in themselves), and they suffice, not doubtless to make a specialist in Thomist philosophy or Thomist theology, but to make a man unshakably strengthened in the love of St. Thomas and in the understanding of his wisdom. I observed this in a good number of our friends, whose example I take to be decisive.⁶³

Yet the roads to the insight, what Maritain calls the intuition of being, are multitudinous. Maritain writes in *Approaches to God* that 'For man there are as many ways of approach to God as there are wanderings on the earth or paths to his own heart.'⁶⁴ For this reason he was involved in a vast array of interests

⁶⁰ John H. Griffin and Yves R. Simon, *Jacques Maritain: Homage in Words and Pictures* (Albany, NY: Magi Books, Inc. 1974), p. 5.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *HA*, pp. 263–265.

⁶³ *N*, pp. 136–137.

⁶⁴ *AG*, p. xv.

and vocations—and perhaps that of the artist most deeply. As Cornelia Tsakiridou writes, ‘In *Art and Scholasticism*, Maritain made it clear that aesthetics would be an integral part of his philosophical mission. The reason was his belief that at the basis of Thomistic realism is “an inexhaustible center of intuitivity” that precedes and grounds discursive reasoning.’⁶⁵ Maritain wrote to the artist Jean Cocteau that ‘contemplatives and poets understand each other’,⁶⁶ and given that my established aim in this study is to deconstruct Maritain’s metaphysics to reach a definitively pre-metaphysical, pre-philosophical instance of contemplation, Maritain’s philosophy of art and his relationships with artists who were major influences are relevant.

4. Art and Faith

As was made evident in the launch of the newly-located Maritain archives at the *Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire* in Strasbourg in 2016, Maritain maintained strong friendships and correspondence with a vast number of artists, from painters to poets, musicians to novelists. Such artists included Léon Bloy, Georges Rouault, Jean Cocteau, Max Jacob, Igor Stravinsky, Jean Hugo, Gino Severini, Marc Chagall, André Girard, and Erik Satie, to name some among the most well-known. Given limitations of space, I must confine myself to Maritain’s relationship with one artist, in one medium (in large part). That artist ought to be the most influential in Maritain’s thought on art, if it is possible to discern such.

Other than Léon Bloy, whom we have already mentioned, the most influential artist in Maritain’s life was the painter Georges Rouault, whom Maritain met at Bloy’s home in 1905 and with whom he remained friends for fifty-two years.⁶⁷ Other artists, such as Jean Cocteau and André Girard are

⁶⁵ Cornelia A. Tsakiridou, “‘Redeeming Modernism’: Jacques Maritain and the Catholic Vocation”, in John P. Hittinger (ed.) *The Vocation of the Catholic Philosopher* (Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association, 2010), p. 97.

⁶⁶ Jacques Maritain and Jean Cocteau, *Art and Faith*, trans. John Coleman (New York, NY: The Philosophical Library, 1948), p. 83.

⁶⁷ Claude Lorentz, ‘« Le clown lunaire » : Georges Rouault ou l’éblouissement de l’art’, in Claude Laurentz (ed.), Jacques et Raïssa Maritain : origines, itinéraires’, in *Maritain et les*

relevant insofar as they both inspired and gave practical application to Maritain's insights on the visual arts, music and the vocation of the artist in general, but Rouault is undoubtedly the most important and as such deserves the most attention in this study. Claude Lorentz, director of the Maritain archives at the University of Strasbourg, relates that Maritain's first public work on art was the preface to a catalogue of Rouault's work in exhibition in 1910, written at the request of Rouault and under the pseudonym Jacques Favelle. Lorentz writes that 'This text prefigures all of his [Maritain's] reflection on art. Maritain detects in Rouault the spiritual kinship that connects him to the great artisans of the Middle Ages, an identical love of technique and gesture' and that as such 'It is equally with Rouault in mind that Maritain wrote his first entire work devoted to art.'⁶⁸ Maritain was later to write that Rouault was 'the greatest religious painter of our time.'⁶⁹

Rouault was a Catholic artist whose paintings are notoriously difficult to interpret. His career is roughly divisible into two periods, with the first period being what Maritain called the 'dark period',⁷⁰ depicting prostitutes, nudes, clowns, and menacing judges, and the second period, particularly during the last seventeen years of his life, being defined by religious images, the Passion and Biblical landscapes in particular.⁷¹ Rouault's style, perhaps close to the Fauves and exploiting his experience as a stained-glass window apprentice, consisted of crude forms of vivid colors (often in pastel) outlined in thick black, and remained consistent throughout his life. However, whatever the content or title of the piece, Rouault's work has a mysteriousness that defies rational commentary and description. He refused to comment on the meaning of his work in any concrete or direct way, though, as a one-time stained-glass window apprentice who was impressed by the anonymity of glass-makers,⁷² Rouault was, William Dyrness writes, 'an artisan . . . in the long line of

artistes : Rouault, Cocteau, Chagall. . ., (Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire de Strasbourg, 2016), p. 44.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Jacques Maritain, *Georges Rouault* (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrahams, 1952), p. 18

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 16.

⁷¹ William A. Dyrness, *Rouault: A Vision of Suffering and Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), pp. 89–95.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 24–25.

craftsmen who demonstrate their reflections by their hands.’⁷³ As such, Rouault’s work is ‘fleshly’ to an imposing degree, and even when it concerned with religious subjects, displays, as Maritain warmly writes, ‘the obscure splendor and vitality of earthly matter.’⁷⁴

Within his broader philosophy of art and his notion of connatural knowledge, the underlying themes and ideas that are made incarnate in a work by the artist Maritain names ‘creative emotion’, and for him there is, when the artist is in the midst of creation, something which amounts to a suspension of rational discourse—even while the artist quite rationally applies the techniques he or she has learned through years of struggle. Maritain writes of Rouault in this connection:

[The] unity of creative emotion and the working reason—with unconditional primacy of creative emotion over all the rest—is a native privilege of any great artist. But it comes to perfection only as the final victory of a steady struggle inside the artist’s soul, which has to pass through trials and ‘dark nights’ comparable in the line of the creativity of the spirit, to those suffered by the mystics in their striving toward union with God. Such was the case with Rouault.⁷⁵

Rouault’s life was one of depression, and like Bloy’s, one of poverty, having been ostracized by the artistic community because his works were regarded as simply too grim and grotesque. With regard to his early work, Léon Bloy, a mutual friend of Rouault and Maritain and who actually shared a similarly pessimistic view of the world, mocked that his paintings featured ‘always the same slut and the same clown, with the single and lamentable difference that each time the worthlessness appears greater. . . . you are attracted exclusively by the ugly; you seem to be enthralled by the hideous.’⁷⁶ In what is a very critical piece on Bloy, Tsakiridou highlights the similarity of the views of Bloy and Rouault as expressed in their artistic work, and also their cumulative influence on Maritain:

⁷³ Ibid., p. 72.

⁷⁴ Maritain, *Georges Rouault*, p. 18.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

⁷⁶ Léon Bloy, quoted in Dyrness, *Rouault*, p. 43.

A morbid, and obsessively dolorist spirituality, arbitrarily exercised and dispensed, and prone to the exaggerations and extremes that we find in Bloy, lacks the moderation, humility, and joy that permeate the great Mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Person of Christ himself, and seems oblivious to the healing power of love with which Christ transfigures all beings. . . . There is in Bloy an oppressive monotony, something that we also see in the work of Rouault. Rouault, termed Fauve and an expressionist (by Maritain), was criticized in the 1904 *Salon d'Automne*, for eliminating light from his 'black pictures' (*tableaux noirs*) in contrast to the Impressionists, 'for whom light was everything.'⁷⁷

Expressing his own inner sufferings and, as Maritain writes, 'searching for himself . . . his own inner harmony',⁷⁸ Rouault felt the necessity of traversing suffering to reach meaning, and eventually, God.

Tsakiridou writes that 'The Bloy-Rouault relationship is important because it serves as a key link to Maritain's aesthetics and his idea of the artist as saint and mystic.'⁷⁹ Rouault himself decided to meet Bloy after reading his *La Femme Pauvre*, and the two soon discovered, according to Pierre Courthion, that they 'shared the same vision of reality, apparently terrible and relentlessly sordid.'⁸⁰ Artistically, despite Bloy's repudiation of Rouault's paintings, 'Bloy's style was loaded with the same explosive expressiveness that marked Rouault's new manner of painting', and the prostitutes of Rouault's early phase can be regarded, 'to certain extent, [as] sisters and daughters to Bloy.'⁸¹ It was the life-long occupation of both artists to depict and transmute the darkness and suffering in life—in the world and in themselves—into profound, if disturbing, Christian art. Maritain's own philosophical interpretation of the peculiar vocation of these Catholic artists, informed by the philosophy of art of Aquinas, will be one of the main subjects dealt with in Part II of the study. With this, we now turn to the place of suffering in knowing for Maritain, and

⁷⁷ Cornelia A. Tsakiridou, 'Spiritual Expressionism', p. 221.

⁷⁸ Jacques Maritain, quoted in William A. Dyrness, *Rouault: A Vision of Suffering and Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), p. 44.

⁷⁹ Cornelia A. Tsakiridou, 'Spiritual Expressionism', p. 221.

⁸⁰ Pierre Courthion, *Georges Rouault* (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 1961), p. 102, quoted and translated in Tsakiridou, 'Spiritual Expressionism', p. 221.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 98, quoted and translated in Tsakiridou, 'Spiritual Expressionism', p. 221).

how all of this relates to my argument.

5. Petit Frère de Jésus

The Christian notion that suffering, if offered in abandonment to God, can be an especially profound way of reaching closer union with God is a theme that runs through the entirety of Maritain's life. This is perhaps because of the intense sufferings and overwhelming spiritual power of those closest to him, at least in the years of his formation as a Catholic thinker—namely his wife Raïssa, Léon Bloy, and Georges Rouault. Raïssa Maritain relates that for her and Jacques, Bloy's example in the face of suffering 'placed before us the fact of sanctity' and that 'he brought us to know the saints and mystics.'⁸² The theme of the 'dark night of the soul' from John of the Cross, of apparent abandonment by God in the face of suffering, and the need to surrender oneself to the mystery of God and God's providence—of what we might call 'not-knowing' (what will later be called 'the cloud of unknowing' after the medieval mystical text of the same name)—is often seen in Maritain's work and keenly felt in his correspondence. Reflecting on the years immediately following his conversion, when he was torn between Bergsonism and the propositional Catholic faith, Maritain wrote in 1961:

And my own solitude? . . . One will never know to what temptations of black sadness and despair a philosopher can be exposed in proportion as he descends into the knowledge of himself and of the great pity which is in the world. His rest here on earth will finally be in the night, if in this night, which is nearer to God than the day, and more desolate too, an invisible hand which he loves leads him like a blind man.⁸³

What this quote suggests is that in times of inner confusion and suffering, Maritain does not turn to Thomism but to the Christian faith that is the wellspring and core of Thomism. In other words, he ceases to be a philosopher

⁸² *WHBF*, p. 150.

⁸³ *N*, p. 74.

and instead becomes a man of prayer—perhaps a mystic. Let us explore this further.

I said that the years after Raïssa's death were Jacques Maritain's most difficult. Maritain wrote to the writer Julien Green: 'Happy, Julien, how could I be happy? I have lost the physical presence of her whom I have love more than myself. I have witnessed the slow and implacable destruction of her poor body'.⁸⁴ Maritain confessed to Green that he was in a state of 'bewildered aberration';⁸⁵ he kept a note about Raïssa written by a friend as a 'talisman against despair'⁸⁶. During this time, Maritain did publish a work addressing the problem of evil and suffering, *Dieu et la permission du mal (God and the Permission of Evil)* in 1963, expanding the arguments of previous works touching upon the same issue, but despite the aid of a lifetime's philosophical learning and a thorough knowledge of Thomist positions in the problem of evil, a philosophically supplemented understanding of the nature of evil and God's providence was not enough, and from Maritain's correspondence we learn that he had to rely on friends like Green and Thomas Merton and the resources of his faith, going to live with the Little Brothers of Jesus, writing that 'I need to be protected from myself. . . . I will try to live a bit of their contemplative life'.⁸⁷ Writing in October of 1960, a month before Raïssa's death, Merton did not appeal to Maritain's Thomism in the depths of his suffering, but offered friendship and necessary silence:

You have entered into the great mystery of the Cross which no one comprehends and which one should speak only in few words, and in a low tone, as it were in passing, with reverence and fear.

All I can do then is to stand mutely by your side, and nod to you . . .⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Bernard Doering, 'Jacques Maritain, George Bernanos and Julien Green on the Mystery of Suffering and Evil', *Religion and Literature*, 17 (3) (1985), p. 38.

⁸⁵ Jacques Maritain, quoted in Doering, 'Jacques Maritain, George Bernanos and Julien Green', p. 51.

⁸⁶ Henry Bars and Eric Jourdan (eds.), *The Story of Two Souls: The Correspondence of Jacques Maritain and Julien Green*, trans. Bernard E. Doering (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1988), p. 38.

⁸⁷ Barré, *Beggars for Heaven*, p. 411.

⁸⁸ Merton, *The Courage for Truth*, p. 33.

Here the element of mystery at the heart of Catholic faith and mysticism that was spoken of in the introduction of this study comes to the fore. Maritain's premium on 'reason' falls away, because what is required, as he and his friends see it, is total commitment to faith in Christ and the redemptive value of the Cross. Nor was a fully-fledged theory of suffering ('evil', metaphysically speaking and 'sin', theologically speaking) and divine providence—that is, a theodicy—ultimately possible, because for Maritain, as for Aquinas, evil is a privation of being, the willful 'nihilation' of God's influx of being as the First Cause.⁸⁹ Because God is Being and Goodness, 'in God there is no idea of evil',⁹⁰ with the logical consequence that evil is that non-reality which cannot be known or caused by an omniscient and omnipotent God—an absurdity. This Maritain believed was absolutely necessary, for, he writes, 'The fundamental rock to which we must cling, is the absolute innocence of God.'⁹¹ If God has knowledge of evil, he must, by virtue of his eternality and omniscience, be the author of evil. The question of how God knows evil, if he is not its original cause and is yet unchanged in his being through the introduction of evil by those with free agency is a 'mystery' for Maritain, which nevertheless, he writes, 'does not worry me excessively, since I know in any case, and with certain knowledge, that God is absolutely not the cause of evil.'⁹² Here we find again the priority of faith over reason in Maritain.

Even so, it seems that for Maritain, knowing that God is innocent of evil did not provide him with sufficient pastoral resources to deal with evil and suffering as experienced in his life. Though classical Christianity affirms divine aseity, that is, God's fundamental separation from his creation and creation's fundamental dependence on God for its being such that God cannot be influenced in His essence or knowledge of Himself by creation, Maritain could not reconcile this with faith in a God for whom evil is 'inadmissible' and who

⁸⁹ *EE*, p. 90; *UT*, p. 258; Jacques Maritain, *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil* (Milwaukee: WI: Marquette University Press, 1942), pp. 32–34.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁹¹ Jacques Maritain, *Dieu et la Permission du Mal* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963), p. 11 (trans. auct.).

⁹² Jacques Maritain, quoted in David Griffin, *God, Power and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), pp. 88–89.

truly suffers with us and for us as evidenced, he believed, in the Incarnation. During a seminar with the Little Brothers of Jesus, Maritain explored the mercy attributed to God, mercy being defined by Aquinas as the quality of character that one has if one is afflicted with sorrow at the misery of another, as if that misery were one's own.⁹³ Maritain was reminded of what Léon Bloy once said to him, that 'All the rapes of reason, as we are accustomed to call that faculty, can be accepted from a God who suffers'⁹⁴ and said:

How can one help from asking if there is not in God something that corresponds in a supereminent way to that reality which in actual existence implies incompleteness and imperfection, but which is also rich with how many treasures, which here below is called suffering... And when love is betrayed, is there not in him who loves a suffering whose depths is proportioned to the immensity of his love?... What do we mean by the expression 'an offence against God' if not that our betrayals pierce to the very heart of subsistent Love itself?⁹⁵

In virtue of divine aseity and the fact that God is Love itself, we cannot understand this to mean that in virtue of His mercy God in His essence undergoes emotional changes in response to our actions. On the other hand, Maritain believes that we must take God as suffering at least analogously to human beings (passionate suffering in fact often being a noble element of love). For if God only 'suffers' to the extent that what He eternally wills for human beings out of love can be deprived of actualization or effectuation by the free abuse of human free will,⁹⁶ then 'that leaves the mind unsatisfied', because the mercy of God, as ontologically one with His love, Maritain writes, exists 'not according to what it *does*, but according to what it *is*'.⁹⁷

Following Bloy and Raïssa Maritain, the latter of whom writes of the necessity of a 'mysterious perfection which pertains to the suffering of the

⁹³ *UT*, p. 254.

⁹⁴ Jacques Maritain, *Approches sans entraves*, quoted and translated in Doering, 'Jacques Maritain, George Bernanos and Julien Green', p. 53.

⁹⁵ Jacques Maritain, *Approches sans entraves*, quoted and translated in Doering, 'Jacques Maritain, George Bernanos and Julien Green', p. 54.

⁹⁶ *UT*, pp. 254–255.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

creature',⁹⁸ Jacques offers a solution to this dilemma in suggesting that the passionate suffering we ourselves undergo in loving mercy is in fact a participation in an 'unnamable' of God, an unnamable splendor of God which implies no imperfection, no diminishing of God in His essence in virtue of His mercy, no risk of undermining divine immutability or aseity, but in virtue of which it can truly be said that God suffers with us.⁹⁹

What sin 'does' to God is something which reaches God in the deepest way. . . . [T]his mysterious perfection which in God is the unnamed exemplar of suffering in us, *constitutes an integral part of the divine beatitude*—perfect peace at the same time infinitely exultant beyond what is humanly conceivable, burning in its flames what is apparently irreconcilable for us.¹⁰⁰

Suffering, for Maritain, then, is not only one of the ways that we can reach a more fully realized union with God. It is also that which makes God that reality which deserves to be loved and worshiped—what Maritain calls 'the great mystery' of that which corresponds to sorrow in ourselves and which is both 'the sign of our misery . . . and the sign of an incomparably fecund and precious nobility'.¹⁰¹ It is plain that we cannot begin to explicate this reality within a philosophical framework employing Thomist terminology such as 'perfection' and even such terms as 'divine aseity'. As Maritain writes, 'there is only one solution, that of faith . . . And at the heart of this faith rests the certitude that God, and this is after all what Jesus said, has for us the feelings of a Father'.¹⁰²

To bring to bear the resources of Caputo's thesis, this mystery which Maritain speaks of—the unknowability of both how God knows evil and how He can suffer—seems to correspond to the mysterious realm of the 'Godhead' of Meister Eckhart—the 'God beyond God'¹⁰³ in virtue of the complete inability of our intellect to comprehend the divine reality even while we place moral and spiritual predicates on it (such as that God loves us and in so doing, actually

⁹⁸ *WHBF*, p. 190.

⁹⁹ *UT*, p. 255.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 258–259.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

¹⁰² Jacques Maritain, *Approches sans entraves*, quoted and translated in Doering, 'Jacques Maritain, George Bernanos and Julien Green', p. 53.

¹⁰³ *HA*, p. 276.

suffers with us). In addition, the surrendering in faith on the part of Maritain before the mystery of suffering seems also to correspond to the notion of 'detachment' (*Gelassenheit*) that we find in Meister Eckhart. Both of these were taken by Caputo to the culmination of the latent mysticism in Thomas Aquinas that revealed Aquinas to be in close kinship with Eckhart and Heidegger, once the scholastic machinery was stripped away.

In his analysis of Maritain's attempts at theodicy, Michael Torre concludes with the following: 'What, then, does sin mean for God? This is the meditation towards which all Maritain's work here tends. Perhaps this was really Maritain's central spiritual preoccupation throughout his life, from his encounter with Léon Bloy and his devotion to Our Lady of La Salette to one of his final reflections on theological wisdom.'¹⁰⁴ I do not agree with Torre that the problem of evil is the source and summit of Maritain's thought, but I do believe that it is one of the most direct routes to what is: the question of the meaning of being.

Yves Simon said in his lecture on Maritain that 'Under the influence of such a man as Léon Bloy, the faithful understood better that the center of Christian life is the beatific vision of the Divine persons and that, in this world, there is nothing greater than the contemplation of supernatural truth in the charity of Christ.'¹⁰⁵ I believe this justifies these extensive investigations into the people and events that most influenced Maritain in the service of this study and we shall continue on this path as we examine Maritain's conceptions of moral knowledge, artistic knowledge, and mystical knowledge.

Before doing so, though, I want to sum up what has been achieved in the whole of the first part of this study. The first part is entitled 'Philosophical Foundations' for the reason that here the principal tasks are to determine Maritain's philosophical and religious influences and set out the broad trajectories of both Maritain's and Heidegger's philosophical projects for the purpose of later demonstrating a certain *rapprochement* between the two

¹⁰⁴ Michael D. Torre, 'The Sin of Man and the Love of God', in John F. X. Knasas (ed.), *Jacques Maritain: The Man and His Metaphysics* (Mishawaka, IN: The American Maritain Association, 1988), p. 210.

¹⁰⁵ Griffin and Simon, *Jacques Maritain: Homage in Words and Pictures*, p. 5.

pertaining to the mystical. By way of a biographical introduction, I first revealed Maritain's underlying realist concern to understand extra-mental reality or being. This realist preoccupation Maritain shared with Heidegger, as both stand in complete opposition to philosophical schools which place self-reflective knowledge of the subject as their point of departure, namely, Cartesianism and Kantianism. At the same time, Maritain's Bergsonian stress on the centrality of intuition in coming in to contact with being, as well as in a variety of pre-conceptual, 'connatural' modes of knowing, were also demonstrated.

I argued that in virtue of these two facts—Maritain's realism and the priority of intuition over abstraction—even Maritain's 'intuition of being' rests on a more primordial experience and aspiration, which is communion with ultimate reality. I argued that successfully identifying such a mystical aspiration in Maritain, however, cannot be achieved by recourse to Maritain's Thomistic metaphysics, for like Aquinas' thought, Maritain's thought is also 'ontotheological' in nature, not concerned, primarily, with the meditative attitude towards reality of which Heidegger speaks. We must, then find it elsewhere, in what Maritain did *not* say, as what was left *unthought* in his life and writings. To this end, Maritain's religious formation and most significant religious and artistic influences—Léon Bloy and Georges Rouault—were discussed. What has so far been discerned is the importance of suffering and the chief role occupied by the artist in the development of what I will argue is Maritain's conception of religious and mystical life which overcomes metaphysics.

PART II

BEYOND *ESSE*

Levels of Relation to Being

1. The Transcendentals and 'Natural Analogies of Mystical Experience'

(i) Maritain's Map of Being

In demonstrating that in Maritain's life and philosophy there is an immanent mysticism, one of my aims in this part of the study is to draw the similarities while acknowledging the differences between Maritain's and Heidegger's approaches to thinking about and experiencing Being. These approaches both illuminate and deepen the mystery of the meaning of Being that both thinkers pursue—progressively, from philosophy, including metaphysics and phenomenology, to thinking Being in the case of Heidegger and to supernatural, mystical union with God in the case of Maritain.

In classical Thomist fashion, Maritain provides what we may consider as a kind of map of Being in what are known as the 'transcendentals': the one, the true, the good and the beautiful. In Thomist language, the transcendentals are properties of being *qua* being, which is to say manifestations of being in ways by which we can relate to it, i.e. by analogy. The transcendentals, for Maritain, are available at the third degree of abstraction following the intuition of being. Here I will quote from an unlikely and lesser-known text by Maritain, *An Introduction to the Basic Problems of Moral Philosophy*, to demonstrate just how important these metaphysical considerations are to Maritain, even in the realm of ethics, which is the subject of this chapter:

The very first human concept is the concept of *being*. When being is considered *as being*, not as particularized being . . . or as vague being (as understood by common sense), but precisely as supra-universal and analogical being, that is to say when we have perceived in a flash of intuition what inexhaustible reality is signified by the word 'being' or 'that which exists,' then we see that being is the first metaphysical concept.¹

The movement or oscillation between the intuition of being and its abstraction via analogy that Maritain sketches here mirrors the same movement between the intuition of duration and the formulation of concepts in Bergson, though, as we saw in Part I, in Maritain intuition and abstraction or the use of concepts are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily temporally sequential. He writes:

Every thing is being; and yet every thing differs from every other thing by a characteristic which is also being, thereby demonstrating the essential polyvalence of the concept. It takes in all things and is itself intrinsically varied; this is the classical doctrine of the analogy of being.²

Analogical abstraction allows for the notion of the transcendentals, which in turn clarify and deepen the intuition of being, making the metaphysician proper, given that even the word 'being' is, as only one concept, only one objectivization of the experience and as such is limited in comprehensible application. As Maritain further reflects:

[T]his very reality which I reach in the notion of being is richer, more charged with intelligible value than what I saw immediately in the idea of being alone. An internal necessity requires it to overflow, in a sense, the very idea where it is objectivized. It is objectivized in a multiplicity of other ideas, the idea of the True, the idea of the Good, etc. . . . This is how we came to have those *modes* or universal aspects of being, as ample and infinite as being itself, which are called the

¹ *IBPMP*, p. 29.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.

transcendentals (the ‘properties of being’).³

Maritain lists the transcendentals as the one, the true, the good, and the beautiful. This pattern itself—that is, the ‘one’ and the ‘true’ being prior to the ‘good’ and the ‘beautiful’—determines the pattern of Maritain’s thought as manifest in his great studies in ethics, art, metaphysics and mystical experience, with metaphysics as first philosophy underlying all other enquiries and subject areas in philosophy. Moral knowledge, artistic knowledge and mystical knowledge (in that order) also repeatedly feature as the three instances of connatural knowledge—again, being developments of Bergson’s notion of intuition, as we saw in Part I.

Maritain writes that ‘The *one* is being itself insofar as it is undivided’ and that ‘beauty is the splendor of all the transcendentals combined.’⁴ This splendor, or grandeur, as manifest to both our sense and intellectual faculties, therefore also features as one of the highest principles in Maritain’s philosophy of art and aesthetics as a constituent of the clear radiance of the beautiful. Following Aquinas, Maritain argues that the beautiful consists in three properties of ‘integrity’, ‘proportion’ or ‘harmony’ and ‘clarity’ or ‘radiance’, the latter of which encompasses the former two and which denotes the intelligibility and splendor of the form of the beautiful object as a distinct object.⁵ We should not be surprised to find that such an unblemished clarity or radiance characteristic of the beautiful is also characteristic of mystical experience for Maritain, when all mediation falls away and one directly experiences the absolute.

What follows the present chapter are three chapters which take the transcendentals and the modes of connatural knowledge as their respective themes. The connatural modes of knowing of the moral good and beauty Maritain calls ‘natural analogies’ of mystical experience. It should be noted, however, that Maritain also extensively discusses other natural analogies to mystical experience—mystical experience being taken by Maritain as

³ Ibid. p. 30.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ AS, pp. 24–25.

immediate knowledge of God in union through love and also coming under the name of 'supernatural contemplation'. These are (among others) 'metaphysical experience' and love between human persons. One example of a metaphysical experience is the 'intuition of being' which has been discussed and will be discussed further in relation to Heidegger. I believe, however, that Maritain regards human love as the most important of the natural analogies of mystical contemplation:

[W]e must not forget the most obvious and natural analogies of mystical contemplation, the ones that mystical language currently uses: human love, with all its trials and joys, with the dim though profound experience of another person which it produces—even with its most deadly madness; for things divine are so exalted and transcendent that sometimes they can find the means of showing forth some of their analogies only in the negative guises of sin.⁶

I will discuss love along with moral knowledge in the next chapter before taking it as a guiding theme in the final chapter.

(ii) Persons as Revealers of Being

My intention is to follow Maritain in the trajectory of his thought as already laid out, which, on the basis of a pre-philosophical apprehension of Being as inescapable mystery as such (the one), takes the form of a progressively more profound investigation of the transcendentals as Being that can be known and conformed to the intellect (the true, understood and grasped as *adaequatio*) which eventually collapses by necessity in the unmediated, unitive, and eminently practical experience of the good not so much in moral acts *per se* but through moral *exemplars*—particularly saints—whose lives are testimonies to the highest reality of love and the supra-rational experience of divine beauty. Again, I will return to love, or charity, in the final chapter as the condition for the highest and most authentic mystical experience of union with the divine.

A progression in the experience of Being is also present in Heidegger.

⁶ DK, p. 300.

As Silvia Benso has shown, Heidegger's *Kehre* can perhaps be defined by a move away from Dasein manifesting and returning to Being towards a conception of Being giving itself to Dasein, and a focus on the need for what Heidegger calls a 'shepherd of Being' or guardian of Being who, thanks to a meditative attitude, is in a position to receive the self-giving of Being and help us human beings recover the difference between Being and beings and mystery of the meaning of Being as such.⁷ Some scholars, such as Benso, argue that as Heidegger's writing develops in his later years, this guardian figure increasingly seems to be the poet more than the 'thinker'.⁸ Others, such as George Pattison, stress the difficulty one immediately meets upon attempting to define Heidegger under any label—be it a poet, mystic, or deep ecologist—and Pattison points out that in his later writings in particular, Heidegger 'consistently refuses to adopt any kind of hierarchisation'⁹ of terms and ways to come to into contact with original truth. Indeed, in the essay 'The Origin of the Work of Art', Heidegger offers multiple examples of how truth establishes itself, including the founding of a political state, a sacrifice, and thinking (*Denken*) Being.¹⁰

For my analysis, and to demonstrate Maritain's affinity with Heidegger in the overcoming of metaphysics, I shall therefore take as already granted the philosophical apprehension of the true in Thomistic metaphysics as the correspondence or adequation of mental idea to extra-mental reality (*adaequatio rei ad intellectum*). I shall also reverse the order of progression of the transcendentals, journeying through the good and the beautiful and their corresponding modes of connatural knowledge to arrive once more at the one. In his treatments of connatural knowledge, Maritain in fact lists artistic—or what he will call 'poetic'—knowledge first. I will discuss moral knowledge first, however, because experience, human interrelatedness and interpersonal action, in my estimation, have logical priority over the production and appreciation of beautiful objects or performances. The latter, as we will see,

⁷ Benso, 'On the Way to an Ontological Ethics', pp. 171–173.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁹ *TLH*, p. 192.

¹⁰ *PLT*, p. 60.

are the two defining features of Maritain's philosophy of art and the beauty.

In this connection, Maritain acknowledges: 'The practical intellect does not deal exclusively with artistic creation. It also, and first of all, has to do with the moral life of man.'¹¹ Of course, the *act* of creating a certain object can never be totally separated from the moral and existential considerations of the artist in the first place—a point on which Maritain is most emphatic in *The Responsibility of the Artist*.¹² The key point is that, as Maritain writes, connaturality 'necessarily intervenes in prudential judgements wherein the intellect has to judge through conformity with right will',¹³ and for Maritain what ultimately determines the rightness of the will, besides its immediate singular object, is the very rightness of that object in reference to the ultimate end of human life, namely, God.¹⁴ Let us summarize, however, that where we are dealing in instances of connaturality, we are also dealing, implicitly, with God, as the ground and ultimate good of the human person.

Taking the human person as my focus, I also intend to demonstrate that Maritain provides phenomenological analyses of the good and beautiful (in the basic sense of being descriptive) as he, like Heidegger, traverses beyond the realm of traditional philosophy, and later, beyond philosophy *per se*. Let it be said, though, that regarding the good and the beautiful as they pertain practically to spiritual life as an order of experience below the singular mystical experience of the divine, there is no *ontological* or *epistemological* order or priority for Maritain, for one who participates in either the good or the beautiful is participating in and doing the will of God, and of course, according to Maritain as a Thomist, God *is* the Good and the Beautiful, so there can be no hierarchy of participation among the two. Mystical knowledge for Maritain, on the other hand, is the highest degree of spirituality insofar as it encompasses the whole human being, mind, spirit, and body, given that these are what the human being is, as opposed to merely one of them. Neither the participation in the good through the moral life alone nor the beautiful in the artistic life alone

¹¹ AG, p. 57.

¹² Jacques Maritain, *The Responsibility of the Artist* (New York, NY: Gordian Press, 1972), p. 26, 29.

¹³ DK, p. 298

¹⁴ Maritain, *The Responsibility of the Artist*, pp. 26–36.

encompass the whole human being, and therefore cannot by themselves make the holiness or sanctity of a person, the ‘full spirituality that belongs to those who are called by St. Paul the “perfect” and the “sons of God.”’¹⁵

For Maritain, holiness or sanctity is only possible if two ontological conditions are met: that the soul receives sanctifying grace and that there is an ‘indwelling of the Divine Persons within the soul in the state of grace’.¹⁶ Heather McAdam Erb writes that for Aquinas, ‘mystical experience is the natural crown of the life of grace’,¹⁷ and Maritain, in following Aquinas, writes elsewhere: ‘Grace orders us to the vision of the Divine Essence, or Deity itself which is beyond being, whereas, by nature, we are ordered only to a knowledge of being in general and, in the first instance, of the being of sensible things.’¹⁸ We might ask exactly what grace is, and the question will be addressed later. As will be made apparent in this part of the study, the necessity of grace will be a decisive factor in determining the precise relationship between Maritain’s and Heidegger’s respective conceptions of the highest aspirations of the human being—resulting in their related but divergent notions of ‘mystical experience’ and *Denken* respectively.¹⁹

The matter is very much complicated by the fact that even before Maritain fully developed his notion of the ‘intuition of being’, which we have already discussed, he admits of potentially infinite ‘natural analogies’ of mystical experience or ‘experience of things divine’.²⁰ Every kind of natural knowledge through inclination or sympathy—what Maritain calls ‘connaturality’—is, according to him, a ‘more-or-less remote analogy of mystical experience.’²¹ My intention is to compare Heidegger’s notion of *Denken* to these natural analogies, as well as Maritain’s conception of mystical

¹⁵ *DK*, p. 284

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 270

¹⁷ Heather McAdam Erb, “‘Pati Divina’: Mystical Union in Aquinas”, in Alice Ramos and Marie I. George (eds.), *Faith, Scholarship and Culture in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), p. 74.

¹⁸ *DK*, p. 273.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 287–288.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

²¹ *Ibid.*

experience itself, to gauge the extent to which there is resemblance insofar as there is an overcoming of metaphysics.

2. Heidegger and Maritain on Authenticity

(i) Heidegger and the Question of Ethics

Before we begin to make our way to the first natural analogy of mystical experience which is experience of the good, however, it needs to be said that while my ultimate aim is to demonstrate a certain *rapprochement* between Maritain and Heidegger (the first step of which is through an analysis of the moral life), Heidegger, unlike Maritain, never developed an ethics in the form of a system of moral rules or laws governing human action and which are grounded on a metaphysical system or philosophical anthropology.

John Macquarrie has argued that Heidegger 'consistently avoided ethical questions.'²² Caputo argues that Heidegger, particularly in his later writings, ignores ethical questions to the extent that his philosophy is 'ethically tasteless, insensitive, scandalous—thoughtless' and, in a world sometimes beset with the worst kinds of suffering, actually 'neutralizes good and evil.'²³ This study is not the place to determine whether Caputo is right on this matter, but it is important to understand the context which underlies his motivations to accurately delineate and juxtapose areas of enquiry for comparison between Maritain and Heidegger and clarify Maritain's understanding of the relationship between metaphysics and mystical experience and Heidegger's *Denken*.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger offers a phenomenological analysis of *Dasein*'s modes of being. Heidegger transforms Husserl's transcendental Ego into the necessarily social being of *Dasein* who, rather than being defined by modes of intentionality or consciousness of objects is defined by a pre-conscious use of the *a priori* structures of existence, which he groups as the

²² John Macquarrie, *Heidegger and Christianity* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1994), pp. 70.

²³ John D. Caputo, 'Thinking, Poetry and Pain', *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 28 (1) (1990), p. 179.

'primordial structural totality' of 'care' (*Sorge*).²⁴ Because Heidegger provides such a thorough description of *Dasein* through a phenomenological analysis of *care*, again moving from Husserl's Cartesian distancing of conscious and object and employs what may strike one as normative terms such as 'fallenness', 'guilt', 'authenticity', 'inauthenticity', and 'resoluteness', it would be a mistake to believe that Heidegger has nothing to say about how human conduct relates to human existence or even to the relationship between human being (*Dasein*) and the Being of beings. Heidegger's project in *Being and Time*, writes George Pattison, is 'bringing to view the kind of being that is disclosed in *Dasein*'s own (unique) capacity to question itself as to its manner of existing.'²⁵ Pattison also writes that in speaking of the fallenness of *Dasein*, 'it is hard not to hear something like a tone of moral judgment in Heidegger's account of 'das Man' [the they], especially, indeed precisely, because of the possibility of choosing instead the way of authentic existence.'²⁶ If we recall, Heidegger's central problematic is the question of the 'meaning of being', and he begins *Being and Time* by asserting that that question has been forgotten. The constant theme in Heidegger's writings is that the question of the meaning of being *should* be taken up.

One of Heidegger's key theses is that it is by realization of the inevitability of death, not as a specific object that one 'meets' or that 'happens' but as utterly indeterminate and yet inevitable,²⁷ that *Dasein* can be woken up to the fact that its being is its own and not the possession of the 'they'. For Heidegger, death, as the end of all possibilities,²⁸ forces *Dasein* to take into consideration the meaning of what possibilities have been and remain still possible for it, with this looking ahead and taking account of possibilities referred to by Heidegger as 'projection' (an aspect of 'care').²⁹ In other words, its *life*, which, like death, is not something that happens to *Dasein* or others,

²⁴ *BT*, 41/238.

²⁵ George Pattison, *Heidegger on Death: A Critical Theological Essay* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), p. 20.

²⁶ *TLH*, p. 19.

²⁷ *BT*, 40/230–231.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 52-52/299-311.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 41-42/238–243

but which is each Dasein's alone.³⁰ Heidegger calls the exclusive existential possession Dasein's 'ownmost'; death reveals itself as the 'potentiality-for-Being' which is one's ownmost, nonrelational, and not to be outstripped.³¹ Both the imminence and immanence of death force Dasein to consider its life as a whole and in this also force Dasein to regard its life as distinct from every other Dasein, and indeed, the rest of the world. This radical realization of one's individuality, not numerically but existentially, as one who holds one's life in one's hands, brings Dasein out of the hypnosis of fallenness and brings about an anxiousness (or what Heidegger calls 'anxiety') for authentic living.³² In Heidegger's own words: 'Anxiety throws Dasein back upon that which it is anxious about—its authentic potentiality-for-being-in-the-world. Anxiety individualizes Dasein for its ownmost Being-in-the-world, which as something that understands, projects itself essentially upon possibilities.'³³

But this individualization of Dasein is by no means isolation from others. Whereas for Descartes and Husserl, to realize one's being required shutting oneself off from the world and all our ideas about it, for Heidegger, the process involved in seeking authentic existence rather brings one in a more meaningful relationship with the world:

Anxiety individualizes Dasein and thus discloses it as '*solus ipse*'. But this existential 'solipsism' is so far from the displacement of putting an isolated subject-Thing into the innocuous emptiness of a worldless occurring, that in an extreme sense what it does is precisely to bring Dasein face to face with its world as world, and thus bring it face to face with itself as Being-in-the-world.³⁴

Such is Heidegger's description of the process by which Dasein takes up authentic existence and what that authenticity consists in. Dasein's consciousness of and inner confrontation with death, understood to be the total lack of future possibilities, along with the implications for authentically taking

³⁰ Pattison, *Heidegger on Death*, pp. 26–27.

³¹ *BT*, 50/295.

³² *Ibid.*, 40-41/232–237, 51-53.298–311.

³³ *Ibid.*, 40/232.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 40/233.

one's own existence as one's own, Heidegger calls the mode of 'being-towards-death' (a component of 'care').³⁵ This is all possible because of the most fundamental *a priori* condition for Dasein's unique being which is 'temporality', that Dasein's existence is always set in reference to the experience of time—hence the title of Heidegger's major work *Being and Time*.

(ii) Maritain on Authenticity

As a self-proclaimed existentialist, Maritain also has much to say on the matter of authenticity. Here I shall have recourse to 'Man and the Human Condition', the last and arguably most important chapter of Maritain's work *Moral Philosophy*, as it appears in the edited collection *Challenges and Renewals*. The content and character of the present chapter is fundamentally phenomenological, that is, descriptive, and bears much similarity to Heidegger's approach as just explicated.

Maritain begins by writing that 'The considerations that follow do not have to do with doctrines and systems, they bear on human conduct itself and on the most general options with which our attitude in life is linked.'³⁶ For Maritain, each moral system is a call for the human being 'to go beyond his natural condition', but given the vast array of approaches to the human condition which remains implicit in every system even while it offers precepts for action, that the effort to transcend the human condition 'involves so profoundly the individual subjectivity, that it depends, to tell the truth, on a sort of metaphysics of conduct which precedes moral theories and systematizations.'³⁷

This 'metaphysics of conduct' reminds one of Heidegger's notion of *care*, of our fundamental relation to our own existence, and of our relation to the world and others. This is in fact, what Maritain appears to mean, for he writes:

³⁵ *BT*, 52–52/299–311.

³⁶ *CR*, p. 369.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

The fact is, I believe, that in the background of all our moral difficulties there is a fundamental problem which is ineluctably posed for each of us, and which in practice is never fully resolved, except in those who have entered into the ways of perfection: the problem of the relation of man to the human condition, or of his attitude in the face of the human condition.³⁸

For both Maritain and Heidegger, then, there are more basic ways of being in the world than those ways which are the products of conscious construction by means of philosophical and theological systems. Heidegger conceptualizes this being in the world most fundamentally as 'care', whose structure is a web of temporality, thrownness, projection, fallenness, temporality, being-toward-death. For Heidegger, these components of care are not without any modification whatsoever, but are constantly changing as both influencing and influenced by an individual's attitudes which are assumed in their day-to-day existence. These attitudes are rarely brought to conscious attention as they reflect or constitute the residue of philosophical and theological perspectives given to Dasein by 'the they' and determine authentic and inauthentic living.

In 'Man and the Human Condition', Maritain delineates four such basic attitudes or ways of being in the world, and like Heidegger, distinguishes the authentic from the inauthentic. The first two are 'The temptation to refuse the human condition' and 'The temptation to accept purely and simply the human condition'. The 'human condition', it should be noted, is characterized more negatively than positively by Maritain. It is a condition, Maritain writes, 'of a spirit united in substance with flesh and engaged in the universe of matter. It is an unhappy condition. In itself it is such a miserable condition that man has always dreamed of a golden age when he was more or less freed of it, and so miserable that on the plane of revelation, the Christian religion teaches that mankind was created, with the grace of Adam, in a superior condition in which it was free of sin, of pain, of servitude, and of death, and from which it fell through its own fault.'³⁹ Maritain's defining the human condition in religious terms through means of data provided by Christianity (in particular the Fall) is

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 369–370.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 370.

noteworthy, for, unlike Heidegger, what Maritain's conceptions of authenticity and a holistic ethics of human conduct are determined by his Catholic faith. Yet it would be a mistake to take Maritain's outlook as *totally* negative, because for Maritain, the human being, made in the image of God, possesses a nature which is 'good in its essence' and a dignity that the rest of the entire material universe does not possess.⁴⁰ This goodness and this dignity, as we shall see, rests upon the capacity of love that is both human and divine. More on this shortly.

To return to the first two ways of being that Maritain describes, he takes them both to be irrational and essentially impossible to live by. Totally refusing the human condition is, for Maritain, to refuse in some way the inescapable aspects of our existence such as vulnerability and temporal finitude—inescapable because we are bodies and not pure spirits. Maritain warns us that such a tendency is particularly strong in intellectuals because the mind (or intellect) is a spiritual faculty, and the spirit, unlike the body, is immortal. Yet, 'there is no sadder and more fruitless distress than the distress of men who under the pretext of wanting to live according to the intellect allow themselves to be carried away by the temptation to refuse the human condition. They are vanquished beforehand, and their defeat aggravates their subjection.'⁴¹

The temptation to 'accept purely and simply the human condition', Maritain says, is irrational and contradictory because the human being always desires improvement—individually and societally. Every society and every person, Maritain argues, sets out prohibitions and punishments for actions which are deemed unworthy of the community or the human person as such.⁴² Even if a person accepts the inadequacies of and suffering resulting from human nature and its limitations, there is always some standard to which the human being refers their actions. In sum, there is always a *lived* acceptance of the distinction of good and evil.⁴³

Maritain's assertion—again, made in the light of Christian revelation—

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 371.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 373.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 374–375.

⁴³ Ibid.

is that 'What is asked of man is neither to accept purely and simply nor to refuse the human condition—it is to transcend it.'⁴⁴ Maritain offers 'The answer of Indian spirituality' as one instance of transcending the human condition, but a transcendence 'by the means of refusal.'⁴⁵ Maritain claims (rightly or wrongly) that the spiritual pursuit most characteristic of India, Hindu or Buddhist, essentially consists in pure effort or 'spiritual energy' even as they strive to dissolve the sense of individual self,⁴⁶ and that given that the effort is aimed at the cessation of the suffering of transmigration brought about by the self, it is precisely an effort 'to deliver oneself from the human condition.'⁴⁷ Maritain detects in this pride as much as courage, and this pride, which leads the Hindu or Buddhist to attempt to transcend the human condition, is in fact self-frustrating, because by the sage's very efforts they demonstrate their humanness and their condition of finitude. Not only that, however, but the fact that the sage still has to die, that 'he is not delivered from that which is the most tragically human in the human condition', reveals a weakness of 'Indian' spirituality.⁴⁸

Now for the fourth way of being in the world, Maritain perhaps unsurprisingly offers Christianity as 'an authentically rational attitude toward the human condition'⁴⁹ with consists in both its acceptance and transcendence. Unlike secular systems of thought that 'attempt to go beyond the human condition by the sole means of man' and which are 'doomed either to futility or to illusion',⁵⁰ 'It is only with Christianity', for Maritain, that the effort to go beyond the human condition comes to real fruition.'⁵¹ The Christian, if they have an authentic faith, accepts the human condition in terms of its suffering, including the suffering brought about by sin, but does not take sin or moral evil as in any way desirable.⁵² It is by faith in God and love of God that

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 377.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 376–377.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 377.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 378–379.

the Christian (and in the fullest sense, according to Maritain, the saint) can be transformed in the grace of God as 'a participation in the divine life itself.'⁵³ This, Maritain says, is the other aspect of Christianity: the promise of salvation and eternal life in God as the hope that guides one in a life saturated with suffering and evil which result from our condition of fallenness. The eternal significance of even our most seemingly mundane actions and the fact that God has entered into human history and taken upon himself the sufferings of our condition, Maritain says, gives life meaning and suffering a meaning too, because it is given the new sense of Christ's redemptive work and self-annihilation, this being the source of the peace of saints.⁵⁴

Maritain writes that the person who has been given and has fully developed the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, which are gifts of grace, has entered into the 'regime of supra-ethics'.⁵⁵ The moral virtues reside in the order of nature, whereas the theological virtues have their source and object in the very life of God.⁵⁶ Whereas the moral virtues have to do with the regulation of action in the human world, the theological virtues have to do with life in relationship to God, a measure which is utterly different in kind:

Unlike moral virtues, the theological virtues do not consist in a mean between excess and defect; no excess is possible in the exercise of these virtues—one never believes too much in God, one never puts too much hope in Him, one never loves Him too much. For Christian ethics the theological virtues are superior to the moral virtues. The latter are still required, but they are no longer supreme. The supreme virtues are of a supra-moral order, and the highest of them, on which the perfection of human life depends, is charity.⁵⁷

The differentiation between natural moral virtues and supernatural theological virtues and the differentiation between the moral and the 'supra-moral' allows

⁵³ Ibid., p. 379.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 379–380.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 379.

⁵⁶ *MP*, 'Christianity and Philosophy': The Impact of Christianity on Moral Philosophy, 10. In virtue of my only having access to the online version provided by the University of Notre Dame's Maritain Center, which is neither paginated nor clear in its numerical sequencing of chapters, I reference the name of the chapter and relevant sub-section.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

us to conceptualize what Maritain and Heidegger share on a larger level pertaining to how human beings relate to Being.

(iii) Three Levels of Relation to Being

What can be gleaned from Maritain's and Heidegger's doctrines of authenticity as expounded above with regard to the question of the meaning of Being for Maritain and the *rapprochement* between Maritain and Heidegger that I claim can be found? It is that both Maritain and Heidegger posit, for lack of a better word, different 'levels of relation' between the human being and Being as such, what I will call the pre-moral, the moral, and, with Maritain, the 'supra-moral'.

I posit that these levels of relation to being all relate to authenticity and determine the essential nature of mystical experience. Maritain writes, following Aquinas, that divine grace can endow people with 'infused' moral virtues which stand above ordinary moral virtues, but more importantly, that divine grace can bring the theological virtues to an 'experimental stage' by also endowing the person with supernatural 'gifts' such as wisdom (the highest of the gifts).⁵⁸ This experimental knowledge is knowledge of God and a 'contemplative experience through union of love.'⁵⁹ Here, above the pre-moral and the moral (consisting of the moral virtues and infused moral virtues), we have the supra-moral: mystical experience. But—and this is a crucial point—we must not mistake the supra-moral to be the *amoral*. Such a statement appears to border on paradox, but is not, in fact, paradoxical, for the reason that the supra-moral is, in its essence, love. The Latin suffix *supra* has various meanings of 'above', 'beyond', 'greater than', 'exceeding the limits of' and 'outside of', but these do not suggest a nihilation of what is lower. The supra-moral is important to consider as we examine the relationship between morality and mysticism in Maritain and the role of the supernatural theological virtue of love or charity in the transformation of our moral lives. The supra-moral level of mystical experience through union of love clearly influences both the pre-

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

moral and the moral levels given that Christianity is a religion for which mysticism is only one vocation. Intimations of mystical union in love can be felt, however, through the example of ordinary people insofar as they exude moral and spiritual wisdom and insight. Such people Maritain calls the 'friends of God',⁶⁰ and they will be the subject of later discussion. There it will again be seen that Maritain is very much influenced by Bergson, particularly in his discussion of the Christian mystics in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*.

3. Heidegger's *Denken* as Supra-Moral

(i) *Dasein* and Ethics

Having indicated what the supra-moral consists of for Maritain, we shall now do the same for Heidegger, as an important step in determining the relationship between Maritain and Heidegger as pertaining to the mystical.

For Heidegger, death allows for the call of conscience or guilt that *Dasein* needs to take its own being and time into its own hands (authenticity) and decide its present and future being according to its own desires, not out of duty to the collective nor to the allegedly universal moral laws given by the collective (resoluteness).⁶¹ For Heidegger, *Dasein* becomes aware that it and it alone can really take a stand or decide upon beliefs and ways of being in the world, rather than attributing these to society or a universal moral law which denies the individual as the locus of value.⁶² Anthony Camele summarizes the implications of such a thesis:

[The] wedding of authenticity and resoluteness seems to be a wedding of absolute subjectivism with absolute voluntarism—a wedding which can issue only in the denial of all socially conceived ethics. This is true but it does not mean that moral responsibility is denied. Authenticity and resoluteness are formal and pre-ethical in much the same way that Kant's categorical imperative was formal and pre-ethical. Conscience,

⁶⁰ AG, p. 63.

⁶¹ Pattison, *Heidegger on Death*, p. 34.

⁶² BT, 53/308.

or authenticity and resoluteness, has no content, dictates nothing, does not prudentially evaluate alternatives, nor does it after the fact judge the actual choice vis-a-vis the proposed one.⁶³

The most general implication of Heidegger's position in *Being and Time* relating to ethics is that it is not a moral one in the ordinary sense. Heidegger does not aim to provide a moral system. His project is perhaps what analytic philosophers would call 'metaethical' insofar as it deals with the foundations (or lack thereof) of ethics itself, but which I have called 'pre-moral'. We might look at it as a philosophical anthropology which, as a prerequisite understanding of human nature, then allows us to contextualize human action and then to establish an ethics. On Heidegger's view, though, this would be a mistake, for fundamental ontology operates on a deeper level than any philosophical anthropology which would be formulated for the sake of correct action or *praxis*. This is why Heidegger disavowed Sartre's claim that the former's existential philosophy should be viewed as a 'humanism'. Heidegger argued that conceiving the relationship between Dasein and being and the conditions for authentic existence as a humanism would be to reduce Being in a metaphysical, univocal manner, for the purpose of commodifying and manipulating it according to the designs of human beings. Such a move would amount to an insidious anthropomorphism which is, in fact, symptomatic of the oblivion of being.⁶⁴

The result is that, as Camele argues, Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* does not serve to explicitly and directly provide an ethics or even a 'philosophical anthropology'⁶⁵ and, moreover, that whatever Heidegger has to say is provisional.⁶⁶ In *Being and Time* and in later works, Heidegger refuses the classical Aristotelian delineation of the spheres of *theoria*, *praxis*, and *poiesis*—that is, between the spheres first of theorizing, second of right moral or political action for the good (or happiness, *eudaimonia*) of both the individual

⁶³ Camele, 'Heideggerian Ethics', pp. 288–289.

⁶⁴ *BW*, pp. 225–226.

⁶⁵ Camele, 'Heideggerian Ethics', p. 284

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

and the collective, and third, of the production of objects. The analysis operates on a deeper level and as such, is not concerned with either what is today known as 'normative ethics' nor with what is called 'applied ethics'. As Camele says, 'How Dasein stands with beings and what course of action he is or ought to take depends upon the true understanding and interpretation of Being.'⁶⁷

We have seen that for Maritain there is a 'metaphysics of conduct' that was prior to any moral system. The authentic metaphysics of conduct for Maritain was Christianity, and this corresponded to Heidegger's notion of 'being-toward-death' in terms of the level of relation to being rather than to content. Maritain also never offers Christianity as a 'system', and maintains, as we shall see in greater detail, the independence of philosophy and religion. Ethics (Thomistic ethics, in the case of Maritain) builds upon Christian faith as the second level of relation to being, and here lies Maritain's notion of the 'moral knowledge of God' that I intend to examine later in this chapter.

Another point of contact between Maritain and Heidegger is the role of death in human life. I claim that Maritain, in both his life and his written work, viewed the realization of one's inescapable death as an instructive (what he would call *metaphysical*) experience insofar as it leads us to search for the truth of human being and being as such. We have in fact already seen evidence of this in Maritain's life. As he and Raïssa considered suicide, there was at the same time a striving and longing for meaning and absolute truth, though they did not know what these were.⁶⁸ More importantly, however, I claim that Maritain provides his own phenomenology of authenticity rooted in the example of saints and spiritual exemplars in his life such as Léon Bloy. This corresponds to the supra-moral level of relation to Being which is also the mystical, supra-conceptual level of knowledge. At both the pre-moral and supra-moral levels, then, conceptualization is not present, though it is present at the moral level.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *WHBF*, p. 80.

(ii) Being, Thinking, Poetry, Ethics

In his later writings, Heidegger clarifies his position on how we should approach Being as that of 'thinking' (*Denken*), and in so doing helps us determine the way forward. *Denken*, according to Heidegger's idiosyncratic use of the term, is neither merely cognition, as in the ordinary meaning of thinking, nor merely a representing of what is actual. It is rather a special relating to Being; in Heidegger's own words: 'To think "Being" means: to respond to the appeal of its presencing. . . . The responding is a giving way before the appeal and in this way an entering into its speech.'⁶⁹ For Heidegger it is no longer the case that Being is *held* or indeed *grasped* as an *object* of philosophical assessment, accessed via the reflections of Dasein as in *Being and Time*. For the later Heidegger, it is more the case that Being reveals itself to the human being and, as revelation, is and must be *expressed* in ways that are properly human. Hence, Heidegger writes, 'Being's poem, just begun, is man'.⁷⁰ As such, we can see that the task of thinking for Heidegger is not so much a systematization of Being (which amounts to the mastering of being typical of ontotheology) but an appreciation of and a reveling in the mystery of Being, of its presencing, and, as we come to think Being, its withdrawing. Insofar as thinking is not concerned with explanation, it is related to the phenomenology of the earlier Heidegger, but insofar as it is appreciative, meditative, expressive, and has no concern for logic or internal consistency, it is far more analogous to poetry, which, for Heidegger, is 'the saying of the unconcealedness of what is'⁷¹ and why Heidegger writes that

Singing and thinking are the stems
neighbor to poetry.

They grow out of Being and reach into
its truth.⁷²

⁶⁹ *PLT*, pp. 181–182.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

It is also why for Heidegger the poet replaces the philosopher or the sage as the one who preserves an intimation of the mystery and question of being, for the poet is concerned by virtue of the meditative attitude demanded of their unique art, transcends a solely propositional understanding of the conveyance of meaning through language.⁷³ This, as Albert Hofstadter says, is not to say that any poet engages in thinking in Heidegger's sense, nor that thinking is always poetic, but it is to say that the best poets think and the best thinkers think poetically.⁷⁴

In fact, any and all language 'in which beings are brought into the opening clearing of truth'⁷⁵ can be said to be poetry. In Heidegger's terminology, poetry is language which allows for the *presencing* of beings, their genuinely coming forth and not merely being represented. Heidegger's interpretation of the Greek term *poiesis*, as the 'setting-into-work' or 'founding' of truth,⁷⁶ truth is here understood not as *adaequatio rei ad intellectum* but in a more fundamental sense of the emergence or unconcealedness of beings that is the precondition for any and all relatedness to human beings, prior to the question of which among them are better or worse, real or mere counterfeit.⁷⁷ When Heidegger speaks of 'truth' of the being of Dasein or of Being itself, he is speaking, as Pattison says, 'in terms of bringing the matter at issue out of a state of concealment or forgetfulness so that it could be seen for what and how it is'.⁷⁸ Poetry, or *poiesis*, is therefore that which makes all art possible, and as we shall see, the artwork has a special function with regard to truth as Heidegger conceives it in this more primordial sense.

It is worth noting here that Maritain also has much to say about *poiesis*, albeit as distinct from *praxis*. Maritain writes that poetry, most fundamentally, is the 'intercommunication between the inner being of things and the inner being the human Self which is a kind of divination'⁷⁹ and as such, is the 'secret

⁷³ *TLH*, p. 161, 184.

⁷⁴ Albert Hofstadter, 'Introduction', in *PLT*, pp. x–xi.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. xii.

⁷⁶ *PLT*, p. 72.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁷⁸ Pattison, *Heidegger on Death*, p. 30.

⁷⁹ *CI*, p. 3.

life of each and all the arts.⁸⁰ It is this specific type of 'bringing-forth' that is specific to art and the artist that will be a subject of the next chapter. I hope to show that there are similarities between Maritain's and Heidegger's conceptions of artistic knowledge and the artist's relationship to being in terms of poetry, as well as differences in their respective conceptions of poetry and what Maritain calls 'poetic intuition', which will in turn determine how Maritain thinks of Heidegger's later work and his notion of thinking. There will in fact be some continuation from the present chapter because we will be concerned with the vocation of the artist in terms of that which makes it possible to be an artist and the context in which the artist works. In Maritain's view, the latter inevitably involves moral considerations.

(iii) 'Original Ethics'

Heidegger's notion of thinking, we have thus far seen, is not philosophy as traditionally conceived. It is therefore unlike moral philosophy or ethics as an academic discipline, being 'neither ethics nor ontology'⁸¹—and therefore also neither metaphysics nor philosophical contemplation, but something different, which I call supra-moral. Herman Philipse says that given this, Heidegger's later writings are 'equally destructive with regard to moral theory.'⁸² I will quote Herman Philipse at length for the purpose of greater clarity in pinpointing exactly where the issue lies in Heidegger's later work insofar as we are unable to locate any type of ethics as an antidote to ontotheology, subjectivism and enframing:

Heidegger now says that moral precepts cannot be binding for human beings unless they are issued by Being itself (*das Sein*), that is, by a transcendent non-entity or agent that is both concealed in human history and sends (*shickt*) to us humans the historical epochs that are our destiny (*Geschick*) and constitute history (*Geschichte*). This doctrine resembles traditional religious views on ethics, according to which moral

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ *BW*, p. 259.

⁸² Herman Philipse, 'Heidegger and Ethics', *Inquiry*, 42 (3–4) (1999), p. 440.

rules cannot carry authority unless they are God's commands. Yet there is a crucial difference between Heidegger's heteronomous doctrine and religious conceptions. Whereas religions provide ethical content to their doctrines of God's command by spelling out divine commandments, Heideggerian Being never issues moral precepts. As a consequence, Heidegger's heteronomous doctrine exterminates ethics by investing a transcendent non-entity (Being) with a moral monopoly, but without specifying moral rules so authorized.⁸³

Heidegger in fact distinguishes between the moral (*das Moralische*) and the ethical (*das Sittenhafte*) and argues that a more primordial way of relating to being, rooted in traditions (perhaps oral and ritualistic) and serving as a historical formation of human beings and which the Greeks called *ethos*, was gradually degraded to 'morality'. What began as a natural, spontaneous relating to and way of being in the world was reduced to conscious methods of shaping our being according to various models—these models are what we still call moral or 'ethical' systems, but which conceal a deeper foundation.⁸⁴

As such, Heidegger does not attempt to provide an ethical or moral theory, but does, by 1947, with the publication of the *Letter on Humanism*, have recourse to what he calls *ursprüngliche Ethik*—translated as 'original ethics' or 'originary ethics',⁸⁵ the source of which is the *ethos* that Heidegger speaks of, with the 'original' denoting that which is most primordial in the human being: the 'thinking which thinks the truth of being'.⁸⁶

In the essay 'Building Dwelling Thinking', Heidegger writes that thinking is an authentic way of being (or, as the later Heidegger says, 'dwelling' in the world). Heidegger gives an etymological analysis of the German word *bauen*, tracing its origin in the High German and Old English word *Buan*. In so doing, he identifies its original meaning as dwelling (both noun and verb), signifying 'to remain, to stay in a place', but the true meaning of which, he admits, 'has

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 16; Benso, 'On the Way to an Ontological Ethics', p. 160.

⁸⁵ *BW*, p. 258.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

been lost to us.’⁸⁷ Heidegger proceeds:

Where the word *bauen* still speaks in its original sense it also says *how far* the nature of dwelling reaches. This is, *bauen*, *buan*, *bhu*, *beo* are our word *bin* in the versions: *ich bin*, I am, *du bist*, you are, the imperative form *bis*, be. What then does *ich bin* mean? The old word *bauen*, to which the *bin* belongs, answers: *ich bin*, *du bist* mean: I dwell, you dwell. The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth, is *Buan*, dwelling. To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell. The old word *bauen*, which says that man *is* insofar as he *dwells*, this word *bauen* however also means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine. Such building only takes care—it tends the growth that ripens into its fruit of its own accord. Building in the sense of preserving and nurturing is not making.⁸⁸

Cultivation is contrasted with construction, and here we come again to Heidegger’s contrast between thinking and ontotheology, the latter of which emerges from the Latin lexicon; hence, the Latin *colere* and *cultura* Heidegger identifies with the ‘raising up of edifices.’⁸⁹ The dwelling that Heidegger is concerned with is habitual in that it signifies an inhabiting in something, which, insofar as human beings are bodily, world-situated beings, is nothing less than their nature, and, it has been subject to the oblivion of being ‘in favor of foreground meanings.’⁹⁰

In pursuing this notion of dwelling in the later Heidegger, we begin to glimpse the convergence of the supra-moral, poetic and something like the mystical. For Heidegger suggests that human beings do not just dwell in or on the earth, but in a ‘fourfold’ of earth, sky, divinities and mortals (the latter of which they are). This fourfold is a central idea of the later Heidegger and he writes that ‘Mortals dwell in the way they preserve the fourfold in its essential being, its presencing. . . . Mortals dwell in that they save the earth. . . . receive the sky as sky. . . . await the divinities as divinities. . . . [and] initiate they own

⁸⁷ *PLT*, pp. 144–145.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 145.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 145–146.

nature—their being capable of death as death.’⁹¹ Heidegger goes on to describe dwelling as a preserving and safeguarding of the fourfold in which human beings reside.

We can, by now, see that dwelling is a relation of the human being to the Being of beings and that, for Heidegger, it is to be regarded as prior to conceiving moral systems, for moral systems are one means by which human beings attempt to shape Being (as the horizon of human experience) and constrain its possible manifestations through conceptual nets (for example, those of psychology, anthropology, politics and biography).⁹² They are not the simple, appreciative—and to some extent—mystical relating to Being that characterizes thinking and dwelling. Heidegger thus conceives moral philosophy as essentially metaphysical, and therefore an instance of ontotheology. What began as an original ethics of dwelling was, according to Heidegger, gradually appropriated for the purpose of shaping Being in our image, given that Being, as we saw, is increasingly seen as a product that is made actual.

The condemnation of ethics decayed to morality is thus present in Heidegger in a polyvalent form: condemnation of ethics insofar as it is a particularistic science; condemnation of the subjectivistic character of the evaluation—which makes out of Being an object to which to attribute a value; condemnation of the limitation of Being to ought-to-be—by which act morality claims its own autonomy, forgetful of the ontological primacy of Being (and of the ontological difference to which such primacy leads). A threefold blasphemy of a metaphysical discipline.⁹³

Because the concepts we employ are always the product of some intended control of events, morality, Heidegger argues, operates on the ‘ontic’ level, that is, the realm of individual entities, and as such the *human*, even as it tries to transcend the human, as with ‘Plato’s ‘science of the good’. Heidegger has therefore almost nothing to say about morality as the discipline with which Maritain is concerned. On the other hand, original ethics operates on the

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 148.

⁹² Benso, ‘On the Way to an Ontological Ethics’, pp. 159–160.

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 161–162.

‘ontological’ level, the realm of the structure of meaning which grounds and renders possible the ontic. Heidegger’s oft-repeated distinction between beings (on the ontic level) and the Being of beings is mirrored in these two different realms. We also see that while Heidegger is not concerned with ethics or morality in the normal, everyday sense, the ‘original ethics’ of dwelling corresponds to the pre-moral level of relation to being. This is why thinking is ‘neither ethics nor ontology.’

But, as the Heidegger scholar Silvia Benso argues, precisely because Heidegger has much to say about the ontological comportment toward Being which can be clearly seen to guide human life with some innovative application of his thought, there can be discerned in Heidegger an ‘ontological ethics’.⁹⁴ Benso offers further justifications and suggestions for determining a way forward in developing such an ethics:

Heidegger’s constant nonengagement in any sort of ethical project. . . . is structural to his thought which is concerned more with Being in its abstractness and vagueness than with Being considered as what enables the interweaving of human relationships, where by ‘human’ one should understand not only interpersonal relationships but, more fundamentally, any kind of relationships human beings can entertain with the world in which they live. Heidegger’s neglect of ethics, however, should not prevent exploring that path that he has laid open for us, even against his intentions. The openings Heidegger lets us glimpse must be sounded and asserted even when they work against the letter of Heidegger’s thought.⁹⁵

Benso seems to argue that this ontological ethics is distinct from original ethics only insofar as it directly applies original ethics to the ontological situation of the human today. She argues:

By withdrawing from any claim of normativity, the ontological ethics, by the same move, recedes from the claim of defining and delimiting the reality into categories always and anyway too narrow and artful. It unlearns the *nomos* as a product of reason in order to follow ‘the assignment contained in the dispensation

⁹⁴ Benso, ‘On the Way to an Ontological Ethics’, pp. 175–180.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

of Being,' since only 'from Being itself the assignment of those directions that must become law and rule for man.'⁹⁶

But I am not persuaded by Benso's project here, for she herself follows Heidegger in his use of normative terms such as 'evil'⁹⁷ and provides practical examples by which the efficacy of an adequate ethics is determined, such as the prevention of horrific events like Auschwitz.⁹⁸ It should also be pointed out that even such notions as 'letting-be' (*Gelassenheit*) contain moral overtones. The assignments given to human beings from Being, according to Benso, 'take the linguistic form, not of the imperative, but rather of the injunction, of the appeal which presupposes—and implores—listening and answering. The injunction to let it be has a performative character: it absolutely summons the one who listens to the appeal to change, to transform his way of being.'⁹⁹ Again, one sees here the employment of normative terms such as 'injunction' and 'appeal', and, if we recall, as Herman Philipse argued, a moral monopoly being given to Being, precisely as it commands us.

I believe we are now sufficiently justified to claim that there exists in the later Heidegger the same three levels of relation to Being as we found in Maritain, namely, the pre-moral, moral, and supra-moral, which are all mutually influential. One example of where the pre-moral (the comportment to Being) can serve to inform the moral in Heidegger's later thought (and which Benso herself identifies) is the statement that 'we can affirm the unavoidable use of technical devices, and also deny them the right to dominate us, and so to warp, confuse, and lay waste our nature'.¹⁰⁰ It is by thinking that the one escapes the enframing mindset at the root of technology and 'ponders the abode of man.'¹⁰¹ This statement of Heidegger's can be seen to be 'ethical' in the sense of *ethos*—in contradistinction to the ontological attitude of technological control, being a fundamental relating or comportment towards being that

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 177.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 177.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 176.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 177.

¹⁰⁰ Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, p. 54.

¹⁰¹ *BW*, p. 258.

appreciates its mystery. As such, thinking is neither ethics not ontology, argues Benso,

because actually it is *both* ethics *and* ontology: not only ethics because it is more than ethics in providing access for a possible encounter with Being; not only ontology because it is more than ontology in approaching Being through a dwelling which lets it be. Certainly from a metaphysical perspective it would be declared a nonethics: but such 'ethics' seems to be able to stand beyond the metaphysics of the subject, of the will, of reason, with respect both to—using a metaphysical term—the ethical 'categories' it proposes and to its manner of proceeding—which is descriptive and not normative—and also to the relationship it entertains with Being.¹⁰²

Anticipating the counter-argument that Heidegger is most emphatically against 'ethics' as conceived in philosophy since Plato, and as such has nothing to do with any enterprise called 'ethical', Benso remarks:

[S]uch 'ethics' would be declared a nonethics: but such 'ethics' seems to be able to stand beyond the metaphysics of the subject, of the will, of reason, with respect both to—using a metaphysical term—the ethical 'categories' it proposes and to its manner of proceeding— which is descriptive and not normative—and also to the relationship it entertains with Being.¹⁰³

Here we have a clue as to the trajectory of Heidegger's later thought and a better understanding of Heidegger's levels of relation between the human being and the Being of beings. We have here delineated original ethics as the pre-moral, and the moral precisely as moral. What about that which was referred to as 'supra-moral'? I suggest that Heidegger's *Denken*, as the meditative activity beyond philosophy but which is an entirely conscious undertaking, constitutes the supra-moral relation of the human being to Being, for it is not concerned with action, not concerned with production of any sort, and is therefore not concerned with justifying itself, but is rather, as Maritain will say of genuine art, for the sake only of itself. And it also bears some relation

¹⁰² Benso, 'On the Way to an Ontological Ethics', p. 176.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

to some relation to mysticism insofar as it is in no way analogous to the science of philosophy, and both thinking and mystical experience, as Maritain conceives the latter, operate on the supra-rational, supra-conceptual level. The principal difference between thinking and mysticism, however, is that for Maritain, mystical experience is a gift of supernatural grace and operates through love, transformed as a formal means of knowing.¹⁰⁴ Heidegger is most emphatic on the absolute independence of thinking from all previous (ontotheological) conceptions of it since Plato:

[W]e must free ourselves from the technical interpretation of thinking. The beginnings of that interpretation reach back to Plato and Aristotle. They take thinking itself to be a *techne*, a process of reflection in service to doing and making. But here reflection is already seen from the perspective of *praxis* and *poiesis*. For this reason thinking, when taken for itself, is not 'practical.' The characterization of thinking as *theoria* and the determination of knowing as 'theoretical' behavior occur already within the 'technical' interpretation of thinking. Such characterization is a reactive attempt to rescue thinking and preserve its autonomy over against acting and doing. Since then 'philosophy' has been in the constant predicament of having to justify its existence before the 'sciences.' It believes it can do that most effectively by elevating itself to the rank of a science. But such an effort is the abandonment of the essence of thinking. Philosophy is hounded by the fear that it loses prestige and validity if it is not a science. Not to be a science is taken as a failing that is equivalent to being unscientific. Being, as the element of thinking, is abandoned by the technical interpretation of thinking.¹⁰⁵

The supra-moral relation of thinking to being leads back to the pre-moral level of dwelling, given that, as Heidegger makes clear in 'Building Dwelling Thinking', thinking does not attempt to attain a particular experience, but is rather concerned with the grateful and patient appreciation of what is: 'Dwelling preserves the fourfold by bringing the presencing of the fourfold into things. But things themselves secure the fourfold *only when* they themselves as things

¹⁰⁴ *DK*, p. 379.

¹⁰⁵ *BW*, pp. 218–129.

are let be in their presencing.’¹⁰⁶ Moving from the ontic to the ontological, ‘Thinking accomplishes the relation of Being to the essence of man. It does not make or cause the relation.’¹⁰⁷

Heidegger changes his emphasis away from temporality as the primary *a priori* condition of human being to dwelling, although this is not as simple as a mere change of emphasis away from what *can or will be* to what *is*, for Heidegger’s understanding of thinking, which serves to guard Being in its essential mystery, is also a waiting for its presencing. As expressed by the teacher in the dialogue ‘Conversation on a Country Path About Thinking’: ‘Waiting, all right; but never awaiting, for awaiting already links itself with re-presenting and what is re-presented. . . . In waiting we leave open what we are waiting for.’¹⁰⁸ The essence of thinking, then, is what Heidegger calls *Gelassenheit*, or letting-be,¹⁰⁹ which is in fact the original German title of *Discourse on Thinking*. Hence, Heidegger says in the essay ‘Language’, that as against the ‘understanding that is schooled in logic, thinking of everything in terms of calculation. . . . we do not want to get anywhere. We would like only, for once, to get to just where we are already.’¹¹⁰

Heidegger’s ideas about the way by which we get to where we are already, and who leads us there and why, lead us away from moral philosophy and toward the mystical element which Caputo identifies in Heidegger’s notion of thinking. Having examined Maritain’s and Heidegger’s conceptions of authenticity and identified three levels of relation to Being, I will now turn to the second level of relation to Being, of moral philosophy or ethics in the ordinary sense, and return later to mysticism.

¹⁰⁶ *PLT*, p. 149.

¹⁰⁷ *BW*, 217.

¹⁰⁸ Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, p. 68.

¹⁰⁹ *HA*, 284.

¹¹⁰ *PLT*, p. 188.

Moral Knowledge of God, Love and the Spiritual Marriage

'A person possesses absolute dignity because he is in direct relationship with the absolute, in which alone he can find his complete fulfilment.'¹

1. Maritain's Phenomenology of Good and Evil

(i) Maritain as Personalist

I do not intend to provide a complete survey of Maritain's moral system, for such a task demands a study itself. Instead, the focus here and in the next chapter is on the elements of Maritain's thinking which are most relevant to the lived reality of the person—in particular, moral exemplars and saints, who Maritain calls 'friends of God'² and what I will call, in explicit comparison with Heidegger's shepherd of Being, 'revealers of Being'.

Maritain, especially in the context of his political and educational works, writes from the perspective of 'personalism',³ by which is meant that persons, human and divine, are the locus of all philosophical explanation and justification. They are, in a word, the source and end of *value*, given that with persons comes a world of freedom that is unknown to the physical world, determined as it is by regular or fixed laws.⁴ Following Armando Rigobello, Thomas D. Williams helps to delineate two different types and operative

¹ *RMNL*, p. 6.

² *AG*, p. 63.

³ *RMNL*, p. 10.

⁴ *IBPMP*, pp. 54–73.

meanings of personalism. The first is a 'strict' type that places an intuition of the person's own self and analyses of the experience of the self at the center of a philosophical system.⁵ The second is a 'broad' type, to which Maritain's Thomistic brand of personalism is presumed by Williams to belong. Williams writes:

In its broader sense, personalism integrates a particular anthropological and ethical vision into a global philosophical perspective. Here the person is not considered as the object of an original intuition, nor does philosophical research begin with an analysis of the personal context. Rather, in the scope of a general metaphysics the person manifests his singular value and essential role. Thus the person occupies the central place in philosophical discourse, but this discourse is not reduced to an explicitation or development of an original intuition of the person. In this context, the person does not justify metaphysics but rather metaphysics justifies the person and his various operations. More than an autonomous metaphysics, personalism in the broad sense offers an anthropological-ontological shift in perspective within an existing metaphysics and draws out the ethical consequences of this shift.⁶

With the qualification that Maritain agrees with existentialists such as Heidegger and Sartre that the intuition of one's own finitude is a valuable metaphysical experience insofar as it can open the door to more global contemplation, his philosophy does seem to be of the broad type. Maritain's analyses of moral knowledge, artistic knowledge, and mystical knowledge, as possible by means of connaturality, are always set in a realist and theistic framework. What Maritain calls 'pre-philosophical' or 'natural knowledge' of moral values, as distinct from reflexive, philosophical knowledge of moral values is not, according to Maritain, to be used as proof for the validity of a moral system.⁷ One needs moral philosophy, which Maritain calls 'knowledge of the second look', to first verify pre-philosophical intuitions and second, to place them within a greater framework for advancements in individual and

⁵ Thomas D. Williams, 'What is Thomistic Personalism?', *Alpha Omega*, 7 (2) (2004), p. 165.

⁶ Williams, 'Thomist Personalism', pp. 165–166.

⁷ *IBPMP*, p. 63.

collective moral life.⁸

For Maritain, moral values are neither heralded nor created by philosophers, as in the cases of Kant and Sartre.⁹ They are rather perceived as external obligations and acted upon by persons connaturally. Moral experience, including the experience of the 'second look', then, has to be our focus here. For Maritain, this includes natural law, which is a natural disposition or connatural knowledge of the objective principles of avoiding evil and to do good derived from one's essence as in the *imago dei*. Maritain writes that 'knowledge through connaturality plays an immense part in human existence, especially in that knowing of the singular which comes about in everyday life and in our relationships of person to person'.¹⁰ Indeed, it is because direct experience and the second look are not mutually exclusive that Maritain can speak of a 'moral knowledge of God' in acting according to and manifesting the moral good.¹¹ And understanding the experience of moral goodness allows us to understand the experience of human love.

(ii) The Task of Ethics

For Maritain, the determination of what happiness consists in is the task of moral philosophy.¹² Ethics or moral philosophy for Maritain, must, in light of Christian revelation, be 'subalternated' to moral theology, because Christian revelation has provided human beings with the most crucial facts possible with regard to the human condition as such.¹³ These facts include the fallenness of human beings, the immortality of the soul, and the universal call to the divine life and the beatific vision.¹⁴ Joseph Pappin writes that, for Maritain, 'It is impossible to escape from the results of the irruption of faith into the structures

⁸ Ibid., p. 59.

⁹ Ibid., p. 52; *EE*, pp. 50–60.

¹⁰ Jacques Maritain, 'On Knowledge Through Connaturality', *The Review of Metaphysics*, 4 (4) (1951), p. 475.

¹¹ *AG*, p. 57.

¹² *MP*, 'Christianity and Philosophy': The Impact of Christianity on Moral Philosophy, 10.

¹³ Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, p. 86.

¹⁴ Joseph Pappin, 'Maritain's Ethics for an Age in Crisis', in Deal W. Hudson and Matthew J. Mancini (eds.), *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), p. 292.

of our knowledge.’¹⁵ And yet, as Ralph Nelson points out, ‘a purely natural moral philosophy lacks the knowledge of man’s true ultimate end, to which all his actions are to be ordered.’¹⁶

Maritain believes that ethics has its own subject-matter and its own methodology as distinct from theology or moral theology, because moral philosophy and moral theology will approach the ultimate end of the human being differently; the former regarding the question of the ultimate end from the perspective of the perfection of human nature by means of nature’s own resources and the latter regarding the question from the perspective of the participation by human beings in the life of God.¹⁷ Yet, precisely because Christianity granted human beings the knowledge that ultimate happiness lies in Beatitude through the love of God—delivering the human being from the ‘egocentricity in which Aristotelian eudemonism remained’¹⁸—the existential condition of the human being must be considered in a totally different light. We consequently find that the differences in points of departure and subject-matter between Christian ‘existentialists’ such as Maritain and atheistic existentialists such as Heidegger and Sartre in the totality of the field of ethics—the pre-moral, moral and supra-moral—are marked indeed.

In light of Christian revelation, for Maritain, the notion of freedom is transformed into a positive notion of freedom *for* or *to*, *toward right and proper action for proper goods*. Maritain’s ethics is Aristotelian or ‘eudaimonist’ in that it holds that the human will is necessarily ordered to the fulfilment of human nature, which is happiness or well-being, with the result that one’s actions are always, whether consciously or subconsciously, ordered to that end. For Maritain, as for Aquinas, the ultimate end of human action and human life is God and one’s union with God, or ‘beatitude’.¹⁹ Freedom of will and action do not include the possibility of changing this essential ordering of human nature

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 299.

¹⁶ Ralph Nelson, “Moral Philosophy Adequately Considered”, in Joseph W. Evans (ed.), *Jacques Maritain: The Man and his Achievement* (New York, NY: Sheed & Ward, Inc., 1963), p. 145.

¹⁷ Ibid. 147.

¹⁸ *MP*, ‘Christianity and Philosophy’: The Impact of Christianity on Moral Philosophy, 8.

¹⁹ Ibid., 6-8.

towards happiness and God, but rather consists in the freedom to choose among means to attain the end.²⁰ That said, for Maritain one does not necessarily need a conscious knowledge of God as one's ultimate end, and here we come to experience of the moral good as a natural analogy of mystical experience.

Maritain attempts to show that a 'purely practical, non-conceptual and non-conscious knowledge of God' is possible in moral experience.²¹ To ascertain the epistemic and ontological relationship between God and moral acts for Maritain, we should begin by recapitulating the notion of the moral good as 'a particular analogue' of the transcendental of the ontological Good, or 'a certain fullness of being in a particular given line, the line of what specifically human, so that the moral good remains related to being and to the transcendental realm of being'.²²

For Maritain, as for Aquinas, God is the first cause and preserver in existence of all that is not Himself. God is *esse ipsum subsistens*, that which is subsisting being itself, or Being as such, without modification(s) such as contingency or supervenience upon a substance. God, though, is not just Being as such, or the One, but is also supreme metaphysical Goodness—a doctrine which Maritain utilizes in approaching the problem of evil. Holding that God, as *ipsum esse subsistens*, is the absolute Good and cannot therefore be the source of evil either by creating or willing it—whether natural or moral, non-conscious operations in the natural world or conscious decisions in human life—has the implication that moral goodness is at the heart of, and expresses, ultimate reality. It also has the implication that moral evil, as Augustine, Aquinas and Maritain held after them, is a 'privation' of being, a vacuum, because it is not *created positively and sustained in existence* by God.²³ This is the classical Catholic doctrine of *privatio boni*.

The doctrine of *privatio boni* applies to all of creation, but here we have to limit our scope to the categories of good and evil as they pertain to ethics or

²⁰ *EE*, pp. 85–122.

²¹ *RR*, p. 70.

²² *IBPMP*, p. 33, 79.

²³ *EE*, p. 90.

the moral life of human beings. In his celebrated lecture, *St Thomas and the Problem of Evil*, Maritain expresses the doctrine by describing moral evil as a ‘nihilation’ of being, the opposite of positive creation.²⁴ The human being, through free volition of the will, nihilates being and introduces nothingness, or a vacuum in being, when he or she fails to act according to the moral good. Maritain follows Aquinas and Augustine in affirming that moral evil is a privation of being, of some good, but crucially, a *due* good, ‘the absence of or lack of a certain good, a certain being which *should* be there, which is unconditionally required by a thing by virtue of its nature’²⁵—a normative statement involving a value judgement. For Maritain, given that God creates us and sustains us in our being and given that God can only will the good due to his nature, God must be the primordial or first cause of all morally good action, and it is we who have the secondary initiative of aligning ourselves to the moral good, thus doing God’s will.²⁶

Maritain explains that evil action, however, is a privation of the good, a ‘nihilation’ of being, of which it would be logically impossible for God to ‘cause’, because God can only create and will something that can participate in His essence. Only human beings, therefore, can be the first and only cause of evil.²⁷ Evil or sin is action performed in the willful absence of the good, of the natural law, of God’s commandments—of God’s will, more generally. Moral evil for Maritain, then, is rooted in the nature of the human will insofar as it is *free*. It consists not, however, in the free decision to pay heed to the moral ‘rule’, given that the prior decision to pay heed to the moral rule is a pre-moral question of deciding which conception of reality will guide our pre-moral and moral lives. Moreover, we cannot say the human will itself is evil, but the decision to thereby produce an action in the knowledge of the absence of one’s consideration of the moral rule, taking the first initiative away from God.²⁸ Any morally good action, however, is also made possible by God’s own action, and God can therefore be said to be the first cause of any morally good action.

²⁴ Maritain, *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 32–34.

²⁵ *IBPMP*, p. 48, 49.

²⁶ *EE*, pp. 88–93, 108–109.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 109–110.

²⁸ Maritain, *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 23–38.

Maritain's doctrine here can be summarized by a rather beautiful passage in *Existence and the Existent*: 'There is not in the world a shadow of beauty, a trace of actuality, a spark of being of which the subsistent Being itself is not the author. The more so where it is a question of that singular nobility and ultimate flowering of being which is the morally good act of the free will.'²⁹

Maritain refers to John 15:5: 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.' The passage is important for understanding Maritain's views on good and evil and how they pertain to moral experience. Maritain points out what he believes is a significant pun in the phrase 'do nothing'.³⁰ The first meaning is that without God's primordial act of creation as the first cause of all that is actualized, human beings could neither *be* nor *act*. The second meaning is that when we do not respond to the moral law as made evident to us in natural law or revealed law, we nihilate being, introducing nothingness.

How does this pertain to moral experience? Certainly all of the above is assumed to be the case by Maritain prior to his writing on what he calls the 'Ways of the Practical Intellect' to know God's existence.³¹ Maritain proceeds, however, not with such an abstract and theoretical framework, but by a reconstruction of the existentially defining experience of recognizing the moral good and deciding to act upon it, what he calls 'the first act of freedom'. How this plays out exactly, Maritain calls an 'immanent dialectic'.³² He writes:

I am considering any *first or primal* free act, any free act through which a new basic direction is imposed on my life. Such an act goes down to the sources of my moral life; through it I take hold of myself so as to project myself in a spray of ulterior actions which may be indefinite. Nevertheless, I am not necessarily aware of the profundity of what is happening; the available evidence may be but a very slight impact, a mere ripple on the surface of the waters.³³

²⁹ *EE*, p. 88.

³⁰ Maritain, *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 35–36.

³¹ *AG*, p. 53.

³² *RR*, p. 76.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Maritain begins, following Aquinas, by considering the example of a child who, having arrived at the age of reason, truly morally deliberates about his or her actions for the first time, and we know from our own experience that this can occur without explicit conceptualization or any discursive analysis whatsoever. The case is by no means limited to childhood and in fact can occur at any time in life. Nevertheless, in the example, the child refrains from telling a lie, Maritain relates, not out of fear of punishment, not out of upsetting his relations, or from any conditioned reflex, but out of an intuitive and compelling perception that lying is not *good*.³⁴ Of paramount importance for Maritain, as he explains, is that in recognizing and acting upon—one may say submitting to—the good, the child, despite the fact they do not know the greater significance of the decision upon their life in the longer term, has answered the question, ‘What do you live for?’³⁵

The immanent dialectic contained implicitly and non-consciously in the act of choosing the good, the *bonum honestum*, is threefold. The first movement or implication is the distinction between good and evil, and the acknowledgement that the good ought to be acted upon not for some practical purpose or in virtue of conditioning, but solely in virtue of itself *as good*. It is, as Maritain writes, ‘a formal motive which transcends the whole order of empirical convenience and desire.’³⁶

The second implication is that because the value of the moral object and act passes beyond the empirical order of cause, necessity, desire, and utility, to what *ought* to be done, there is ‘an order of proper consonance between our activity and our essence, a *law* of human acts transcending all facts.’³⁷ Maritain continues:

Such a law carries in the world of actual existence the requirements of an order that depends on a reality superior to everything and which is Goodness itself—good by virtue of its very being, not by virtue of conformity with anything distinct from itself. Such a law manifests the existence of a Separate Good

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 67.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 68.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 68–69.

transcending all empirical existence and subsisting *per se*, and subsists primarily in this Separate Good.³⁸

Maritain's position is that the order which is revealed to us between human conduct and the intuitively perceived precept that my conduct ought to be morally good is an ideal order and, as such, must have an ontological ground, which is God, its creator and sustainer. Elsewhere, in *An Introduction to the Basic Problems of Moral Philosophy*, Maritain offers two other cases, of people observing fair treatment of others, the first being someone observing an employer paying his employees fair wages, and the second, someone observing a tribal chief ruling strictly but justly. Here Maritain employs such examples to illustrate the existence of moral inclinations that serve as the expression of the unwritten, natural law, and says that 'Reason takes a certain pleasure in such examples', suggesting an intuitively perceived consonance between action and moral law which is the measure of the action.³⁹ As we found with prudence and moral knowing by connaturality, the reason that is operative here is not that which is present in *theoria* but *praxis*, 'embodied in the situation itself, inseparable from it, and preconscious, not expressed in a mental word (concept), but which, translated into abstract terms, would be something like "Give to each his due."⁴⁰

Such a thesis amounts to nothing less than a phenomenology of the good, for Maritain offers a description of the phenomena of the moral good precisely as it is manifest to us in experience as obligation, fairness, and justice, and not just as it can be *thought* in moral philosophy and moral theology. Moreover, in speaking of evil as a nihilation of being, perhaps Maritain also provides a phenomenology of evil. Maritain's thesis is that 'ontological evil—suffering—is a natural *fruit* of moral evil' and that as a 'metaphysical law', 'Evil can only engender evil.'⁴¹ He continues: 'Sin spreads evil in the world—evil radiates from the sinner like the waves on the surface of a lake when a stone drops in the water. Sin produces moral evil, hate for hate,

³⁸ Ibid., p. 69.

³⁹ *IBPMP*, p. 56.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 204.

murder for murder.⁴² Most significantly, according to Maritain, moral evil, as nihilation ‘must flow back upon the agent himself’⁴³ according to the aforementioned metaphysical law of evil engendering evil. This law, as it pertains to the author of evil, is a law of punishment, rather than being merely retributive. However, it is primarily restorative insofar as the suffering which the wrongdoer experiences existentially re-orders them into alignment with the whole of being, of which they are a part—by their destruction or by their inner healing (the latter being possible if the wrongdoer can accept the punishment as just through humility and love).⁴⁴ Whether Maritain’s description of evil amounts to a phenomenology of evil or can be used to provide a phenomenology of evil is a worthy question for further research.

A more pressing concern must be dealt with, though. How, Maritain asks, can one both recognize the Good and commit oneself to it as *one’s own* Good, or, we might ask, why exactly do we choose to be morally good if there can be no other reason to choose the good than the good itself? Is there a contradiction present if we choose the good *to be* good? Maritain’s answer is no, and that whether we are aware of it or not, in the same act of acting *upon* the good, we choose the Good as our ultimate end. We believe, Maritain says, that by acting in a way that serves the moral good, we will be happier.⁴⁵

To connect what has been said about Maritain’s conception of the good as transcendental and the immanent dialectic of the first act of freedom, what needs to be said is that Maritain believes that the person who chooses the good—and by implication, the ontological Good and their ultimate end, chooses, by further implication, God. In willing and loving the Separate Good, one’s intellect, Maritain writes, ‘has of God a vital and non-conceptual knowledge. . . . independently of any use possibly made or not made of the idea of God, and independently of the actualization of any explicit and conscious knowledge of man’s true last End.’⁴⁶ God is the terminus of the will’s

⁴² Ibid., p. 205.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 206.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 207–208.

⁴⁵ *RR*, p. 69.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 70.

movement.⁴⁷

Maritain insists that the practical knowledge of God under discussion here is by no means mystical knowledge, for it is not a 'fruitful experience of the absolute.'⁴⁸ We can now confidently infer that by 'fruitful experience of the absolute', Maritain means a conscious experience-knowledge of mystical union with God. Nevertheless, here, as elsewhere in discussing connatural knowledge (especially poetic knowledge, which we have yet to examine), Maritain lapses into semi-poetic or mystical language. I mean mystical language in its apophatic element, such as when Maritain refers to a 'night without concept and without utterable knowledge'.⁴⁹ And perhaps he is inspired by 1 Corinthians 13:12 when he refers to this practical knowledge of God as achieved by the "dark mirror" of the moral good.⁵⁰ He does, however, also quote John 3:21: 'Those who do what is true come to the light'.⁵¹

Maritain plainly distinguishes himself from the medieval scholastics and so-called manualists as a modern philosopher working in the Thomist scholastic tradition in writing that scholastic doctors such as John of St. Thomas were preoccupied with 'analyzing the objective requisites of the act of faith in themselves and in theologically elucidated terms rather than looking for the psychological modalities in which they are realized in the subject', which, as he continues, 'limited his [John of St. Thomas'] study to the sphere of conscious thought and of conceptual or notionally expressed knowledge.'⁵² Maritain is a Thomist, but he is also a modern philosopher of the post-Cartesian, post-subjective turn and scientific era, obviously concerned like Heidegger with the inner life of the individual and the types of knowledge that are present *in situation* but also *hidden*. He writes that we must

consider the innermost recesses of mental functioning and to use, as a prerequisite philosophical equipment of ours, those more complex and deeper views on knowledge which are not new to the experience of the experts in the human heart's

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 77.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 82.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 81.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 82; NRSV, Catholic Edition.

⁵² Ibid., p. 79.

mysteries, but which have been given scientific consistency through the progress of psychological research with regard to the unconscious or pre-conscious life of the mind.⁵³

Maritain insists that while the 'metaphysical content with which it is pregnant is not grasped,'⁵⁴ what is achieved in the immanent dialectic is 'a practical and volitional knowledge of God'⁵⁵ which, as John of St. Thomas believed, according to Maritain, is the 'inner inspiration revealing the things that are necessary for the act of faith'.⁵⁶ For Maritain, a person who knows and chooses the good, knows and chooses God—has faith and charity, and even if they claim they do not believe in God is, in fact, only a 'pseudo-atheist' who 'knows with a natural, volitional and merely practical knowledge that same God Whom he denies in his words and explicit, formulated thoughts.'⁵⁷ It is precisely because the moral good subsists ideally, beyond physical necessity and convenience, that the good is necessarily spiritual or religious in nature, even if the idea of God or a certain conception of God according to the specifications of a religion is absent:

[T]he moral virtues—and even the natural beginnings of such virtues within us—create a certain affinity in the soul with the *spiritual order*, in the most indefinitely sense of that term. In this way they can incline the intellect, with scant efficacy however, to instinctive judgements about the great truths of natural religion.⁵⁸

Maritain here reveals his affinity to phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Sartre insofar as he is concerned above all with description. He describes in detail the experience of choosing and valuing the good with concrete examples before proceeding to retrospectively explain the phenomena, and he does not claim that a proof of God's existence can be mounted upon such descriptions and analyses.⁵⁹

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 79–80.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 76.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 80.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 84.

⁵⁸ *DK*, p. 299.

⁵⁹ *RR*, p. 82.

(iii) The Transcendent as Personal Savior

There is a further specification to be made regarding the relation between moral knowledge and knowledge of God. As a Catholic and a Thomist philosopher, Maritain always signifies the divine as the Christian God as construed by orthodox Catholic theology and retains the distinction between nature and grace, which underlies his metaphysics and phenomenology of good and evil. Taking the cardinal facts of human existence as revealed, Maritain believes that human beings are fallen and are thus unable, by the natural strength of their will, to choose the good and to love God.⁶⁰ Given that God is the first source of all that is good, his sanctifying grace is what makes choosing the moral good possible in the first place.⁶¹ Maritain claims that when a person chooses the good, supernatural grace and charity are in operation, and when someone does not choose the good in the first act of freedom, it is because they refused God's healing grace.⁶²

Whatever the land of his birth, whatever may be the tradition handed down to him, whether or not he knows Christ, a child born of woman can initiate his moral life rightly only in the grace of Jesus Christ. And without that grace, as Saint Thomas taught, his primal act of freedom can only be a sin which turns him away from his ultimate End.⁶³

It was related that Maritain argues that we choose the good because we believe we will be happier for it, consciously or subconsciously. But considering the fallen state of human beings and the influx of sanctifying grace that God's initiative consists in, Maritain goes further than this, claiming that what appears to the intellect in the perception of the good as that which ought to be done is also the perception of '*the good by means of which "I shall be saved"*'.⁶⁴ This, Maritain claims, amounts to an implicit recognition, which is now speculative yet still beyond formulation and reflective consciousness that the Good is a '*refuge and salvation*' and precisely because it is personal, this

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 71.

⁶¹ Maritain, *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 34–35.

⁶² *RR*, pp. 71–73.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 74.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 77 (original emphasis).

is the Christian God who is savior. What all of this amounts to is that the opening up of the self to that Good which calls us from beyond allows us to place our happiness and our hope in the transcendent, which can only be personal, and which, for Maritain is the Christian God.

Heidegger, on the other hand, repeatedly affirms an '*ontological difference*' between Being and beings,⁶⁵ but refuses to identify Being as any kind of God. He therefore vehemently refuses to identify God as pure Act, as Maritain does, following Aquinas. This fundamental difference is crucial in determining the characteristics of the levels of relation to Being in both philosophers, and in this connection the notion of grace, which is always at work for Maritain, again becomes significant. Whether Heidegger's Being is analogous to the Christian conception of God without this Thomistic metaphysical underpinning is a question that will have to be addressed in the last chapter. Indeed, one question that will have to be addressed as part of this overall theme of a possible identification of God and Being in Heidegger is whether Heidegger affirms what orthodox Catholic theology refers to as the distinction between nature and supernature, or 'nature' and 'grace', particularly as it pertains to mystical experience, and not merely metaphysics.

2. The Primacy of Persons

(i) Individuality and Personality

It was said that the focus of this chapter is on the elements of Maritain's thinking which are most relevant to the lived reality of the person. The person, for Maritain, it was said, was the revealer of being. We have examined Maritain's notion of the moral knowledge of God through experience of the good, but we have yet to push through to the most profound element in the idea, which is experience of God in and through love—love between *persons*. We shall examine the knowledge of God through love first of all as a natural analogy of mystical experience, and second as the supernatural virtue of charity, which takes us even beyond the cloud of unknowing to union with God.

⁶⁵ *BPP(R)*, 4/17.

The first step is an analysis of Maritain's conception of the human person as that which loves and is loved. In the West, the innermost being of a human being—ourselves and others—is normally conceived as the person, and everyday language, as well as legal and political discourse, presupposes persons and personhood. Maritain writes in this connection: 'We know that an essential characteristic of any civilization worthy of the name is respect and feeling for the dignity of the human person.'⁶⁶

According to Maritain, personality rests in the spiritual nature of the human being: The human being 'is caught between two poles; a material pole, which in reality, does not concern the true person but rather the shadow of personality or what . . . is called *individuality*, and a spiritual pole, which does concern *true personality*.'⁶⁷ In saying this, Maritain is keen to point out early on that this is equatable neither to Platonic nor Cartesian dualism, which posit substance to be only two homogeneous, mutually-exclusive and self-existent wholes, of two kinds, matter and mind, or soul, and claim an identity between person and soul. Plato, at least in some dialogues such as the *Phaedo*, puts forward the view that the soul abhors matter and the body, so much so that for him philosophy is conceived to be a way of purifying oneself from the prison of the body. While Descartes affirms that the body and soul constitute a unity in the manner of a pilot and a ship, he also maintains an identity between person and mind or soul, and claims that the soul exists as a whole independently of the body, because it is pure thought (its essence is thinking, as expressed in Descartes' 'Cogito ergo, sum'), whereas matter is mere extension. Maritain accepts, as Aquinas did, Boethius' definition of person as rational substance, that is, as a conscious entity,⁶⁸ and soul and matter are 'two substantial co-principles of one and the same being':⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *RMNL*, p. 5.

⁶⁷ PCG, Chapter 3: 'Individuality and Personality'. In virtue of my only having access to the online version provided by the University of Notre Dame's Maritain Center, which is not paginated, I reference the name of the chapter.

⁶⁸ J. Marenbon, *Boethius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 72.

⁶⁹ Jacques Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, translation edited by Mortimer J. Adler (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1940), p. 60.

[W]e must emphasize that they are not two separate things. There is not in me one reality, called my individual, and another reality, called my person. One and the same reality is, in a certain sense an individual, and, in another sense, a person. Our whole being is an individual by reason of that in us which derives from matter, and a person by reason of that in us which derives from spirit.⁷⁰

If one brackets out what is the Aristotelian hylomorphism of matter and special form of the human soul, such a view of the psychosomatic unity of the human being seems to be coherent and in agreement with common sense and experience. For one is one's body as much as anything some might be inclined to call 'mind', and we and other people experience us to be exactly that. It is the whole person who feels angry, sad, hungry, thirsty or sexually aroused, just as it is the whole person who feels at peace after meditation or prayer, refreshed after a shower or a swim, and the whole person who can psychologically change if their brain is physiologically damaged. Moreover, morally speaking, habituation creates certain personalities, moral characters and characteristics, such as a politeness or impoliteness, greediness or charitableness. Finally, the continuity of an individual's personhood is plain for other people when they visually perceive that individual, and they do not in general make a distinction between mind and body and identify different persons according to different mental states.

And yet, for all this, the person cannot be defined totally by their body or their behavior, for there is an interior realm that cannot be entered into from outside, or objectively. Just as one cannot think what another person thinks as they think it as *this person* (Daniel, for instance), one cannot feel what they are feeling, that is, as it feels *to them*. Edith Stein, a student of Husserl's in her early career and later a Thomist and friend of the Maritains, infers a spiritual dimension that is the seat of personality from apparently non-physical phenomena such as valuing and willing.⁷¹ Maritain similarly repeats Aquinas' argument from intentionality—the mind's being the locus of intentional being

⁷⁰ PCG, Chapter 3: 'Individuality and Personality'.

⁷¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), pp. 75–80.

insofar as understanding an object is to ‘intend’ a non-sensible essence—for the immateriality and immortality of the human soul, as well as arguing from knowledge by analogy for the immateriality of the function of understanding.⁷² We may also say with Stein that personality—the self, or the ‘I’—is a ‘zero point of orientation’, non-spatially localized ‘in’ the body.⁷³ And again Maritain agrees with this, saying that ‘the human intellect does not reside in any special part of the body.’⁷⁴ Nonetheless, there is an undeniable exclusivity of personal experience, and persons—except perhaps God—are coextensive with spatially exclusive bodies.

So, for Maritain, personality derives from what is spiritual in nature, but what, for Maritain, is spiritual in nature—the soul or form—cannot exist apart from the matter which it informs. That, as mentioned in Part I, essence for Aquinas stands in potency to act, is mirrored here in matter standing in potency to form. However, while matter is the principle of potency, Aquinas and Maritain say it is also the principle of individuation or designation of form, such that by it Cole, or Rebecca, as individual human beings, can exist.

It appears that nothing here in Maritain’s metaphysics and philosophy of mind precludes anything that physiology and neurology have told us, including the central role of the brain in human consciousness and intellection, which Maritain admits.⁷⁵ Maritain also accepts the existence of the subconscious, as well as a ‘spiritual subconscious’ or ‘preconscious’⁷⁶—which is particularly important for his thinking on artistic knowledge and experience. As such, at the outset of his considerations on personhood in *The Person and the Common Good*, Maritain cautions that while personality is essentially spiritual, the person does not equate to ego, as the source and activity of thought, as for Descartes. Rather Maritain writes:

Metaphysically considered, personality is . . . ‘subsistence,’ the ultimate achievement by which the creative influx seals, within itself, a nature face to face with the whole order of existence so

⁷² *RR*, pp. 54–57.

⁷³ MacIntyre, *Edith Stein*, p. 80.

⁷⁴ *RR*, p. 56.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *CI*, pp. 66–80.

that the existence which it receives is *its own* existence and *its own* perfection. Personality is the subsistence of the spiritual soul communicated to the human composite. Because, in our substance, it is an imprint or seal which enables it to possess its existence, to perfect and give itself freely, personality testifies to the generosity or expansiveness in being which an incarnate spirit derives from its spiritual nature and which constitutes, within the secret depths of our ontological structure, a source of dynamic unity, of unification from within.⁷⁷

Maritain continues that while personality ‘signifies interiority to self’, this by no means implies that the self is shut off from the world or from others, as in the case of the Cartesian *cogito* or Husserl’s transcendental Ego. Maritain holds that one’s actions are not all determined by one’s essence, that ‘A thing . . . does not act solely in accordance with its archetypal or primarily intelligible being, but also as it is subject to particular conditions and possessed a particular individuality’.⁷⁸ The implication is that an individual human being possessing a universal essence does not in principle preclude their having a unique personality, and it also does not preclude their freedom. Maritain distinguishes between the primary act of existence (*esse*) of the human being (or ‘suppositum’, as ‘*that which* exercises existence and actions . . . *that which* subsists)⁷⁹ and the others, the accidents, which it is able, in virtue of its subsistence and free will as an individual, to perform and possess.⁸⁰ This includes anything from mental or emotional states to actions or behavior that bear upon the way one lives one’s life, such that certain modes of existing—for example, being an artist—we can say *define how one takes hold of one’s own (act of) existence*.⁸¹ It is by virtue of the communicability of one’s being to others through the perception of the ‘act’ or existence of the accidents one performs (such as drawing a portrait of someone if one is an artist), is made possible by interaction with others. For Maritain, human beings have a common essence, but are also able to transcend their essence in virtue of taking hold of their existences (their individual *esse*) and manifesting qualities,

⁷⁷ PCG, Chapter 3: ‘Individuality and Personality’.

⁷⁸ Maritain, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 215.

⁷⁹ *EE*, P. 62.

⁸⁰ Maritain, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, pp. 160–169.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 220–221.

or accidents which truly make them an individual. It is when a being is endowed with freedom and autonomy, Maritain says,

suppositum [the subsisting human substance] becomes *persona* [a person], that is, a whole which subsists and exists in virtue of the very subsistence of its spiritual soul, and acts by setting itself its own ends; a universe in itself. . . . Only the person is free; only the person possesses . . . inwardness and subjectivity—because it contains itself and moves about within itself.⁸²

We know each other in virtue of the accidents—appearances, activities, vocations, and actions and behavior—by which we become who and what we are. But such accidents rest upon the *esse* of the human subject, who, in virtue of freedom of the will, can, particularly in the moral realm, make the accidents *their own*. This transcendence of *esse* over *essentia* is why the eminent Maritain scholar and translator Joseph Evans writes:

In Maritain's social and political philosophy, the primary of *esse* in being is supplemented by, or even translated into, the primacy, in the ultimate analysis, of the human person. Maritain has a profound grasp of what it means to be a person; he knows what it means to be endowed with intellect and will, to be capable of understanding and loving, to be capable of knowing and deliberating about ends; and he has gradually come to see that his knowing the true import of the person has far-reaching implications in the field of social and political philosophy.⁸³

And Williams remarks of Thomism's hylomorphism: 'No matter what other elements are emphasized—the person's freedom, his creativity, his action, his self-consciousness, his interiority, his sociability, and so forth—they all have their objective base in an intellectual, and thus a spiritual, nature.'⁸⁴ What I want to argue in what remains of this chapter is that *esse*—considered under its dimension as the perfection or capacity to take hold of one's own existence and thereby transcend *supposita* to render possible *persona*—is the key to the most important natural analogy of mystical experience for Maritain: human

⁸² *EE*, p. 68.

⁸³ Joseph Evans, 'Jacques Maritain's Personalism', *The Review of Politics*, 14 (2) (1952), p. 166.

⁸⁴ Williams, 'What is Thomistic Personalism?', p. 176.

love.

For Maritain asserts that personality 'requires the communications of knowledge and love. By the very fact that each of us is a person and expresses himself to himself, each of us requires communication with *other* and *the others* in the order of knowledge and love. Personality, of its essence, requires a dialogue in which souls really communicate.'⁸⁵ For Maritain, to be a human person is to be capable of taking one's existence as *incarnate* as one's own, and the positive conditions for doing so are relationships with others and self-giving through charity. In other words, personhood is essentially relational and human existence is essentially *dialogical*. This, as we have seen, also seems to be the case with Heidegger because of the essential situatedness of *Dasein*. This will be most important when it comes to mystical experience.

We might wonder, however, what Maritain means when he writes: 'In each of us, individuality, being that which excludes from oneself all that other men are, could be described as the narrowness of the ego, forever threatened and forever eager to grasp for itself. Such narrowness in flesh animated by a spirit derives from matter.'⁸⁶ Maritain believes in accordance with Genesis that matter, as the principle both of potency and individuation, is potentially good. In fact, it is in virtue of the substantial form of a particular body that individual characteristics or accidents are able to emanate from the soul, distinguishing persons from each other even as they belong to the species of human being.⁸⁷ With regard to the relation between individuality and personality, Maritain offers the analogy of a painting, which by reason of all its materials is a physico-chemical complex, but is no less a work of beauty and meaning in virtue of the painter's art.⁸⁸ Rather, Maritain's point is that as material—embodied—beings, we suffer the threat and knowledge of inevitable death and we have an array of material needs, including food, drink, shelter, and companionship. Insofar as we are physical substances, we are, like everything else, also subject to physical determinisms, and in the case of the human

⁸⁵ *PCG*, Chapter 3: 'Individuality and Personality'.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*; Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, p. 61 (with 'narrowness of the ego' being translated as 'narrowness in being').

⁸⁷ Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, pp. 60–61.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

being, this includes biological and social determinisms.⁸⁹ The fact of individual material existence implies the fact of a fundamental selfishness, a regard for the self which is often the cause of conflict, and as we have seen, much suffering and eventually death—and this is not a normative statement. As such, Maritain sees the body as necessarily involved in the spiritual life and of the healing work of grace. Quoting from an edition of his publication *Le Roseau d'or*, Maritain argues that true spirituality must involve the body:

'Man has a spiritual soul, but it informs a body, when it is a question of rising to a wholly spiritual life, his reason does not suffice; his attempts at angelism have always broken down. His only authentic spirituality is bound up with grace and the Holy Ghost.' We mean here spirituality in the pure and simple sense of the word, that fires and takes hold of the entire being.⁹⁰

This taking hold of the entire being will be seen to be of the utmost significance when Maritain discusses love between human persons as a natural analogy of mystical experience and the love between God and the human being. He writes, for example that 'The human person can give itself to another, or find ecstasy in the other, to the point of making that other its All, only if it gives, or is ready to give, its body to the other at the same time that makes the offering of its soul.'⁹¹ Maritain is speaking of making a complete gift of self to the beloved and this is what defines the experience of the saint in their love of God, for God's own sake.

(ii) The Knowability and Value of the Person

Maritain assures us that, despite the aforementioned exigencies that individuality places upon us, it 'is not something bad in itself' and is indeed 'the very condition of our existence.'⁹² Of course the same thing is to be said for our social existences, our lives as persons with and among persons, and

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 61–62.

⁹⁰ *DK*, p. 283.

⁹¹ *UT*, p. 170.

⁹² Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, p. 65.

Maritain has much to say that is similar to the insights of leading phenomenologists. He writes:

By sense or experience, science or philosophy, each of us . . . knows the environing world of subjects, supposita, and persons in their role as objects. The paradox of consciousness and personality is that each of us is situated precisely at the centre of this world. Each of us is at the centre of infinity. And this privileged subject, the thinking self, is to itself not object but subject; in the midst of all the subjects which it knows only as objects, it alone is subject as subject. We are thus confronted by subjectivity as subjectivity.⁹³

That said, while there is an exclusivity of subjective experience, we can, nevertheless, encounter foreign mental life *as other* and not merely apprehend and use other human beings *as objects*. It is precisely because other human beings are endowed with intellect and will and those properties, in the function of capacities, are manifest in their actions, that Aquinas writes: “Person” means that which is most perfect in the whole of nature, namely what subsists in rational nature.⁹⁴ Human beings, because they possess intellect and will in virtue of being made in the image of God, are unique in the world and are of irreducible value. As Maritain himself says: ‘no equivalent is to be found in the physical world. . . . in the flesh and bones of man there lives a soul which is a spirit and which has a greater value than the whole physical universe.’⁹⁵

And while the human person is made by God and shares with God the properties or capacities of intelligence and free will, what the person is in its inmost essence—what Maritain calls the *persona* on the basis of *suppositum*⁹⁶—is unknowable, precisely because it is that in which we participate and which is the necessary background of all acts of knowing. Maritain writes:

[T]he intuition of subjectivity is an existential intuition which surrenders no essence to us. We know that which we are by our phenomena, our operations, our flow of consciousness. The

⁹³ *EE*, p. 68.

⁹⁴ *St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae* (London: Blackfriars in conjunction with Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1965), Ia, 29, 3 co.

⁹⁵ *RMNL*, p. 6.

⁹⁶ *EE*, p. 68.

more we grow accustomed to the inner life, the better we decipher the astonishing and fluid multiplicity which is thus delivered to us; the more, also, we feel that it leaves us ignorant of the essence of our self. Subjectivity as subjectivity is inconceptualisable; it is an unknowable abyss. It is unknowable by the mode of notion, concept, or representation, or by any mode of any science whatsoever—introspection, psychology, or philosophy. How could it be otherwise, seeing that every reality known through a concept, a notion, or a representation is known as object and not as subject? Subjectivity as such escapes by definition from that which we know about ourselves by means of notions.⁹⁷

Here we see the influence of Bergson, for whom the self could only be immediately intuited and not be made into an object of knowledge—that is, *relative* knowledge.⁹⁸ Maritain writes that ‘To objectivise is to universalise’,⁹⁹ which, in the case of the self, is impossible in virtue of its singularity. This is consonant with Gabriel Marcel’s view that the self (my self and the self of another) cannot be defined in virtue of its primordial presence, of its being the point of departure for all knowing and doing, unable to be converted into an ‘it’—its essence being ‘to be more than an essence’, just as the essence of the ‘thou’ ‘is to be more than an essence.’¹⁰⁰

The closest Maritain gets in examining the essence of personhood is the notion of ‘subsistence’—of self-possession and self-existence—but this, as characteristic of both the human person and of God, neither defines personhood nor explains how it comes about. Nonetheless, the properties and indefinability of the human person imply that human beings represent a singularity. Again, human beings are unique in nature, and for Maritain, of course, they are made in the image of God. We might say that they are, therefore, in a word, sacred (although Maritain does not use this word).

At this point, a question might be justifiably posed: Is the dignity or sacredness of human beings known not just objectively but also subjectively, in subjective experience, for Maritain? It is of some consequence for us that

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70.

⁹⁸ *IM*, p. 21, 23.

⁹⁹ *EE*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁰ Kenneth T. Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1975, 3rd edn.), p. 25.

he is not clear about this. For while he appears to imply that the person is radial in nature—that its nature is to be open and disposed to communion not just with things but with other persons—he also seems to say that human persons can only apprehend other human persons *as subjects* rather than objects through love or charity. It is useful here to return to a passage in which Maritain writes of the communicative nature of the person and at the same time of the difficulty of actual interpersonal communication:

[T]he subjectivity of the person has nothing in common with the isolated unity, without doors or windows, of the Leibnizian monad. It requires the communications of knowledge and love. By the very fact that each of us is a person and expresses himself to himself, each of us requires communication with *other* and *the others* in the order of knowledge and love. Personality, of its essence, requires a dialogue in which souls really communicate. Such communication is rarely possible. For this reason, personality in man seems to be bound to the experience of affliction even more profoundly than to the experience of creative effort.¹⁰¹

Is our capacity to perceive others as subjects inherent or is it conditional upon the cultivation of charity? Gabriel Marcel speaks of a ‘metaphysic of *we are* as opposed to a metaphysic of *I think*’,¹⁰² of a ‘transsubjectivity’ which is given in our experience, because it is only in virtue of the existence of the other that one can identify and give definition to one’s own existence—the person, when egocentrism is overcome, being given to oneself as ‘presence-in-communion.’¹⁰³ Let us return to Maritain’s *Existent and the Existent*. Maritain writes:

Being the only subject which is a subject for me in the midst of a world of subjects which my senses and my intelligence can know only as objects, I am at the centre of the world. . . . With regard to my subjectivity in act, I *am* the centre of the world (‘the most important person in the world’). My destiny is the most

¹⁰¹ PCG, Chapter 3: ‘Individuality and Personality’.

¹⁰² Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, Vol II: Faith and Reality*, trans. G. S. Fraser (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery, Gateway Edition, 1960), p. 10.

¹⁰³ Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, p. 22.

important of all destinies. Worthless as I know myself to be, I am more interesting than all the saints.¹⁰⁴

Here Maritain acknowledges the motivations of the Cartesian and Husserlian projects, which are concerned precisely with the self who is the 'center of the world', and which are dogged by the problem of solipsism. This, however, is the 'metaphysics of conduct', the attitude, that defines many of our everyday lives. William Rosser writes that for the normal human person 'These two perspectives, that of himself as subject and that of his situation in respect to other objects, will not coincide. He oscillates rather miserably between them.'¹⁰⁵ But here, precisely at the point at which we are tempted to stagnate in isolation, caught between the dualism of self and other, Maritain offers love as that which enables us to enter into genuine communion with other selves and with God.

3. Maritain's Phenomenology of Love

(i) Human Love

To complete the analysis of the moral knowledge of God and the natural analogies of mystical experience pertaining to the lived experience of the human person, what follows is an analysis of Maritain's conception of human love as one of the natural analogies of mystical experience. If we recall, Maritain said that it was the most important among those he lists, and we are now in position to examine his reasons for such a claim. In this regard, I shall quote Maritain at length to get a fuller picture of his position on the role of love in the knowability and value of persons.

By love, finally, is shattered the impossibility of knowing another except as object. I have emphasized this impossibility above at length and noted that it directly concerns the senses and the intellect. To say that union in love makes the being we love another *ourself* for us is to say that it makes that being another

¹⁰⁴ *EE*, p. 74–75.

¹⁰⁵ William L. Rossner., 'Love in the Thought of Jacques Maritain', in Joseph W. Evans (ed.), *Jacques Maritain: The Man and his Achievement* (New York, NY: Sheed & Ward, Inc., 1963), p. 243.

subjectivity for us, another subjectivity that is ours. To the degree that we truly love (which is to say, not for ourselves but for the beloved; and when—which is not always the case—the intellect within us become passive as regards love, and, allowing its concepts to slumber, thereby renders love a formal means of knowledge), to this degree we acquire an obscure knowledge of the being we love, similar to that which we possess of ourselves; we know that being in his very subjectivity (at least in a certain measure) by this experience of union. Then he himself is, in a certain degree, cured of his solitude; he can, though still disquieted, rest for a moment in the nest of the knowledge that we possess of him as subject.¹⁰⁶

While Maritain does not specify what kind of love is necessary for us to be able to perceive others as subjects in *Existence and the Existent*, I believe it can be justifiably inferred that he is speaking of a kind of love which is *selfless* and *other-regarding*, rather than self-regarding, and which is clearly spiritual in its source, rather than instinctive or animalistic. This, however, requires further specifications. We shall now have recourse to Maritain's essay 'Love and Friendship' as featured in his final book, *Untrammelled Approaches*.

Here Maritain delineates an array of subtly different forms of human love, but one of the first things that is made clear is that he is not concerned with purely sensual or carnal love. While he has something to say regarding the role of the body and sexual attraction, *mere* carnal love, or perhaps *mere* sexual attraction and 'love-making', has nothing to do with what he is seeking to examine. In this regard, Maritain makes a fundamental distinction between love of *dilection* or 'love-for-the-good-of-the-beloved' (*amor amicitiae*), which is a 'gift of oneself', and 'covetous' or 'possessive' love, or 'love-for-the-good-of-the-subject' (*amor concupiscentiae*).¹⁰⁷

For Maritain, the kind of love that is necessary for the perfection of human life is love of *dilection*, or other-regarding love. It is this love that Maritain places highest existential and epistemic value on throughout his work and contrasts with what he perceives as a Cartesian isolation of self, even if in most places he is concerned with the love of human beings for God (what he refers to as 'charity') and God's love of human beings (what he refers to as

¹⁰⁶ *EE*, p. 84 (original emphasis).

¹⁰⁷ *UT*, pp. 166–167.

'uncreated Love').¹⁰⁸ Here Maritain distinguishes between two aspects of love of *dilection*, which are themselves taken to be love as a self-giving '*directly, openly, and in complete nakedness*',¹⁰⁹ and 'friendship' which is 'the deep desire for the good of one's friend that goes as far as giving one's life for that friend.'¹¹⁰ Whereas the former is a direct giving of self, the latter is an indirect giving of self, in the sense that the lover gives what they possess, rather than what they are (though, Maritain admits, in the case of the giving of one's life, this is in a way a giving of what one is).¹¹¹ Nevertheless, both kinds of love of *dilection* are necessary aspects of true love among human beings, as opposed to mere possessive love.

Taking what was said earlier in this essay about the distinction between individuality and personality as our point of departure in considering what we normally call 'romantic love', for Maritain, love is not merely love for the physical attributes of a person but for their very being as a person, 'endowed with a spiritual existence, capable of containing itself thanks to the operations of the intellect and freedom, capable of super-existing by way of knowledge and of love.'¹¹² Maritain continues: 'For this reason, the metaphysical tradition of the West defines the person in terms of independence, as a reality which, subsisting spiritually, constitutes a universe unto itself, a relatively independent whole within the great whole of the universe, facing the transcendent whole which is God. For the same reason, this tradition finds in God the sovereign Personality whose existence itself consists in a pure and absolute super-existence by way of intellection and love.'¹¹³ Recognition of the essential independence of the person, as a *somebody* who holds their existence in their own hands but who can nevertheless *give themselves* to another in love, not as an object to be merely subjectively enjoyed, possessed or—perhaps the

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 170–171.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 166–167.

¹¹² *PCG*, Chapter 3: 'Individuality and Personality'.

¹¹³ *PCG*, Chapter 3: 'Individuality and Personality'.

combination of both—controlled like material objects, but rather appreciated as absolutely unique, is the source of genuine love:

‘Not the person but only its qualities do we love,’ Pascal has said. This is a false statement, and exhibits in Pascal a trace of the very rationalism against which he strove to protect himself. Love is not concerned with qualities. They are not the object of our love. We love the deepest, most substantial and hidden, the most *existing* reality of the beloved being. This is a metaphysical center deeper than all the qualities and essences which we can find and enumerate in the beloved. The expressions of lovers are unending because their object is ineffable.¹¹⁴

What appears to define the deepening of a romantic relationship according to Maritain’s description in ‘Love and Friendship’ is an increase in the intensity and effectuation of the romantic partners’ willingness to give of themselves for the benefit of the other. To be sure, there is a part to play for romantic attraction and carnal pleasure, but devotedness, a gift of self and a union in flesh which is more than merely for the sake of pleasure for one of the parties characterizes the maturation of a romantic relationship and are key constitutive elements of marriage.¹¹⁵ In its most extreme, this kind of love Maritain calls ‘*amour fou*’, meaning ‘mad love’, because at this point the romantic partners live in, through and for one another, against all logic.

This love in which the very person in each case gives itself to the other in all truth and reality, is in the order of the ontological perfections of nature, the highest point of love between Man and Woman. Then the lover gives himself to his beloved and the beloved to her lover, *as to his or her All*, in other words is ecstatic in the other, makes himself or herself—even though remaining ontologically a person—a part which no longer exists except through and in that All which is his or her All. This extreme love is *amour fou*; and this name fits it very well because it does (in the special order or, if you like, in the magic and the spiritual ‘superexistence’ of love) precisely what is in itself impossible and makes no sense in the order of mere existence or simple being, in which each person continues to

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ *UT*, p. 170.

be a whole and could not become a real part of another whole.¹¹⁶

Maritain writes that *amour fou*, because it is such a total self-giving of person to person and 'both flesh and spirit', also requires the giving of the body, of 'union *in the flesh* as well, at least in desire, with all the carnal joy and pleasure of the senses *par excellence*, which are associated with that union. The human person can give itself to another, or find ecstasy in the other, to the point of making that other its All, only if it gives, or is ready to give, its body to the other at the same time that makes the offering of its soul.'¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, precisely because the beloved comes to occupy the center of the lover's life and existence, the sexual pleasure of the lover recedes in the order of their priorities. Maritain goes so far as to say that while loving persons give their bodies to one another, to the degree that persons are above all spirits, 'the same degree *amour fou*, authentic love in its ultimate form, surpasses passionate [or sensual] love.'¹¹⁸ On this 'mad' union, Maritain continues:

This is the paradox proper to love; on the one hand it demands the ontologically unbreakable duality of the two persons; on the other hand it demands, and, *in its own way*, brings about a faultless unity, the effectively consummated union of these same two persons ('in a single spirit and love' as St. John of the Cross says of supernatural mystical union, but this is already true, on an entirely different level and in analogical sense, of the natural union between man and woman in *amour fou*).¹¹⁹

Maritain's teaching regarding human love as an analogy of mystical union with God is original in its descriptive, phenomenological quality, but also strictly in line with Thomistic doctrine. 'St. Thomas', William Rossner writes, 'made the same distinction [between natural love and charity] . . . but St. Thomas did not fully develop the concept of natural love by explicitly studying the hypothesis of nature considered in abstraction from the gifts of grace. M. Maritain, by making an explicit study of natural love in this more restricted sense, offers a

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 169.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 170.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 169.

considerable development of the doctrine.¹²⁰ In discussing a ‘faultless unity’ through the connatural mode of knowledge of love, Maritain is applying the notion of intentionality to this sphere of human experience, but with this essential difference to ordinary acts of knowing, that whereas in ordinary acts of knowing the knower becomes the known in virtue of intentional being (*esse intentionale* or *esse spirituale*) of the known in the knower’s mind, the beloved becomes another self who permeates the lover’s being in every aspect. The beloved enters into the will of the lover such that ‘the beloved becomes the principle of action, the “weight” of the lover.’¹²¹ Love, then, as Rossner says, is more ‘unitive’ than other modes of knowledge ‘in uniting with things in the very subjectivity of their existence.’¹²² This difference of modes of intentionality between acts of knowing and acts of loving will be essential in the final chapter as I turn to the question of apophatic knowledge and whether God is known in mystical experience as an ‘object’ in virtue of intentionality or known in a non-representational manner in virtue of the ‘faultless unity’ of love.

(ii) Person as Mystery, Love as Self-Giving

We can now understand why, for Maritain, human love is the most perfect natural analogy to mystical experience. It is because love concerns relations between persons and is self-giving:

What reveals subjectivity to itself is. . . . self-mastery for the purpose of self-giving. When a man has the obscure intuition of subjectivity, the reality, whose sudden invasion of his consciousness he experiences, is that of a secret totality, which contains both itself and its upsurge, and which superabounds in knowledge and love. Only by love does it attain to its supreme level of existence—existence as self-giving.¹²³

Self-giving, as Maritain says, is the human person’s supreme level of existence. To the degree that we love, we give of our self, and in virtue of this self-giving, also enrich our own self. This is where the connection between

¹²⁰ Rossner, ‘Love in the Thought of Jacques Maritain’, p. 246.

¹²¹ *DK*, p. 393.

¹²² Rossner., ‘Love in the Thought of Jacques Maritain’, p. 245.

¹²³ *EE*, p. 83.

human love and the love between God and human persons lies. Maritain writes:

It is something to know that God is a transcendent and sovereign Self; but it is something else again to enter oneself and with all one's baggage—one's own existence and flesh and blood—into the vital relationship in which created subjectivity is brought face to face with this transcendent subjectivity and, trembling and loving, looks to it for salvation. This is the business of religion.¹²⁴

'Religion', Maritain continues, 'is essentially that which no philosophy can be: a relation of person to person with all the risk, the mystery, the dread, the confidence, the delight, and the torment that lie in such a relationship'.¹²⁵ 'In each of us there dwells a mystery, and that mystery is the human personality.'¹²⁶ Maritain elsewhere calls this 'the abyss of subjectivity'.¹²⁷ We see that the mystery of personality taken as constitutive of the human being is amplified to an infinite degree in God, and the only authentic response, lest we be caught up in self-isolation, is a surrendering of self-will in love. Here we glimpse the triumph of love even over the indefinable abyss of God and apophaticism in Maritain's mystical thought, which, as we will see, follows in the footsteps of the mysticism of St. John of the Cross.

For now, however, we observe that for Maritain, a relationship between persons born of love is the only answer to the isolation and fearful selfishness that unfortunately characterize many of our lives, and which is often answered by the prizing of one's unique subjectivity above everything else or dissolving oneself in the activities and desires of the world.¹²⁸ As Rossner writes, paraphrasing Maritain: 'the antinomy can be resolved only from above. God is the center, not in relation to a particular perspective',¹²⁹ being 'like that in which each created subjectivity is the centre of the universe it knows, but speaking absolutely, and as transcendent subjectivity to which all subjectivities

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74.

¹²⁶ *RMNL*, p. 5.

¹²⁷ *EE*, p. 83.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 75; Rossner, 'Love in the Thought of Jacques Maritain', p. 243.

¹²⁹ Rossner, 'Love in the Thought of Jacques Maritain', p. 243.

are referred. At such time I can know both that I am without importance and that my destiny is of the highest importance.¹³⁰ Here we come to a most crucial point in our considerations.

Maritain writes that human love is the most obvious natural analogy of mystical experience. For Maritain it is also the most important, for he also writes that the analogy of human love is that which mystical language uses.¹³¹ Maritain's interpretation of the *Song of Songs*, which we will examine in the final chapter, represents the spiritual marriage of Christ and the Christian Church through images of humanly love which are not merely erotic but, as Maritain says, 'love of *dilection*', an encounter and a union between persons. The purpose of marriage, says Maritain, is not merely to bring to fulfilment romantic attraction but to '*transform* romantic love, or what was there at the beginning, into a real and indestructible *human* love, a love that is radically free of all self-centeredness," which by no means excludes sensual desire and passion, but which in itself and by its essence is principally spiritual'.¹³² Here it helps to bear in mind Maritain's own vocation, not only as a lay philosopher, but more importantly, as a married man. For both Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, as we have seen, the married life is no less a vocation through which people can be called to a holy and contemplative life than the priesthood or religious life. The vocation of marriage demands that one partner be 'really dedicated to the good and the salvation of the other, and consenting to be entrusted completely with the revelation of and the care for, all that the other *is* in his or her deepest human depths.'¹³³ Maritain explains:

If the image [of human marriage] is so overpowered by the burden of its likeness that a creature can scarcely be truly loved without a demand for the infinite wherein human love immolates itself, why may not the trials and mutual give-and-take of such a love, the gift that love demands of those persons who constantly reveal themselves to one another, why may not

¹³⁰ *EE*, p. 76

¹³¹ *DK*, p. 300.

¹³² *UT*, p. 184.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

these be the most direct analogy of the trials, exchanges and mutual gifts of mystical love?¹³⁴

In his writings on love and mysticism, Maritain relies heavily on St. John of the Cross, who, regarding the highest mystical state attainable in this life, also wrote of the spiritual marriage of the soul and God, analogous to two lovers transformed in their union of love, after the *Song of Songs*. But it should be said that this is neither merely affective nor cognitive on the part of the soul; there is a total transformation of the being through charity, made possible, as we saw earlier according to Maritain, by faith:

The soul thereby becomes divine, becomes God through participation, insofar as is possible in this life. And thus I think that this state never occurs without the soul's being confirmed in grace, for the faith of both is confirmed when God's faith in the soul is here confirmed. It is accordingly the highest state attainable in this life.¹³⁵

Now, enough has probably been said for human love as the pre-eminent natural analogy of mystical experience for now, for it is only an image of the divine marriage between Christ and his Church, it is by its nature imperfect. Being known by and among other human persons, even in a loving relationship, is at the same time to experience the disappointments and sufferings which are necessarily attendant to communication and co-existence among creatures who are fallible and who have an array of limitations and needs. To know ourselves but never to be fully known by another, Maritain writes, is always to some degree to be in 'desperate solitude'.¹³⁶ For this reason Maritain writes:

[T]o know that I am known as subject in all my dimensions of my being is not only to know that my truth is known, and that in this knowledge justice is done me; it is also to know that I am *understood*. Even though God condemn me, I know that He understands me. . . . [H]ow can we keep from thinking that God Who knows all these [human beings] in their subjectivity, in the nakedness of their wounds and their secret evil, must know also the secret beauty of that nature which He has bestowed upon

¹³⁴ *DK*, p. 301.

¹³⁵ St. John of the Cross, 'The Spiritual Cantic', st. 22 (3), in *SJCW(R)*.

¹³⁶ *EE*, p. 78.

them, the slightest sparks of good and liberty they give forth, all the travail and the impulses of good-will that they drag from the womb to the grave, the recesses of goodness of which they themselves have no notion? The exhaustive knowledge possessed by God is a loving knowledge. To know that we are known to God is not merely to experience justice, it is also to experience mercy.¹³⁷

In his late work, *Moral Philosophy*, Maritain gives an analysis of Bergson's last major work, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, as constitutive of his own exposition of the relationship between Christianity and ethics. In that work, Bergson distinguishes between a 'closed morality' which consists in the pressure of societal rules for the preservation of society, and an 'open morality' which is a communion with the principle of life, or *élan vital*, which, as we saw for Bergson, was nothing other than reality itself. It is by virtue of the latter, Bergson posits, that spiritual exemplars such as the Christian mystics, are able to exude love for humanity as such, and go beyond the self-centeredness that was remarked earlier as characteristic of everyday life.

In this connection, Maritain writes that 'It is by virtue of an emotion analogous to the creative emotion of the poet, but higher and more transforming—and with which the person "becomes one"—that the mystics, says Bergson, stir up in humanity the "irresistible attraction" which draws it beyond nature.'¹³⁸ We recall at this point that it was love, in the modality of charity, or *caritas*, that defines supernatural experience and mysticism for Maritain. 'This emotion tears us away from our ego, decenters us from ourselves, centers us in another. It is essentially spiritual. Bergson knew its name; it is called charity.'¹³⁹ Love, as we shall see in the final chapter, is not only that which defines mystical experience for Maritain, but also the key to transcending the ontotheological nature of the mystical experience he conceives.

Maritain, however, levels this criticism at Bergson: that 'Having decided to ignore all theology, he says nothing either of the supernatural order on which

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 78–79.

¹³⁸ *MP*, 'Closed Cosmic Morality and Open Cosmic Morality': Bergsonian Morality and the Problem of Supra-Morality, 6.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

such “emotion” depends, or of the faith which is at the root of it, according to the testimony of the great mystics whose experience he has examined.¹⁴⁰ The necessary constituent of love, but as rendered possible and under the modality of faith, is that which undergirds Maritainian mysticism, and the primacy of both love and faith distinguishes it from a Heideggerian mysticism, even as both are instances of a supra-moral relation to being. Maritain contends:

It is a disastrous illusion to seek mystical experience outside of faith, to imagine a mystical experience freed from theological faith. Living faith, illumined by the gifts, is the very principle of this experience, and, to recall the royal words of St. John of the Cross, which no philosophical commentary will ever efface, it is the only proximate and proportioned means of mystical union.¹⁴¹

But once again, we should not mistake the love which Maritain speaks of as an *irrational* emotion, any more than a supra-moral relation to being which is *amoral*, for, as we have seen, an adequate moral philosophy, in Maritain’s view, must take into account the data provided by Christian revelation and moral theology, and Christian revelation and moral theology teach us that love is both reality itself and the meaning of human life: ‘perfection consists in charity . . . [and] each of us is bound to tend towards the perfection of love according to his condition and in so far as it is in his power. All morality thus hangs upon that which is most existential in the world.’¹⁴² Thus St. John of the Cross also writes of the spiritual marriage as the highest mystical state in this life:

Just as in the consummation of carnal marriage there are two in one flesh, as Sacred Scripture points out [Gn. 2:24], so also when the spiritual marriage between God and the soul is consummated, there are two natures in one spirit and love, as St. Paul says in making this same comparison: *Whoever is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him* [1 Cor. 6:17].¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ *DK*, p. 282.

¹⁴² *EE*, p. 49.

¹⁴³ St. John of the Cross, ‘The Spiritual Canticle’, st. 22 (3), in *SJCW(R)*.

Now having come so far and arrived at the supra-moral union of love—of which human marriage is the most perfect analogy—have we overcome ontotheology? If the supra-moral level of the relation to Being of Heidegger's *Denken* has its parallel in the supra-moral mystical union of God and the human soul, we may come to expect such a result. Caputo, however, would argue that this is not the case.

(iii) The Spiritual Marriage, the Beatific Vision and Ontotheology

In light of the preceding discussion, we can see that *esse*, as the principle of the self-existence or subsistence of the person, undergirds Maritain's phenomenology of love, his understanding of human love as the most important natural analogy of mystical experience, and the spiritual marriage. This is because *esse*, as the ontological principle by which an entity surpasses *suppositum* and becomes *persona* through taking hold of its existence and sharing existence with another through the *esse intentionale* of love, is the highest principle the human mind can conceive. It is, as Maritain says, 'the supreme perfection' of all perfections, given that all other perfections, that is, actions and capacities of a thing, supervene on *esse*. God's *esse* is precisely what He *is*, such that all possible perfections find their source and supreme analogate in God, in which or in whom they participate for their being. As the sovereign metaphysical principle of all things, including the transcendentals (though we have yet to explore the transcendental of beauty), we may therefore regard *esse* as Maritain's master philosophical concept. Concerning mystical union and the beatific vision, the soul becomes 'united' and 'absorbed' in God, Maritain says, by the same principle of participation: 'the substance of the soul, although it is not the substance of God, for into this it cannot be changed, is nevertheless united in Him and absorbed in Him, and is thus God by participation in God.'¹⁴⁴

While St. John of the Cross speaks of becoming divine, he does not, however, by this imply ontological identity. Even in the transformation of the

¹⁴⁴ St. John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, quoted in *DK*, p. 379.

mystical experience, even if the soul, in an absolute and total giving of self is 'transessentiated', as Maritain says,¹⁴⁵ the mystic remains a creature, and the distinction between nature and grace also remains. Regarding the spiritual marriage, Maritain writes: 'From the point of view of entity, in the register of the proper being of things, there is always a duality, nay, say an infinite distance between the soul and uncreated love.'¹⁴⁶ The same applies even in the beatific vision, in which 'the created intellect and the uncreated essence remain entitatively distinct to infinity'.¹⁴⁷

It is in virtue of this emphasis on the entitative distinction between the soul and God in mystical experience that there is also repeated recourse to the language of vision:

[T]he soul is transformed into God. Not transformed . . . by an entitative changing of its being into the being or substance of Deity . . . no; the transformation is effected in a 'physical' or ontological manner, but in order of the relation of the to God as object, inasmuch as by grace the soul is made capable of God and turned towards God *to see and to love* as He sees and loves Himself.¹⁴⁸

With all this, Maritain's conception of mystical union and the beatific vision do not, at least in the way they have thus far been presented, transcend ontotheology. For God remains an object which (or who) is ontologically distinct precisely insofar as He is *ipsum esse subsistens*, the 'First Cause' in whom we participate in becoming divine and, on the basis of what Maritain says, is an object of cognition.¹⁴⁹ The mystical aspiration with which metaphysics is imbued, and to which I have pointed at the outset of this study, Maritain in fact calls the intellect's 'desire to see the first cause in itself' and says that 'The Christian who has the notion of the mystery of the beatific vision knows that "knowing the First Cause in itself" is, in fact or materially (*identice*), the same thing that theology calls "seeing Deity face to face" or "as it is."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ *DK*, p. 396.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 394 (original emphasis).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 302–303.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

Here God is, then, still considered here from the perspective of his causal transcendence and, moreover, seems to be an intentional object of consciousness, as something or someone external to oneself even as one is, in virtue of the connatural knowledge and *esse intentionale* of love, united with Him in ‘one spirit’—as something, as Heidegger would say, considered in terms of a *presence*, even while *transcendent*. In this connection, Caputo writes (and I quote him at length):

[F]or Heidegger . . . this [Aquinas’, and therefrom, Maritain’s] conception of eternal happiness is not Christian but Greek. It moves within the framework of the Greek conception of *θεωρειν* [*theorein*, or ‘seeing’] and hence of the metaphysical conception of Being as presence and of thought as pure seeing, ‘looking at.’ In metaphysics Being means what is permanently and enduringly present (*stetige Anwesenheit*), and thinking means making it present. It assumes a temporal conception of Being where time is conceived primarily in terms of the present: time is a series of present moment, the past and future are a lack of presence, and eternity is a present which does not flow. But in a genuinely alethiological conception, absence and concealment belong to the very structure of appearance. . . . And so what *Being and Time* and the later works ever more clearly say is that Being is an emergent process in which the concealment from which they [beings] emerge is intrinsic to their appearance. Absence is inscribed in the essence of Being; concealment, in the essence of un-concealment. Being is a present which lingers for a while between absence, and thinking is a continual openness toward absence, a resistance to the illusion that thought makes present, renders transparent. Thinking releases itself [that is, partakes in *Gelassenheit*, or letting-be] to the emergence of things and stays open to their ever-concealed depths, the mystery from which they spring.¹⁵¹

Here in Maritain’s conceptions of mystical union and the beatific vision, God is conceived as the enduring presence of non-contingent eternal Being. Maritain seems clear on this when he quotes St. John of the Cross in saying that ‘the beatific life . . . consists in seeing God.’¹⁵² Even here, then, metaphysics as ontotheology is still not overcome. Even if, as Caputo says, ‘*ratio* leads to *intellectus*’, as the simple, intuitive and unitive insight to which metaphysics

¹⁵¹ HA, p. 273.

¹⁵² St. John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, quoted in DK, p. 394.

strives, 'and that *intellectus* is the seat of mystical (and indeed of beatific) union, still the intellectual union of the soul with God belongs to the metaphysics of seeing and presence. This is true even if it is no longer a question of *conceptual* seeing and even if what is present is not an *object*.'¹⁵³

This latter point is important, for though Maritain affirms that it is through love as a means of connatural knowledge (the *esse intentionale* as opposed to mere entitative being) that the human being becomes one in spirit with God, nevertheless there remains an inviolable ontological distinction between God and the human being. This seems to apply to the mystical union or spiritual marriage which is attained by souls infused with the gifts of the Holy Spirit as well as the beatific vision itself. Maritain says that 'The end of the journey is transformation into God, which is begun here below by grace, faith and love, and will be consummated in vision',¹⁵⁴ and that 'all souls, by the fact that they are called to heavenly beatitude, are also commonly called in a general way to enjoy the beginnings of beatitude on earth by means of infused contemplation.'¹⁵⁵ And because of the entitative distinction which Maritain maintains, there remains, to reiterate, the repeated use of visual language, as if two extended objects come to be present before one another, even if in an embrace. In this connection, Maritain writes that 'faith is a movement towards vision', that faith 'demands to be vitally complemented by other supernatural virtues—the gifts of the Holy Spirit—which, thanks to the connaturality of love, make faith penetrate and experience the divine reality, and so to speak give eyes to faith—*fides oculata* . . . So divine contemplation is here below a token and shadow, an experienced promise of vision.'¹⁵⁶

If there is an overcoming of metaphysics in Maritain, it has to be sought, as Caputo seeks with regard to Aquinas, in a deconstruction of his metaphysics. This will be, in light of the insights of the mystics with which Maritain was acquainted personally and philosophically (as Heidegger was with Eckhart and Eckhart with Aquinas), a seeking of 'possibilities' that are

¹⁵³ *HA*, p. 274 (original emphasis).

¹⁵⁴ *DK*, p. 379.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

¹⁵⁶ *MAG*, p. 34.

immanent throughout his life and philosophy. These mystics, as I will show over the course of the next two chapters, are Léon Bloy and St. John of the Cross. But it will not be those mystics considered from the perspective of ‘mysticizing’ metaphysical beliefs about God. Rather it will be from the perspective of those mystics artistically, that is, poetically, conveying the mysteries of their Catholic faith and mystical experiences of God.

Caputo writes of Eckhart that he ‘works out a possibility which is latent in the historical actuality of Thomas Aquinas’,¹⁵⁷ and gives two examples. The first is a radicalizing of Aquinas’ thesis that ‘God is his own act of being [esse] (*deus est suum esse*)’ to form the thesis that ‘Being is God (*esse est deus*)’, which is suggested stresses the total dependence of creatures on God.¹⁵⁸ Caputo is presumably referring to the doctrine of participation, given that one metaphor which Eckhart uses is that ‘Created things have being . . . the way air holds light . . . The air does not “possess” the light; it simply receives it for as long as the sun illuminates it.’¹⁵⁹ Another implication is that if Being is God, and is, as such, the ground of the being of beings and which they do not possess of themselves, God is necessarily an abyss which withdraws from their understanding, much in the same way, I take Caputo to mean, that the lens of the eye, in providing the eye the ability to see color, has no color itself. Hence, Eckhart says, in the famous fifty-seventh sermon, that ‘if my eye is to perceive color, it must be free of all color. If I see a blue or white color, the sight of my eye which sees the color, the very thing that sees, is the same as that which is seen by the eye. The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me: my eye and God’s eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing and one love.’¹⁶⁰ God is therefore closer to beings than they are to themselves but remains concealed in the same way that the human self refuses essentialization upon introspection.

This self-concealing and withdrawing is the element in Eckhart on which Heidegger is particularly focused when he appropriates Eckhart’s term of

¹⁵⁷ *HA.*, p. 279.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 275; *MEHT*, pp. 103–105.

¹⁵⁹ *MEHT*, p. 104.

¹⁶⁰ Meister Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, trans. Maurice O’C. Walshe (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009), p. 298.

Gelassenheit as essential to *Denken* which is 'meditative' and apophatic in its method of approaching the nature of something, such as a work of art.¹⁶¹ In this connection, Caputo writes of Eckhart's distinction between 'God' and the 'Godhead':

For 'God' is everything we say of Him, whereas the Godhead remains behind, its essential Being untouched by this discourse. For if 'God' is Father, Son, and Spirit, *causa prima*, creator, omniscient and omnipotent, then the Godhead is none of these things; it is *prior* to these things, deeper, not *yet* manifest . . . All the names of 'God,' whether they are drawn from philosophy or faith, metaphysics or theology, fall short of the divine abyss.¹⁶²

Because the Godhead is true mystery lying far beneath or beyond the 'God' which we manifest in our concepts, Eckhart says that 'I ask God that He rid me of God.'¹⁶³

The second way that Eckhart radicalizes Aquinas according to Caputo pertains to *intellectus*. As was said in the introduction, *intellectus*, for Aquinas, is a simple, unitative insight towards which, Caputo argues, *ratio* tends. As unitive, *intellectus* is not the faculty of concept-making but is rather a faculty of divine union, consummated in the Beatific Vision when all mediation of concepts becomes unnecessary. Following Rousselot, Caputo takes the unifying nature of *intellectus* to amount to a critique of metaphysics insofar as metaphysics is a science that, by the mediation of concepts, cannot provide the soul with intimate union with God but only approach God as an object at a distance. As the unitative, divine faculty, *intellectus* serves as the hidden principle animating metaphysics, and demonstrates the unity of mysticism and metaphysics of the Middle Ages (though it is not clear whether Caputo is here referring to the entire period or a particular time or place).¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless,

¹⁶¹ Cf. *PLT*, pp. 20–31. In 'The Origin of the Work of the Art', Heidegger approaches the question first by a method that mirrors the *via negativa* in theology, exploring and rejecting traditional theories of what thinghood, and, thereafter, art consist in.

¹⁶² *HA*, p. 276.

¹⁶³ Meister Eckhart, quoted in *HA*, p. 276.

¹⁶⁴ *HA*, pp. 264-267.

Heidegger acknowledged a medieval unity in some form far before he claimed the metaphysics of Aquinas to be guilty of the oblivion of Being:

In the medieval world-view, scholasticism and mysticism belong essentially together. The two pairs of 'opposites' [which are allegedly] rationalism-irrationalism and scholasticism-mysticism do not coincide. And where their equivalence is sought, it rests on an extreme rationalization of philosophy. Philosophy as a rationalist creation, detached from life, is powerless; mysticism as an irrationalist experience is purposeless.¹⁶⁵

As I will show in the final chapter, Maritain is of similar mind when it comes to the unity of scholasticism (that is, Thomism) and mysticism. But we must bear in mind why Heidegger still changed his views on the matter. We saw above that even in the mystical union of the beatific vision, towards which *intellectus* itself tends, God is conceived, in Heidegger's terms, ontotheologically. For this reason, Caputo says, *intellectus*, while serving as a critique of metaphysics, only does so insofar as it also serves as its crown. A critique, though, does not suffice to be a deconstruction.¹⁶⁶ As such, Caputo briefly mentions Eckhart's inversion of *intellectus* from a faculty of presence and Being—the intuitive and ascending movement 'from the light of reason (*lumen naturale*) to the light of faith (*lumen fidei*) to the light of glory (*lumen gloriae*)'¹⁶⁷—to a faculty that is openness to Being, of detachment or *Gelassenheit*.¹⁶⁸ This because, as Eckhart argues, using the same metaphor of the eye, the intellect itself is *not* knowledge, but that *in which* knowledge occurs:

[Th]e intellect inasmuch as it is intellect must be none of those things which it understands; rather it is necessary that it be 'unmixed,' 'having nothing in common with anything' as it is said in the Third Book of the *De anima* [by Aristotle], just as it is necessary that the power of sight have no color, in order that it may see every color. If therefore the intellect is nothing, then

¹⁶⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Frühe Schriften* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1972), p. 352, quoted in *MEHT*, p. 150.

¹⁶⁶ *HA*, p. 272.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

consequently the act of intellection . . . is not any form of being.¹⁶⁹

Having followed Caputo thus far, I now, however, must make my critique. Unfortunately, even if Caputo, as he says,¹⁷⁰ sets out to provide a *religious* way out of ontotheology and a ‘religious alethiology’ by means of reference to Eckhart’s apophaticism as a radicalization of Aquinas’ own teachings, he fails to provide any specific reasons as to why this mysticism is in any sense *Christian* or, indeed, *Catholic*. Toward the end of *Heidegger and Aquinas*, Caputo writes that ‘We must learn to think of God not as the cause of the world but as that fullness of presence which is to the Being of things’, that we must learn to see in the reflected light of the Being in creatures ‘a light which is also a primordial darkness’, and, as such, ‘reinvest God and the world with their religious mysteriousness.’¹⁷¹ I agree with Caputo’s sentiments, but what does the deconstruction of Aquinas’ metaphysics mean for the latter and his lived religion? Caputo fails to even mention the inevitable question of how the total negation of all positive ascriptions of God as we saw in Eckhart can indeed be reconciled with propositional Christian belief. He fails to provide a phenomenological description of how a *Christian* mystical experience occurs upon the divesting of positive ascriptions of God that is allegedly necessary for a retrieved Aquinas who escapes ontotheology. How precisely is the Christian God mystically experienced? And with these comes another question which Caputo does not consider: why Aquinas (or Maritain, or anyone else) would *commit to belief* in a God who, if what has been said is true, is not in fact the ultimate reality which or whom Christians think He is.

The danger with Caputo’s view, setting aside the question of whether Caputo is representative of Heidegger, is that in the name of ridding us of God understood as *prima causa*, it seems to obliterate any distinction between the human and the divine—precisely that which human beings neither see nor feel they possess but to which they orientate themselves in order to give meaning

¹⁶⁹ Meister Eckhart, *Die lateinische Werke*, Vol. V, quoted and translated in John D. Caputo, ‘The Nothingness of the Intellect in Meister Eckhart’s “Parisian Questions”’, *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, 39 (1) (1975), p. 98.

¹⁷⁰ *HA*, p. 283.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 283–284.

to life. This is despite the fact that Caputo actually aims to press Heidegger's distinction between Being and beings. I believe that from Maritain's perspective, there may be the risk of a species of pantheism in Caputo's project, for there is a levelling out of divinity such that it either ceases to exist or exists in all things without differentiation. Again, 'Being' is not a God for Heidegger, in virtue of the fact that he considered both the notion of God and the individual pursuit of faith in a God (that is, a goal-orientated and normatively-governed relating to personal belief in an entity) as operating merely on the *ontic* level.¹⁷²

What makes God God, for Maritain at least, is an essential transcendence in the order of existence and in virtue of which God is that infinite absolute to which we can look to direct our lives. Maritain's comments in a little-known lecture to the Little Brothers of Jesus in 1972 are particularly pertinent in this regard, and, I think, justify my reading. If one abolishes the '*who art in heaven*' in the prayer of the Our Father that Christ gave as the paradigmatic prayer, Maritain says, we are left with nothing other than a god who 'swims about in the ocean of immanence'.¹⁷³ We need not, Maritain says, consider heaven to be a *place* in space and time but as conveying 'to our minds, in metaphors . . . the infinite transcendence of God.'¹⁷⁴ Admittedly, this seems to contradict the language of vision in Maritain's description of the dynamics of the Beatific Vision. Nevertheless, it is not coincidental that in discussing Heidegger Maritain argues that a species of 'natural mysticism plays the part of a stand-in in a role that metaphysics ought to play him.'¹⁷⁵ For while Heidegger affirms the ontological difference between Being and beings, and, as we saw, granted Being a moral monopoly, he refuses to identify Being as any kind of god which is transcendent, and for that reason, the object of metaphysics. Rather, Heidegger abandons metaphysics and philosophy *per se* and opts for *Denken*, which, with Being, is concerned 'to respond to the appeal of its presencing'.¹⁷⁶ What Heidegger means by this requires some

¹⁷² *TLH*, pp. 196–197.

¹⁷³ *UT*, p. 420.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 419.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

¹⁷⁶ *PLT*, pp. 181–182.

unpacking.

Being, as Heidegger says, is that which allows for the ‘unconcealedness of beings’¹⁷⁷ in what he calls the ‘Open’—that is, the dynamic sphere in which beings both reveal themselves as present and at the same time dynamically conceal themselves insofar as their mode of being can never be completely grasped and insofar as beings simulate and replace one another such that the question of what is real is never completely answerable.¹⁷⁸ Things, or beings, have to *come to be* before we can be puzzled by them, but equally, and perhaps paradoxically, we can only know that they *are* because we are puzzled by them, because they stand out as mysterious. This standing out, we shall see, is what makes the artwork special for Heidegger. Putting that aside for now, in my estimation it is because Being for Heidegger is that unknown absolute which pervades all beings in both their presence and their concealment—such that Heidegger says that the ‘truth’ of the unconcealedness (*aletheia*) of beings ‘is never itself but, viewed dialectically, is always also its opposite’¹⁷⁹—that Being, as ultimate reality, is *immanent*, and only ‘transcendent’ in the sense that it cannot be an object of cognition. Regardless of whether Caputo’s interpretation of Eckhart’s most mysterious and difficult writings is accurate, he writes that the unconcealedness of things ‘functions quite explicitly for him [Eckhart] as the *λήθη* [*lethe*] in *ἀλήθεια* [*aletheia*], the concealed and withdrawn depths in the manifest God.’¹⁸⁰ If Heidegger’s Being, which seems to take the place of God, according to Caputo’s interpretation, is impersonal, then Maritain would be correct to call Heidegger’s *Denken* a natural mysticism, for it has nothing of supernatural communion in charity between persons human and divine about it. Heidegger’s *Denken* shares with Christian mysticism a certain passivity and apophatic element, but does not, as Pattison makes clear, make any claims to attaining or experiencing Being as such, only of ‘beings in Being’, and ‘There is nothing to see, nothing to intuit beyond the world.’¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 51–61.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁸⁰ *HA*, p. 276.

¹⁸¹ *TLH*, p. 201.

My point in saying all of this is that after laying down Caputo's book, we are left with no reason to believe this retrieved Aquinas via Eckhart—via Heidegger—is the medieval Catholic friar he was. And if we apply Caputo's deconstruction of Aquinas to Maritain without due reflection, we are also left with no reason as to why Maritain would call himself Catholic—a Catholic of the Nicene Creed which affirms an objectively existing triune God who communicates with us precisely as transcendent. After having gone into detail about Maritain's biography, it cannot be doubted that Maritain was such a Catholic. Through what was an apparent digression, the lines of demarcation between Heidegger's *Denken*—possessing, as Caputo says, a 'mystical element'—and the Catholic mysticism of Maritain have been firmly established as we go forward.

It is clear that we cannot take Aquinas' apophatic experience in isolation, as we cannot take the apophatic mystics' statements in isolation from the propositional faith which made them the Catholic mystics they in fact were. Caputo's efforts in this regard are one-sided, with the end of demonstrating a superiority of the apophatic over the cataphatic, in virtue, I think, of his strong commitment to Heidegger's own commitment, echoing Eckhart, that Being (Eckhart's 'Godhead'), can never be an object or item of knowledge. As Pattison says: 'Being is never identifiable with any particular entity or aggregate or level of entities, divine or mortal, earthly or heavenly',¹⁸² and this may indeed constitute a radical apophaticism in Heidegger.

Having said that, this one-sidedness is doubly evident when we consider that Aquinas is said to have had another mystical experience of completely different character but of no less importance than the one referred to by Caputo, and which is much beloved among Dominicans especially. Robert Barron relates:

It has . . . been reported that when he [Aquinas] was struggling with a particularly thorny intellectual difficulty, he would go to the tabernacle, resting his head on it and begging for inspiration. Toward the end of his relatively short life . . .

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 213.

Aquinas composed, as part of his *Summa theologiae*, a treatise on the Eucharist. When he had finished this remarkably thorough and complex text, he was still unconvinced that he had done justice to this great sacrament. Therefore he laid his treatise at the foot of the crucifix in the Dominican chapel in Naples and he prayed. A voice came from the cross: '*Bene scripsisti de me, Thoma*' (You have written well of me, Thomas), and then, 'What would you have as a reward?' Aquinas said simply, '*Nil nisi te*' (nothing except you).¹⁸³

The treatise features an analysis of the 'real presence' of Christ in terms of 'transubstantiation', of substance changing from that of the bread to that of Christ while appearing to remain bread in virtue of the accidents.¹⁸⁴ Here we find Aquinas having no less a profound mystical experience than the one in which is claimed to have compelled to say that his *Summa* amounted to 'straw'—a mystical experience in which God Himself is supposed to have given his approval to an analysis of the Eucharist which deploys Aristotelian categories!

This other, no less moving, mystical experience of Aquinas, in its apparent contradictory nature to the one that Caputo mentions, goes right to the heart of the problem of the possibility of a religious overcoming of metaphysics, for it also cuts to the heart of the apparent tension between the apophatic and the cataphatic. As such, it also cuts to the heart of the conflict that Maritain saw between Bergsonian intuition and the validity of the concept presupposed by the Catholic faith. Supposing for the sake of argument that this other mystical experience did occur (for both are reported by Aquinas' Dominican brothers, and not by himself), it raises the question of how it can be that the technical, ontotheological writings of Aquinas can at once be as much worth as straw and worthy of divine approval. In the following two chapters, I will show how in Maritain there is an immanent pre-metaphysical, mystical tendency which suffices to overcome ontotheology and which is nonetheless

¹⁸³ Robert Barron, *Catholicism: A Journey to the Heart of the Faith* (New York, NY: Image Books, 2011), p. 189.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

both apophatic and cataphatic—and which, for that reason, is eminently *Catholic*.

The Artist and the Mystic: Overcoming Metaphysics

‘Prayer, holiness, mystical experience—poetry, even pure poetry, is none of these things. But it is their most beautiful and most dangerous moral symbol.’¹

1. Art and the Mystical

Of the many remarkable things about Jacques Maritain are the vast number of subjects he approached and the massive effort of synthesis that he undertook throughout his life. This synthesis was not just of philosophy but also of personal and religious experience. In Part I, it was discerned that the two most important artistic figures in Maritain’s life were his godfather, the novelist and diarist Léon Bloy, and Georges Rouault, who inspired his first writings on art. In this chapter, I am concerned with Maritain’s philosophy of art and the artist as it pertains to what I am claiming is an immanent mysticism and an overcoming of ontheology in Maritain’s life and writings. I argue that it is when we go beyond artistic knowledge or experience of the beautiful as an analogy of mystical experience to the instances in Maritain’s reflections in which the vocations of the Catholic mystic and the Catholic artist converge in poetic expression of mystical experience that we are able to retrieve a Maritain who, while remaining a Catholic philosopher, is a mystic. It is when Maritain’s thought is situated in its wider existential and religious context of his deep yearning for communion with ultimate reality and of poet-mystics who serve as ‘revealers of Being’ for him, that his thought escapes the charge of

¹ *DK*, p. 300.

ontotheology. Essential in demonstrating this are Bloy and Rouault, but also St. John of the Cross.

Touching upon novel developments in contemporary Maritain scholarship, such as John G. Trapani's clarification and expansion of the seldom-used Maritainian notion of 'Poetic Contemplation' (capitalized for reasons which will be made clear) and Cornelia Tsakiridou's notion of Maritain's 'mystical aesthetics', I will first build up a picture of artistic knowledge as an analogy of mystical knowledge and of the artist as an analogy of the mystic in Maritain's thought. I argue that philosophically, the analogies rest on the artist playing the role of what I have called a 'revealer a being'—not, however, in terms of moral action and love as in the previous chapter but in his or her unique capacity to reveal the beautiful as an artist, and that religiously, the analogies rest on asceticism and the role of suffering in the Christian and contemplative life. These analogies will be shown to serve as markers for some similarities but also irreducible differences between Maritain and Heidegger pertaining to the artist and the mystical. Later in the present chapter (from section five), however, I will show that at least in three cases, those of Bloy, St. John of the Cross and Jacques' wife Raïssa, we see that when the artist explicitly directs their work to Christian mysteries, they in fact simultaneously take on the role of the mystic. I call this convergence 'Infused-Poetic Contemplation' and argue that it is here where we witness a religious overcoming of metaphysics in Maritain. This will then allow us to gather the essential components of Maritain's immanent mysticism in the final chapter.

2. Historical Foundations

Like all other areas of Maritain's philosophy, his thought on art and on the vocation of the artist owes most of its conceptual foundations to Aquinas. Yet, if one surveys the copious secondary literature on Maritain, one finds that, along with his writings on political philosophy, his writings on art (the term 'aesthetics' being descriptively insufficient, as we shall see)—garner much

praise for their originality and much scholarly commentary because of this.² As John G. Trapani writes, Maritain's thinking on art is not merely an exegesis or exposition of that of Aquinas: 'Though deeply rooted in the Thomist tradition, Jacques Maritain was also an original thinker; he applied in a fresh and innovative way many of the basic insights found in the thought of his great mentor St. Thomas Aquinas.'³ As with Bergson and the centrality of intuition in Maritain's epistemology and metaphysics, the inspirations behind Maritain's philosophical developments in the area of art must, therefore, derive at least in part from sources *outside* of the Thomist framework Maritain sought to revitalize and apply in all its force to the issues facing the modern world. These sources, I suggest, are the key to discovering a pre-metaphysical, mystical tendency in Maritain that escapes the charge of ontotheology.

Maritain, being the grandson of Jules Favre, who was one of the architects of the Third Republic, was born into a highly respected bourgeois family at the heart of Parisian intellectual and artistic life. Raïssa Maritain relates that, growing up, Jacques' world was one characterized by republicanism and liberalism—'the free play and glory of thought'⁴ that extended to all areas of life, from art to politics. As we saw, later in Maritain's life, this freedom of thought and artistic taste was manifest in the *Cercles d'études thomistes* held at the Maritains' home in Meudon and which attracted all manner of artists, including those of the *avant-garde*. In fact, from an early age Maritain had shown a deep love for the arts, and an aptitude for painting and poetry. As an adolescent he and his friend Ernest Psichari would collaborate in writing sonnets and go out into the countryside of Brittany to paint together, and they were influenced by, among others, Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Mallarmé.⁵ As Raïssa relates, during the early days of her and Jacques' relationship, they would spend countless hours walking around the galleries of Paris, and it was Jacques 'who opened up to me the boundless world of painting.'⁶ These biographical facts are important when we consider

² *PBC*, p. 14.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴ *WHBF*, p. 42.

⁵ Barré, *Beggars for Heaven*, p. 39.

⁶ *WHBF*, p. 42.

how Maritain came to the subject of art. As with philosophy, in this area Maritain is a 'modern' in the fullest sense, and this implies necessary developments of Aquinas' approach to art.

Maritain opens his first book on the philosophy of art, *Art and Scholasticism*, with the claim: 'The Schoolmen composed no special treatise with the title "Philosophy of Art". . . . There is nevertheless a far-reaching theory of Art to be found in their writings'.⁷ But, Maritain goes on to say, the 'art' with which the Schoolmen (the medieval scholastics) were concerned was not 'art' as we consider it today—that being the 'fine arts' of painting, sculpture, music and poetry—but rather the way of doing or craft (physical or mental) of a certain discipline or trade, such as ship building, grammar, or logic.⁸ This is the classical Aristotelian-Thomistic definition of art as a habit, disposition of the mind, or 'virtue' (*habitus*) of the 'practical intellect', which consists in making, that is, the creation of objects, again physical or mental. Maritain retains this conceptual foundation all the way from *Art and Scholasticism* to his last work on art, *The Responsibility of the Artist* (1960). Maritain thus defines art not in terms of the ontology of an artefact or performance first, but epistemologically, within the artificer, as *techne*, a habit of the production of objects involving skill and the adherence to rules attained by the intellect (for instance, perspective in drawing). In other words, the foundation of Maritain's definition of art is first describing how artworks can come into being. In elucidating Maritain's philosophy of art, I will rely in part on my published work on the topic.⁹

Whereas most contemporary philosophers working on the philosophy of art attempt to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for an object to be a work of art (the 'ontology' of art), Maritain flips the picture around and instead asks what it is to *make* art precisely as *work*. While Heidegger operates with a very different philosophical framework, he does, by pursuing the epistemological conditions for the production of an artwork rather than an ontological grounding of art or aesthetic theory, pursue the same strategy of

⁷ AS, p. 1.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Anthony Haynes, 'Jacques Maritain's Definition of Art', *New Blackfriars*, 96 (1065) (2015), pp. 527–541; Anthony Haynes, 'Jacques Maritain's Ethics of Art', *New Blackfriars*, 99 (1079) (2018), pp. 66–83.

Maritain, writing in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' that 'we must . . . go into the activity of the artist in order to arrive at the origin of the work of art.'¹⁰ More on this later.

Unlike the medievals, though, Maritain's focus is on the fine arts that were his first love and, in the case on Bloy's *La Femme Pauvre* and *Mon Journal*, the reason for his coming to faith: 'We got and at once read this strange novel [*La Femme Pauvre*] which is unlike any other. And for the first time we found ourselves before the reality of Christianity.'¹¹ In order to understand the fine arts, Maritain argues, we need to combine the classical understanding of art as an activity of making (*factibile*) along with an ontological analysis of beauty and the beautiful.¹² For while art is indeed a *habitus* of making, that to which it is ordered—the reasons for making something and the rules employed—obviously varies according to the nature of what is to be made (a landscape obviously differs from a table in the manner in and purpose for which either is made).

In this connection, Maritain differentiates between crafts or what have traditionally been called the 'useful arts' and what have traditionally been called the 'fine arts'. The difference is that whereas the useful arts serve a practical purpose, such as meeting a practical need or the improvement of an invention which serves a practical need, the 'purpose' that the fine arts serve is beauty, which is in fact held to be self-sufficient or valuable in itself.¹³ For this reason, Maritain chooses to call the useful arts 'subservient' arts (serving a practical purpose, performing practical functions) and the fine arts 'free' or 'self-sufficient' arts.

At this point, however, we might wonder why Maritain insists on beauty as being the object of the free arts, this insistence amounting to the claim that an artefact or performance can only be an instance of art if it is beautiful. As he begins chapter five in his much later *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (*L'intuition créatrice dans l'art et dans la poésie*), 'I am aware that it is old-

¹⁰ *PLT*, p. 56.

¹¹ *WHBF*, p. 105.

¹² *AS*, p. 1, 5.

¹³ Haynes, 'Jacques Maritain's Definition of Art', pp. 531–533.

fashioned to hold forth on beauty apropos of art, almost as much so as to speak of truth apropos of philosophy.¹⁴ I want to elucidate the reasons for this insistence on beauty and how it relates to the present study on the mystical in Maritain by first returning to the salient biographical details.

As previously noted, Maritain was led to meet his eventual godfather Léon Bloy in 1905 through the latter's religious literary works, and before he published writings on academic philosophy, he wrote an introduction for an exhibition of Georges Rouault's paintings. Rouault's art, we know, was born of a profound religious feeling for the sin and suffering that permeate human reality, at its early stage characterized by disturbing images of clowns, prostitutes and judges. In virtue of these facts we should therefore expect the work and personal examples of Bloy and Rouault to be significant in Maritain's religious formation and in the formation of Maritain's philosophy of art and the vocation of the artist as well, in a way that complements the philosophical foundation provided by Aquinas.

When in 1909 the Maritains moved to Versailles to be in closer proximity to their spiritual director, Fr. Humbert Clérissac, they were delighted to discover that they had the painter Georges Rouault for a neighbor. This was a determining factor for Maritain, and as his friendship with Rouault grew and they shared weekly meals together, he was to write *Art and Scholasticism* with him in mind.¹⁵ Of the significance of this relationship for Maritain, Julie Kernan writes:

Because they did not force his confidence, [Rouault] talked to them freely, telling of his struggles for an 'inner order' that would enable him to express in original forms his exasperation with bourgeois values and his intense religious feeling. To do this, he said, he had to depart from accepted forms of beauty, go his own way at no matter what cost, and accommodate himself to the consequent lack of understanding and to poverty. Through this friendship the Maritains were steeped in many problems of

¹⁴ *CI*, p. 122.

¹⁵ *PBC*, p. 23.

aesthetics which they sought to interpret in the light of Aquinas' philosophy.¹⁶

It is significant for our purposes that the works of Bloy and Rouault were not just instances of modern art with a view to self-expression of the subject that was beyond the psychological and philosophical horizon of Aquinas and the medieval scholastics and thus requiring a new appreciation of the subject to be incorporated in a Thomistic philosophy of art.¹⁷ Both the writings of Bloy and paintings of Rouault were rejected by the literary and painting establishments of the time as being outlandish. The artists themselves were perceived in like manner. Why was this the case? Because both Bloy's vitriolic prose and Rouault's apparently hideous paintings were designed to serve beauty—beauty not in terms of a mere 'aesthetic' experience of pleasant colors and subjects suited to the popular taste of Parisian bourgeois society, but a shining forth of the deep mysteries of reality. In Bloy's and Rouault's cases, the mysteries with which they are concerned are those of God and human life and the relationship between the two.

In all of Rouault's paintings of Christ, it is by means of particular artistic techniques and the bringing forth of powerful emotions that makes Christ's presence 'a presence of suffering in and with our sufferings.'¹⁸ This 'unity of creative emotion and the working reason' manifest in great artists that was mentioned in the first part of the study will be discussed in much further detail in this chapter. Of Rouault's paintings, Maritain says that 'It is religion that is at the origin of his tenderness and revolt, of his hatred against all sorts of pharisaism.'¹⁹ And in Bloy's case, says Maritain, he 'does not argue, he affirms. Not in his own name, but in the name of the first Truth that speaks to us through the Church. A writer of genius, devoted to beauty as to one of the names of Him who is, jealous of the purity and integrity of his art—which he

¹⁶ Julie Kernan, *Our Friend, Jacques Maritain* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1975), p. 48.

¹⁷ Thereby mirroring the need of Thomistic anthropology to develop an adequate 'personalism' in light of the growing awareness, as we saw in the previous chapter, of the 'psychological modalities . . . realized in the subject'.

¹⁸ Dyrness, *Rouault*, p. 186.

¹⁹ Jacques Maritain, *Art and Poetry*, trans. E. de P. Matthews (London: Editions Poetry London, 1945), p. 15.

never prostituted—he makes of that very art, in perpetual magnificence and splendor, a monstrosity of truth.’²⁰

It is reasonable to ask if all of this suggests that Maritain only regards explicitly religious (Christian) art as genuine art, owing such a status to an explicit directedness to God in its subject-matter. And if there is a subordination of artistic expression to religious expression, there is the additional question of whether or not there is a risk of stifling artistic creativity in the name of an all-absorbing Christian morality. These two questions require an elucidation of the key operative terms of Maritain’s philosophy of art and their relationships. In the process, it will be shown that for Maritain, all genuine artistic experience is at the very least an analogy of supernatural mystical experience, and, as the opening quote suggests, of the highest kind. Following this, I will show that when the Catholic artist possesses the grace and gifts of the mystic, their artistic experience can also be mystical experience.

3. Epistemological Foundations: Poetry and Intentional Emotion

Elsewhere, and in ‘analytical’ philosophical terms, I have said that ‘Maritain’s definition of art is “descriptive” because it spells out the meaning of the word “art” while accommodating existing usages—semantically and in artistic practices.’²¹ With respect to the free arts, Maritain’s descriptive definition of art as a practical virtue of making something beautiful (together, both necessary and sufficient conditions) is broad enough that it encompasses historical variety in artistic traditions, functions and contexts, and narrow enough to tell us *why* an artwork is to be distinguished from non-art. With respect to these two necessary and sufficient conditions, detail needs to be given on how an artist creates something beautiful such that it can be called an artwork and how that process of creation relates to its audience recognizing the object as an

²⁰ Jacques Maritain, ‘Introduction’, in Léon Bloy, *Pilgrim of the Absolute*, ed. Raïssa Maritain, trans. John Coleman and Harry Lorin Binsse (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1947), pp. 18–19.

²¹ Haynes, ‘Jacques Maritain’s Definition of Art’, p. 533.

artwork. Deal Hudson remarks that as we trace the development of his philosophy of art from his early work *Art and Scholasticism* to the later works *Creative Intuition and Art and Poetry* and *The Responsibility of the Artist*, 'Maritain's emphasis shifted from the philosophy of art to the philosophy of poetry, and finally, to the philosophy of creativity.'²² For Maritain, what art is depends very largely on the cognitive and affective activity on the part of the artist in the act of creation itself.

For Maritain, the artist is inspired by being able to figuratively see the world through emotion, such that the knowledge that the artist has is intuitive or 'connatural' knowledge, and which, like intuitive moral reasoning 'in the moment', as we have seen, is preconceptual and both cognitive and affective.²³ Maritain holds that the artist has an 'experience-knowledge' through the senses in divining the 'secret meaning' of things, in virtue of emotion.²⁴ Central to his later thought, Maritain's concept of 'poetry', as distinct from the art of writing verses, denotes the 'intercommunication between the inner being of things and the inner being of the human Self which is a kind of divination'²⁵ (hereafter capitalized for clarity, following Trapani's example).

Maritain writes that 'There are two kinds of unconscious, two great domains of psychological activity screened from the grasp of consciousness'.²⁶ He accepts the existence of the Freudian subconscious, but also posits a 'spiritual preconscious', which rests on his assumptions regarding the existence of the human intellect and ideas in a spiritual manner, and for whose unknown activities and operations (performed by what he calls the 'Illuminating Intellect') he believes a spiritual preconscious to best explain.²⁷ The artist's activity is intellectual or intellective in a practical, connatural way, because the resonance between the artist's self and things such as objects, events and

²² Deal W. Hudson, "'The Ecstasy Which Is Creation": The Shape of Maritain's Aesthetics', in Deal W. Hudson and Matthew J. Mancini (eds.), *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), pp. 236–237.

²³ Haynes, 'Jacques Maritain's Definition of Art', pp. 533–534.

²⁴ *CI*, p. 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71; Haynes, 'Jacques Maritain's Definition of Art', p. 533.

other people is more than emotion as we normally conceive it—as irrational. Maritain posits that the Illuminating Intellect, when in contact with an emotion, turns the emotion toward the subconscious and spiritual preconscious, which by association, then transforms the emotion into a ‘spiritualized’ or ‘intentional emotion’, giving it aspects of the object of which it is an emotion.²⁸ The emotion that is associated with a thing becomes one with it in the mind of the artist, and they in turn become one with the thing, such that they are able to manifest the spiritualized emotion in an artwork, that is both about a thing in itself and the artist’s own emotions about it.

‘The first of these “stages” is cognitive, and the second is creative’,²⁹ and these correspond to ‘Cognitivity and creativity’ as ‘the two essential aspects of the intellectual nature [of human beings].’³⁰ In an artwork, the difference between an irrational emotion and a spiritualized emotion is that between ‘sentimentality’ which is not only contrived but lacks logic or lacks any informative power for ascertaining the meaning or the artist’s ‘intentions’ in a work, and ‘sentiment’, which is a spontaneous, sincere, ‘affective response to a valued situation or object.’³¹ For Maritain, I wrote elsewhere, ‘art that moves us is filled with intentional emotion. Such genuine aesthetic experiences are contrasted with those experiences of art which do not move us because we recognize its contrived or shallow nature. The difference between these aesthetic experiences forces us to affirm skill and sincerity in artistic creation and the possibility of critiquing aesthetic taste.’³² Poetry is natural to all human beings, because it is possible for everyone with functioning cognitive faculties to identify intentional emotion. In this connection, Maritain writes that ‘[o]ne can be a poet and still produce nothing.’³³

Because Poetry allows the artist to penetrate the mystery of things and allows their audience to share in such manifestations of meaning in things, it

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 87–89; Haynes, ‘Jacques Maritain’s Definition of Art’, p. 533.

²⁹ Haynes, ‘Jacques Maritain’s Definition of Art’, p. 534.

³⁰ *CI*, p. 168.

³¹ Sean M. Sullivan, *Maritain’s Theory of Poetic Intuition* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Fribourg, Switzerland, 1963), p. 59.

³² Haynes, ‘Jacques Maritain’s Definition of Art’, p. 534.

³³ Maritain and Cocteau, *Art and Faith*, p. 90.

is, Maritain says, the 'secret life of each and all the arts'.³⁴ Poetry serves as the condition for an artwork's being imbued with 'true sentiment' rather than 'sentimentality', and, as we shall see in connection with beauty, even the ascription of meaningfulness, and thereby good quality, to an artwork, as opposed to superficiality and poor quality.³⁵ The 'cognitive' 'stage' of aesthetic experience is therefore universal and allows all of us to appreciate and contemplate art. However, given that art is generally a virtue of making, the creative 'stage' is the province of the artist. Maritain makes a distinction between the universal capacity to apprehend and share in intentional emotion as '[P]oetic intuition' and the incitation to produce an artwork in virtue of intentional emotion as 'creative intuition', for the sake of a work to be produced.³⁶ But while the cognitive and creative 'stages' may be logically distinguished for the sake of non-creative audiences of art who can have Poetic experiences and Poetic insight without creating artwork, they are temporally and logically one for the artist, together constituting 'Poetic Knowledge'.³⁷ Poetic Knowledge can, though, still be understood best in terms of the cognitive and creative elements of the intellect. Maritain writes:

Poetic knowledge, as I see it, is a specific kind of knowledge through inclination or connaturality—let us say a knowledge through affective connaturality which essentially relates to the creativity of the spirit and tends to express itself in a work. So that in such a knowledge it is the object created, the poem, the painting, the symphony, in its own existence as a world of its own, which plays the part played in ordinary knowledge by the concepts and judgements produced within the mind.³⁸

This difference between the cognitive and creative elements of the intellect will be crucial in determining the relationship between artistic experience and mystical experience for Maritain. For just as in ordinary knowledge the object of cognition and that which is produced on the basis of knowledge of the object

³⁴ *CI*, p. 3.

³⁵ *PBC*, p. 164.

³⁶ *CI*, pp. 78–80, 91–93.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 83–98.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

(the concept) are different to the object and work produced in virtue of Poetic Knowledge, so will the object and that which is produced in mystical experience differ from those of Poetic Knowledge. For the artist, though, 'The practice and honing of one's abilities in inspiration and creation—the virtue of art—to see in things their "secret meanings" and create objects that are filled with the personal significance of intentional emotion', I wrote elsewhere, is the reason why for the artist, the virtue of art that they possess is their 'most treasured possession.'³⁹ While everyone enjoys a share of participation in Poetry, the artist creates, or they are not an artist, and for this virtue of art to be truly alive as a habitualized skill (*habitus*), poetic intuition, or creative intuition,⁴⁰ it must be present and relied upon by the artist:

Poetic intuition [or creative intuition], for instance, is born in the unconscious, but it emerges from it; the poet is not unaware of this intuition, on the contrary, it is his most precious light and the primary rule of his virtue of art. But he is aware of it *sur le rebord de l'inconscient*, as Bergson would have said, on the edge of the unconscious.⁴¹

What Maritain says here also has important implications. The fact that the emotional dynamism between the artist's self and the world and the transformation of such emotion into pieces of art are known by the artist as the conditions of their vocation and yet lie somewhere on the border between the conscious and the unconscious, means that Poetic Knowledge, as the unifying mode of knowledge here, cannot be consciously made into a set of propositions or a set of syllogisms. Poetic Knowledge, then, as art, cannot be forced into the mold of a science such as philosophy. For reasons that I will later show, Maritain argues that Heidegger's mistake is attempting to make a philosophical system on the basis of the poetic intuition which is proper to art. Against this, he writes:

Such divination of the spiritual in the things of sense, which also

³⁹ Haynes, 'Jacques Maritain's Definition of Art', p. 534.

⁴⁰ Maritain, Trapani tells us, is never consistent with terminology, particularly given numerous revisions of his works. See *PBC*, p. 90.

⁴¹ *CI*, p. 67.

will express itself in the things of sense, is what we properly call POETRY. Metaphysics also pursues the spiritual, but in a very different way, and with a very different formal object. Whereas it keeps to the line of *knowledge* and the contemplation of truth, poetry keeps to the line of *making* and the delight procured by beauty.⁴²

For Maritain, we know, free art must be beautiful art, by definition. There must, then, as he suggests in the passage just quoted, be an underlying relationship between Poetic Knowledge whose operative principle is the translation of intentional emotion into artworks and the beautiful, which is beyond utility. Here we arrive at the dynamic between meaningfulness and beauty and the analogical relationship between artistic experience and mystical experience.

4. Beauty, the Splendor of all the Transcendentals

What is the quality of the intentional emotions in an artwork? Why do we value artworks as distinct from other objects? Maritain asserts that the artist creates beautiful objects by definition, and, moreover, that beauty is valuable in itself. Some elaboration and exploration of this element of Maritain's definition of art is needed by way of defining the beautiful, describing how the artist pursues it in relation to Poetic Knowledge and also seeing how this key element of Maritain's thesis stands up to objections.

Maritain follows Aquinas in his declaration that "the "beautiful" is something pleasant to apprehend".⁴³ Now, while ideas can be beautiful, the beautiful specific to human beings as material-spiritual composite creatures is accessible through the senses. However, sensual delight only accompanies an intellectual delight upon the perception of the beautiful. For Maritain, as for Aquinas, the beautiful consists in three properties: 'integrity', 'proportion' or 'harmony' and 'clarity' or 'radiance', with the latter encompassing the former two and denoting the intelligibility and splendor of the form of the beautiful

⁴² AS, pp. 96–97.

⁴³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, Ia-IIae, 27, 1, ad. 3.

object.⁴⁴ These properties are intelligible through the senses in virtue of the spiritual-material composite nature of human beings and the many layers of consciousness such that the senses can be called 'intelligentiated'. For Maritain, when the mind recognizes matter so intelligibly arranged as to be beautiful, it recognizes its own nature and the 'intellective appetite' or 'intellectual appetite', which seeks after intelligibility is satisfied and rejoices in delightful contemplation (*gaudium*).⁴⁵ It is because of this that the intellect, in what is the creative impulse of its creative element, longs to create the beautiful, as the process of creating the beautiful and the object itself are 'cleared of all adventitious elements' and is thus a matter of pure intellectual delight, hence the name of the *free arts*.⁴⁶

However, what some find beautiful others do not, and this apparent relativity constitutes one possible objection to Maritain's thesis that artists produce the beautiful by definition. For Maritain, that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' is a half-truth. Beauty is clearly an object of universal experience and delight, which can, I suggest, be contrasted with its opposites, the disgusting and morally repugnant (the latter bearing upon the relationship between the beautiful and the good, which I shall touch on later in discussing Poetic Contemplation and Tsakiridou's notion of Maritain's 'mystical aesthetics'). For now, let us also note that there are things which are always beautiful for everyone, such as a sunset or a rainforest. For that reason, beauty is only relative to the nature and purpose of an artefact or performance—an artwork. For Maritain, beauty is a transcendental, a property of Being *as Being*, which is God.⁴⁷ Beauty is a divine name, and while the perception of beauty is not immediate contact with God, it is for Maritain a participation in a reflection of God, natural beauty manifest in nature or artwork being a participation in the divine beauty. Maritain writes:

Analogous concepts are predicated of God pre-eminently; in Him the perfection they designate exists in a 'formal-eminent'

⁴⁴ AS, pp. 24–25.

⁴⁵ PBC, p. 132; Haynes, 'Jacques Maritain's Definition of Art', p. 535.

⁴⁶ CI, p. 40; Haynes, 'Jacques Maritain's Definition of Art', p. 535.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 25–26.

manner. . . . God is their 'sovereign analogue' and they are to be met with again in things only as a dispersed and prismatic reflection of the countenance of God. Thus Beauty is one of the divine names.

God is beautiful. He is the most beautiful of beings. . . . He is beautiful through Himself and in Himself, beautiful absolutely.

He is beauty itself, because He gives beauty to all created beings, according to the particular nature of each, and because He is the cause of all consonance and all brightness.⁴⁸

Here Maritain is not defining God simply as what we call the beautiful, such that if something is beautiful, it is God, or that God is whatever is beautiful, for this would confuse the distinction between creatures and the Creator and identify God as the genus of the beautiful—an idea which Aquinas explicitly rejects for the reason that as pure Act, God is beyond any genus.⁴⁹ It would also be to forget the distinction between *esse* and *ens*, and, in Heidegger's terms, the ontological and the ontic, the distinction between Being and beings. The transcendentals of the true, the good and the beautiful are, as we have seen, analogies of the perfection of the divine essence, which can never be defined, even while, according to Maritain, it can be partially and analogously expressed and experienced in the things of the world and, as we have seen in the previous chapter, in morally good acts and love between two human persons.

It seems, then, that here we are very much in the realm of ontotheology, given that God, as Beauty, serves as both the formal and causal ground of that which is beautiful. What was ascertained in the previous chapter was that if metaphysics is somehow to be overcome in Maritain, it cannot, as Caputo makes clear with regard to Aquinas, be overcome by operating on the level of Maritain's metaphysics—a metaphysics in which the master concept of *esse* and its attendant principles of transcendental being, analogical being and participation reign. Rather, the overcoming of metaphysics must be sought in a deconstruction of Maritain's metaphysics, seeking out 'possibilities' in its operative principles. This methodological condition being granted, we recall

⁴⁸ *PBC*, p. 151.

⁴⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, Ia, 3, 5 s.c.; *Ibid.*, 3, 7 co.

that it was by means of *esse* and *intellectus* that Caputo made the case for a *rapprochement* between Aquinas and Heidegger, through Eckhart's radicalization of the terms following biographical considerations of Aquinas' apophatic mystical experience. My intention in this chapter is to conduct a similar deconstruction of Maritain's metaphysics but to do in reverse order, presenting the operative principles of Maritain's philosophy of art and the artist before having recourse to the other sources and seeing how the principles elucidated are hermeneutically transformed. With this in mind, it is worth noting what Maritain says in a little-known lecture called 'Man's Approach to God':

What is signified by our analogous concepts pertains to God, and in a better way than to things. But *the manner in which we conceive them*, with the limitations it inevitably involves . . . the *modus significandi* does in no way pertain to God. God is truly *ipsum esse per se subsistens* . . . but He does not suffer any of the circumscribing marks implied in our manner of conceiving Being, insofar as we conceive Being as distinct from Goodness, Truth, or Beauty.⁵⁰

Maritain here affirms the Thomistic doctrine of absolute divine transcendence or 'divine simplicity', the doctrine that God's essence, as self-subsistent Being, cannot be contained in human concepts that are formulated on the basis of comparison and composition. He continues even more forcefully:

God exists, but He does not exist as do any of the existing things. God is good and just and merciful, God knows, God loves, but He is not good, just, or merciful. He does not know or love as any of the beings are or do which have taught us what is goodness, justice, mercy, knowledge or love. In the very degree to which they make the divine essence known to us, our concepts, while keeping their proper meaning, are absorbed into its abyss. In God, what is signified by them breaks loose—we don't know how—from *our manner of conceiving*.⁵¹

With respect to the present discussion on art, beauty, and Poetic Knowledge, such a strongly apophatic statement totally precludes any reduction of the

⁵⁰ *MAG*, p. 30.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31.

divine to instances of the beautiful or aesthetic delight, for God is their source and in His essence, absolutely unnamable, and even the analogous concepts of the transcendentals leave the divine reality as 'uncontained and uncircumscribed' by them.⁵² This suggests severe limitations on predications and any knowledge of God whatsoever, with the apparent paradox that the transcendentals, while subsisting in analogical relation to God also do not touch upon his essence. God is the source of everything beautiful as their supreme analogate, even while He remains beyond any concept of beauty. This is a point to which I will return later in the light of reflections on Bloy, Rouault, St. John of the Cross, and the convergence of the vocations of the artist and the mystic.

One of the most important principles in Maritain's philosophy of art is that as the source of the perfections which inhere in things, such as beauty, God can be indirectly apprehended in natural features and artworks in which 'integrity', 'proportion' and 'radiance' are present. What precisely these terms themselves mean Maritain admits is a difficult question, but he claims that radiance is 'the most important', even if it is 'also the most difficult to explain.'⁵³ He states that the scholastics referred to radiance as the 'splendor of the form' (*splendor formae*) and that the form, as the ontological principle 'which determines things in their essences and qualities, and through which they are, and exist, and act', amounts to a revelation of the 'splendor of the secrets of being radiating into intelligence'⁵⁴ (hence the form of a thing is an 'intelligible', that which enables us to gain knowledge about a thing). However, 'The Schoolmen [the scholastics], when they defined beauty by the radiance of the form, in reality defined it by the radiance of a mystery.'⁵⁵ While form is intelligible, that which is beautiful is form which is infinitely intelligible, and is therefore never known in its entirety, even as it is known in part.

We can see that as with the other transcendentals beauty is omnipresent but also subject to 'proper proportionality':⁵⁶ just as everything in

⁵² Ibid., p. 30.

⁵³ *CI*, p. 123.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

creation is good and good in its own way(s), there are no fixed meanings of beauty with regard to artworks. Rather, each artwork is beautiful on its own terms, subject to varying tastes, education and abilities of aesthetic appreciation of its audience. From the above considerations, we can see that Maritain affirms the ontological and epistemological objectivity of beauty, and while affirming difference of taste, he qualifies this with respect to genuine aesthetic experience engendered by intentional emotion as opposed to feigned aesthetic experience engendered by sentimentality.

As an inexhaustible transcendental, beauty can be expressed in an infinite number of ways by artists. Maritain vehemently disagrees with the view that art is Christian only in virtue of its explicit subject-matter or theme, affirming in *Art and Scholasticism* that truly Christian art is defined not by its material content or subject-matter, but rather that 'the work will be Christian in proportion as the love is alive. Let there be no mistake: it is the actuality of love, contemplation in charity, which is here required. A Christian work would have the artist, as man, a saint.'⁵⁷ What this means precisely is that the work be defined by that which is *lovable*—that the purpose for which and the method by which an artwork is made is able to be loved. We shall soon see in clear detail that the lovable is beauty, or the beautiful. Maritain believes Rouault to best exemplify the quality of the beautiful in his work and proclaims that, insofar as the artist creates the beautiful, which can be instantiated in an infinite number of artworks, they can be a co-creator with God.⁵⁸

As will become increasingly clear, as both his thinking and religious life matures, Maritain does what all mystics do, which, to quote William Harmless, is to 'gradually bring to speech their personal experiences of mystery and their distinctive vision of a God-drenched world',⁵⁹ for God shines through all that is beautiful. The implication for a Heideggerian critique is that the beautiful is not (and cannot) be understood by Maritain solely in a metaphysical or ontological manner. The beautiful must first be apprehended in a pre-metaphysical and predominantly affective manner—an experience which

⁵⁷ AS, p. 71.

⁵⁸ MAG, pp. 24–25.

⁵⁹ M, p. 236.

Thomist metaphysical machinery covers over as Maritain begins to systematize his thoughts on beauty in *Art and Scholasticism*, and continues to do so into later works. In any case, with respect to the question posed earlier about whether, for Maritain, genuine art needed to conform to explicit codes of composition to express a Christian conception of truth and beauty, we are now in a position to answer in the negative.

This qualification on the condition of the necessary presence of beauty in an artistic artefact or performance opens Maritain's thesis of art as a virtue of making beautiful works up to a second objection. It could be argued that many 'artworks' are, in fact, ugly, disturbing, and some are disgusting or grotesque. In this connection we might mention Piero Manzoni's *Artist's Shit* (1961) or many of Fred Einaudi's paintings, which often feature what would otherwise be an innocent and uplifting scene but which include some horrific or obscene element, such as a child in forest holding a mutilated embryo or an artist painting a landscape which includes a woman and a swan having sexual intercourse. Clearly, some of these works are also designed to shock. Again, following Marcel Duchamp and Arthur Danto, many today believe that something can not be beautiful but still be an instance of art, and this, I suggest, presents a potential problem for Maritain's classical thesis, especially given the fact that he did not consider give much consideration to such artistic and theoretical developments in his reflections on art. If the artist produces beautiful works by definition for Maritain, these works seem to be counter-examples to Maritain's definition of art. What follows, then, is an application and extension of Maritain's principles for an adequate response.

What can be said first of all is that artefacts or performances made primarily to shock are not made for their own sake and therefore do not belong to the free arts. In such cases, the work serves the practical purpose of shocking its audience and is thereby not created spontaneously. It is therefore analogous to other kinds of work created for practical purposes, such as propaganda or commercial publicity stunts. This certainly seems to be the case with works such as Marc Quinn's *Self*—a series of frozen sculptures, beginning in 1991, of the artist's own head, made entirely out of his own blood. And while

Andres Serrano's 1985 *Blood Cross*—which is a photograph of a blood-filled cross—may be granted some religious message connected to the Passion of Christ, his 1987 *Piss Christ* and *Piss Light* are photographs of crucifixes submerged in the artist's own urine. Such works, which are only two instances of many in which the artist submerges objects of religious significance in his own body fluids, are clearly designed to shock. Any attempt to find intended meanings and messages beyond this immediately strike one as forced and, at best, disingenuous, regardless of the fact that Serrano has been the recipient of artistic awards for such works.

Let us observe that being shocked by these artworks is a visceral affair, and an appeal to gut reactions, biological impulse and base emotions, such that there is no 'meaning' or 'point' to it. In this sense, an artwork that is shocking is analogous to a merely aesthetically or sensually pleasing artefact or performance in that it, as Trapani writes, 'like fireworks, dazzles the beholder' and 'consort[s] with the spectacular or, in the realm of the emotions . . . are given by brute or raw emotions, depicted or aroused.'⁶⁰ There is, of course, art that shocks incidentally and art that is intended to shock. Indeed, we might refer to both Bloy's and Rouault's work as examples. Maritain clearly says that the works of these two artists are, nevertheless, imbued with intentional emotion—emotion which serves to invoke the divine and its redeeming power. Bloy's hyperbolic language and Rouault's misshapen subjects are intended to serve this purpose. What can be said, then, is that 'art' that *merely* shocks is therefore not primarily concerned with intentional emotion. These considerations permit us to reject it as an instance of free art.

Second, concerning the ugly, I would argue that Maritain's definition is broad enough to accommodate most examples of ugly work in the free arts, given his doctrine of proper proportionality and the free development of the rules of art. For example, what is superficially ugly, such as an anatomical deformity can also be beautiful, in the way that a person bears it, changes, and becomes a stronger, perhaps more compassionate person. This also applies to the audience of the artwork insofar as they contemplate the disfigurement

⁶⁰ *PBC*, p. 165.

and suffering that the artist wishes to convey. It is not unreasonable to suggest that it is precisely one of the purposes of the artist to bring out such beauty. In this regard, Maritain takes Rouault to be a pre-eminent example in his 'searching for himself . . . his own inner harmony'⁶¹ through expressing the darkness and suffering he perceived in the world and in himself. Again, even in Rouault's work, which first shocked audiences with a style and with forms completely at odds with the aesthetic tastes of the time, intentional emotion is present, and strikingly so, making Rouault's early work at once beautiful and disturbing, highly abstract and yet full of messages of universal appeal: human suffering and mercy, fallenness and the possibility of redemption.

It therefore seems that work that exhibits the most extreme ugliness—the disgusting or the grotesque—is the main challenge for Maritain's definition, and to which I finally turn. What works could be regarded as instances of grotesque art? Today, popular culture and entertainment—especially music and television shows, movies and video games—are saturated with extreme violence and gore, as well as with highly offensive language. The *Saw* movie trilogy is one example among innumerable examples of a work of popular entertainment that exhibits such phenomena. If we seek examples among those considered to be artists, works in the category of 'body horror', such as Peter-Joel Witkin's 2007 *Ars Morendi*—which is a photograph of a nude woman lying among decomposing, severed human heads—seems to one clear case of art that is intended to disgust. Others are James R. Ford's *Bogey Ball* (2002–2004), consisting of a ball of nasal mucus, and Jonathan Payne's *Fleshlettes* series.

I noted earlier that Poetry is natural to all, and it explains how both an artist is inspired in their work and how an audience appreciates it. It was said that the intellect, when free, longs to create the beautiful, because the beautiful is a manifestation of Being as *Being*—an inexhaustible wellspring of intelligibility in which the mind, spontaneously and non-self-consciously, delights. However, concerning the Poetry that is a prior condition for the artist's Poetic Knowledge, Maritain writes that 'Poetry stands in the line . . . of the

⁶¹ Jacques Maritain, quoted in Dyrness, *Rouault*, p. 44.

delight procured by beauty'.⁶² This quote, which seems to place the natural ability of the appreciation of the beautiful on equal terms to Poetry as seeing the hidden meaning in things, suggests that a proper mental or spiritual state is required to be able to see beauty in the world in oneself, and thus create and appreciate art. It also suggests, as Trapani says, that the relationship between Poetry and beauty is one of mutual dependence and presence, that 'where there is one, there also will the other be found.'⁶³

On the basis of these considerations, just as for Aquinas and Maritain evil is a privation of the good, I suggest that the grotesque, in its generation in the mind of the artist, is a privation of peace of mind and right emotion, materialized in artefacts or performances and best characterized in this regard, like shocking work, by our psychosomatic detestation of it. Hence the grotesque or 'disturbing' is characterized by both sensual and psychological revolting properties. If, as a cognitive activity, Poetry is a kind of contemplation of the 'secret meaning' of things and experiences in the world and a unification of our mind and those things through intentional emotion, one has to admit that there are healthy, good thoughts about the world and ourselves, and states of mind which are natural and desirable, in contradistinction to disturbing or upsetting thoughts about the world and ourselves. This is not to deny the necessary existence of the latter in the world or in human life, but it is to assert that the latter should not be dominant, and if they are, this is an unnatural and veritably *unfree* state of mind. As I write elsewhere, 'Extreme ugliness of the mind we recognize as undesirable and senseless, and the senseless—such as sentimentality—in art we recognize as ugly.'⁶⁴

Of course, as with the beautiful, there are no hard and fast rules for determining what the threshold for unacceptable degrees of ugliness in cases of shocking, disturbing and grotesque 'artworks' might be—at which point we could easily designate a work as 'merely' grotesque, etc. Nevertheless, if artistic creation is fundamentally free, as Maritain claims, it is ordered to beauty and delight, and smothered to death by sentimentality, practical concerns,

⁶² AS, p. 97.

⁶³ PBC, p. 163.

⁶⁴ Haynes, 'Jacques Maritain's Definition of Art', p. 537.

repulsion, self-doubt, despair and neuroses, which is why grotesque ‘artworks’ are never treasured as beautiful artworks are. ‘What is most real in the world thus escapes the notice of a darkened soul’, writes Maritain.⁶⁵ Whatever grotesque artefacts and performances are, they cannot be instances of free art, and this, I suggest, is as far as we can go in making reliable lines of demarcation for what genuine art ought to be, in the light of contemporary artistic trends.

With this we come to the unity of Poetry and Beauty, and in this connection I will quote Maritain at length.

Poetry, as distinct from art, has no object. I mean to say that in the case of [P]oetry, there is nothing to which the creativity of the spirit tends so as to be *specified* and *formed*, nothing which originally plays with regard to this creativity a specifying or formally determining part; nothing, then, which may exercise command or mastery over it. In [P]oetry, there is only the urge to give expression to that knowledge which is poetic intuition, and in which both the subjectivity of the poet and the realities of the world awake obscurely in a single awakening

But the free creativity of the intellect, as soon as it comes into play, cannot help tending, by virtue of an implied necessity, toward that in which the intellect has its ultimate exultation, in other words, that which causes the pleasure or delight of the intellect. Thus beauty is not the *object* of [P]oetry, it is—here I am groping for an appropriate word; I shall say that beauty is—the transcendental *correlative* of [P]oetry. Beauty is not an object, even infinite (as Being is for science), which specifies [P]oetry, and to which [P]oetry is subordinate. But beauty is a necessary correlative for [P]oetry. It is like its native climate and the air it naturally breathes in, nay more, it is as life and existence are for a runner running toward the goal—an end beyond the end. For [Poetry] there is no goal, no specifying end. But there is an *end beyond*. Beauty is the necessary *correlative* and *end beyond any end* of [P]oetry.⁶⁶

We can now see why for Maritain the artist creates the beautiful, by definition, for the beautiful is that which the intellect most desires. As we saw in the

⁶⁵ Maritain, *The Responsibility of the Artist*, p. 93.

⁶⁶ *CI*, pp. 130–131. Again, ‘Poetry’ is capitalized, following Trapani’s example, to clearly distinguish it as the source of artistic inspiration from the specific art form of the writing of verses (the latter being ‘poetry’).

introduction to this thesis, for Aquinas, the Beatific Vision, as knowledge of the essence of God and the ultimate end of human life, is the fulfilment of *intellectus* as intuitive and unitative. As such it is primarily cognitive or intellectual, rather than affective, for it does not rely on the mediation of the senses for composition of its content as knowledge.⁶⁷ Trapani argues that Maritain follows Aquinas in this regard, and that for Maritain, 'our ultimate happiness and fulfilment is obtained through the satisfaction of the natural desire of the intellect for beholding the fullness of Being.'⁶⁸ I think one can understand this notion of the satisfaction of the natural desire of the intellect by the beautiful in the following way. The intellect desires what is most real, and the beautiful, unlike the merely sentimental or the grotesque, as the shining forth of the infinite mystery and analogously manifesting Being of everything, gives us the opportunity to delight and contemplate the mystery of Being itself. This is why Maritain says that 'if poetic intuition is *really* expressed it will inevitably be expressed in beauty, even without meaning it, for any real expression of poetic intuition derives from its integrity, consonance [or proportionality], and radiance.'⁶⁹ Put simply, the beautiful is *lovable*. All this amounts to saying that for Maritain, the hidden source of art is Poetry, which aims for the beautiful, and the beautiful is what is true.

Coming now to the subject of the relationship between art and the mystical, it is because this contemplation of the beautiful, corresponding to the cognitive rather than the creative aspect of the intellect, is not merely an instance of sensual pleasure but first of all an intellectual delight, that Trapani chooses to take up a notion that Maritain rarely used and never developed: 'Poetic Contemplation'.⁷⁰ According to Trapani, Poetic Contemplation bears an analogous relationship to supernatural contemplation or mystical experience in that it is a species of contemplation of Being through the analogate of the beautiful, but unlike supernatural contemplation in love, does not have God in His very essence as its object and, as such, does not consist

⁶⁷ *HA*, p. 266.

⁶⁸ *PBC*, p. 141.

⁶⁹ *CI*, p. 132.

⁷⁰ *PBC*, pp. 159–163.

of direct, immediate communion with God. 'For supernatural contemplation', says Trapani, the object 'is the infused nature of the Divine itself, Eternal and Abiding Love, while the natural contemplation of beauty, it is that manifestation of the Divine that shines through God's glorious creation, or in participation with the spiritual nature of the human artist's own creative Self, it shines forth in a bona fide work of art.'⁷¹ Trapani's development of Poetic Contemplation is a useful and legitimate extension of Maritain's philosophy art, for it clarifies the role of the beautiful in knowing God, not just at the point of the production of an artwork, about which Maritain seems mostly concerned, but at the ontologically prior stage of Poetry.

What needs to be added other than the fact that both Poetic Contemplation and supernatural contemplation are two species of contemplation of Being, is that they *both* share at least one of William James' 'marks' of mystical experience, which is that of passivity. We know that for Maritain supernatural mystical experience is the result of the gratuitous gift of the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit: 'He it is Who, when we have come under the habitual regime of the gifts of His Spirit, takes pains to complete our purification and to raise us, by the ways of passivity, to the heights of contemplation.'⁷² But the production of a beautiful artwork, as we have seen, also requires that the artwork be produced as an end in itself, and this is why the free arts are to be distinguished from the useful arts. Not only that, but the very ground of both artistic production and appreciation, which is Poetry, lies at the 'edge of the unconscious', with the implication that it can never be reduced to list of items of knowledge or a recipe for repetition. 'It is precisely to the extent to which [P]oetry is useless and *disengaged* that [P]oetry is necessary', Maritain writes, 'because it brings to men a vision of reality-beyond-reality, an experience of the secret meaning of things, an obscure insight into the universe of beauty'.⁷³ Thus we have another reason to consider poetic experience to be an analogy of supernatural mystical experience, but also a sort of preparation for the latter in virtue of a passive

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 159–160.

⁷² *DK*, p. 382.

⁷³ Maritain, *The Responsibility of the Artist*, p. 85.

opening of oneself to the movements and inspirations gifted to us by reality.

It is in virtue of the fact that Poetry essentially correlates to beauty and in virtue of the transcendental nature of beauty as pointing to that which lies beyond it, that the Poet, Maritain says, ‘completes the world of creation; he cooperates in divine balancings, he moves mysteries about; he is in natural sympathy with the secret powers that play about in the universe. A slide down the inclined plane of heaven, a push from grace: the sleeper will change sides, and will wake up with God.’⁷⁴ The tendency of the free arts is to transcend the division between aesthetic beauty in the sense of sensually pleasing qualities and transcendental beauty as a shining forth of the divine. God, argues Maritain, is implicitly known and sought after in the beautiful, much in the same way as in experiences of the moral good—whether performed by oneself or witnessed by another person—as we saw in the previous chapter in the example of choosing the good as one’s existential anchor. We see here that the moral and the artistic modes of connatural knowledge correspond to the transcendentals of the good and the beautiful.

‘In the last analysis’, Maritain writes, ‘all genuine [P]oetry is religious. Even if a [P]oet has no conceptual knowledge of God, even if he is or believes he is an atheist, it is toward the primary source of Beauty that in actual fact his spiritual effort is orientated. And thus . . . he will naturally be led by poetry to some conscious notion and awareness of the existence of that God at Whom he is unconsciously looking, in and through his art and his work.’⁷⁵ Not only this, but the same can be said for the audience of an artwork imbued with beauty as they apprehend the intentional emotion in the artwork and are led to participate in Poetic Contemplation. As with moral goodness and love, in which persons serve as ‘revealers of Being’, here the artist, in exercising their virtue of art, also serves as ‘revealer of Being.’ Raïssa Maritain herself writes, long before Jacques became acquainted with the philosophy of Aquinas, that ‘It is because we read the poignant pages of this journal [of Bloy’s] that we dared to write to Léon Bloy and send him a small sum of money.’⁷⁶ Maritain himself

⁷⁴ *MAG*, pp. 24–25.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷⁶ *WHBF*, p. 112.

was led to Catholicism through the free arts. As Maritain writes in the introduction to *Pilgrim of the Absolute*, a collection of Bloy's letters, 'Bloy draws . . . souls out toward the light by very reason of the union in his work between the tangible and the spiritual.'⁷⁷ And in this connection Bloy wrote to Henriette Charasson: 'Your love of the Beautiful shows you to have a lack of certainty which cannot help make you suffer. You have too much insight to hope that works of art will be able to satisfy your heart. You know very well that beyond the masterpieces there is a burning hearth of Love from which artists must necessarily draw their inspiration, without ever becoming satisfied, and that they cannot, even with genius, *give* more than a very faint echo, a most pallid reflection of that thunder and that furnace.'⁷⁸

With this, I suggest that Maritain's doctrine of the transcendental nature of beauty, leading the soul to God, was possible only in virtue of his own personal experience through Bloy. As Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis says regarding Bloy, 'Jacques Maritain owed the shape of his religious destiny to the "phenomenon of Léon Bloy" just as he owed the shape of his intellectual destiny to Saint Thomas. Indeed, Jacques found Thomas's love of objective truth anticipated in the very unphilosophical Bloy'.⁷⁹ With this, I move to the subject of the relationship between the vocations of the artist and the mystic, using Bloy and Rouault as case studies.

5. The Artist and the Mystic

Quoting Garrigou-Lagrange, Maritain teaches that 'it is at once on the theological virtues, supernatural in their essence, and on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, "doubly supernatural—supernatural not only in their essence, like the theological virtues, but in their mode of action," that infused contemplation and the mystical life depend.'⁸⁰ We have seen that Poetry, as correlative to the

⁷⁷ Jacques Maritain, 'Introduction', in Bloy, *Pilgrim of the Absolute*, p. 10.

⁷⁸ Leon Bloy, *Pilgrim of the Absolute*, p. 279.

⁷⁹ Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, 'Léon Bloy and Jacques Maritain: *Fratres in Eremo*', in Deal W. Hudson and Matthew J. Mancini (eds.), *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), p. 72.

⁸⁰ *PI*, p. 50.

transcendental of the beautiful, is not to be identified with this infused contemplation. In virtue of its sharing in the contemplation of the mysteries of Being, and, as Maritain writes, 'because it detects the spiritual in things' and is a 'knowledge of the mirrors of God', Poetic experience serves as an 'obscure and vulnerable beginning, not of mystical experience, but of the natural knowledge of God.'⁸¹ Here however, I intend to demonstrate that at least in the cases of the Catholic artists such as Léon Bloy and St. John of the Cross, there is a unity of infused (mystical) contemplation and Poetic experience which Maritain did not elaborate upon, but which nevertheless has radical implications for how we can understand the mystical in both his life and philosophy.

I want to ask two different questions, which Trapani does not address, but to which the notion of Poetic Contemplation points and which the two questions posed at the beginning of the chapter foreshadow: what the precise relationship is between the religious (in this case Catholic) artist and the mystic is, and what the relationship is between *religious* Poetic Contemplation and supernatural contemplation. Here I use the examples of Bloy and Rouault to suggest a blurring of boundaries and overlapping of concepts when it comes to natural and the supernatural contemplation, Poetic Contemplation and mystical experience. This blurring of boundaries, I argue, supports my contention that in Maritain's life and writings, there is an immanent mysticism.

(i) Bloy as Mystic

Maritain writes that an artwork is 'always nourished by the experience of the man'.⁸² We have seen evidence of this pertaining to all three cases of beautiful, ugly and grotesque art. We see that the artist's psychological and moral character influences their work for better or worse. In the case of Bloy, though, Maritain reflects:

⁸¹ AP, pp. 55–56.

⁸² Maritain, *The Responsibility of the Artist*, p. 93.

In him [Bloy] were confronted as in their pure state, as if outside the climate of human reason—whether it take on the clothing of philosophy or the clothing of prudence—the privileges of the Christian and those of the Poet. The theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost planted in a profound and intuitive soul famished for the divine vision, a soul whom genius oppressed; a poor human heart preyed upon by all that is superhuman in the divine requirements, and by all that is inhuman in the despotism of art; the great storms, the nights, the tears of a most harsh mysticism in an atmosphere of violence and passion.⁸³

As well as Poetic Knowledge enabling Bloy to use the tangible as signs of the divine, Maritain ascribes to him the fundamental elements of mysticism, which are the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In speaking of 'divine requirements' and the 'despotism of art', Maritain seems to bring together the moral and spiritual demands of the mystic and the moral and psychological demands of the virtue of art as that produced for the sake of the beautiful, suggesting, in the case of Bloy, a unity of vocation, with the mystical characterizing his writings and making those writings possible. In my view, this is quite remarkable, because everywhere in his philosophical writings Maritain makes a strict distinction between the artistic vocation and the mystical vocation, between the natural species of contemplation which is poetic experience and the supernatural contemplation of God in love, which, in this life, is the sole preserve of mystics.

With this unity of vocation, what is particularly interesting is the mode of expression and the role of suffering in Bloy's life and work. With regard to the former, Maritain has this to say:

'I only understand what I guess,' Bloy would often say. Having no taste for the rational discursus or the demonstrative virtues of the intellect, backing with the three theological virtues and the mere organism of the infused gifts the most powerful gifts of intuition, his natural habitat was dissatisfaction, in the intellectual order as in all the others. Disconsolate at not possessing now on this earth the vision of the divine glory, he did not use human language, as do metaphysicians and

⁸³ Maritain, 'Introduction', in Bloy, *Pilgrim of the Absolute*, p. 9.

theologians in their formulas, to try to express, according to the imperfect mode of our concepts, whatever we are able to know of transcendent reality, but on the contrary he used it to try to evoke that which in this reality goes beyond the mode of our concepts, and remains unknown to us. In other words, he made use of the signs of language and reason only to make up for being deprived here below of the beatific vision—which precisely no sign will ever be able to express—and his words tended less to state truths directly than to procure, as he used to say, that feeling of mystery and of its actual presence. As he used reason and intellectual speculation according to a mode more experimental than demonstrative, to express reality in the very darkness that joins it to this feeling, the writers among whom Léon Bloy can suitably be classed necessarily make use of the parables and hyperboles to which mystical expression has recourse.⁸⁴

We see here two important things. The first is that Maritain regards Bloy as possessing the three theological virtues necessary for infused contemplation. This is not an isolated or one-off affirmation, for we read in Maritain preface to Georges Cattui's *Léon Bloy* that 'the true secret of Léon Bloy is the intensity of the three theological virtues in him, the absolute firmness and adoration of his faith, in a soul belonging to poet and prophet'.⁸⁵

The second important insight we gain from what Maritain says is that he classifies Bloy's literary language along the same lines as mystical language, which, as we saw in the introduction, is for Maritain markedly different to that of ordinary propositions and especially of metaphysical propositions in virtue of the use of the symbolic and overstatement to convey existentially important truths. 'For example', writes Maritain, 'the mystic, in describing his experience of created being is before God, would say that the creature is *nothing*, that it is nothing at all. Yes, but these expressions have a mystical, not an ontological meaning.'⁸⁶ In this connection, I will quote Bloy:

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 18–19.

⁸⁵ [*Le vrai secret de Léon Bloy c'est l'intensité en lui des trois vertus théologiques, c'est la fermeté absolue et l'ardeur de sa foi, dans un âme de poète et de prophète . . .* Jacques Maritain, 'Lettre-préface', in Georges Cattui, *Léon Bloy* (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1954), p. 7. (trans. auct.).

⁸⁶ *DK*, p. 347.

At bottom what should you do to avoid being an idiot or a swine? Merely this: you should do something great, you should lay aside all the foolishness of a more or less long existence, you should become resigned to the fact you will seem ridiculous to a race of janitors and bureaucrats if you are to enter the service of Splendor. Then you will know what it means to be the friend of God.

The *Friend of God!* I am on the verge of tears when I think of it. No longer do you know on what block to lay your head, no longer do you know where you are, where you should go. You would like to tear out your heart, so hotly does it burn, and you cannot look upon a creature without trembling with love. You would like to drag yourself on your knees from church to church, with rotten fish strung from your neck, as said the sublime Angela of Foligno. And when you leave these churches after speaking to God as a lover speaks to his beloved, you appear like those poorly designed and poorly painted figures on the Way of the Cross, who walk and gesticulate, against a background of gold. All the thoughts that had been pent up unknown within you, in the caverns of your heart, run out in tumult suddenly like virgins who are mutilated, blind, starving, nude and sobbing. Ah! Surely at such moments the most horrendous of all martyrdoms would be embraced, and with what rapture.⁸⁷

Leiva-Merikakis writes that, taking this striking passage above as one example among many, in Bloy's writings, 'both the fury and the lyricism are vehicles of love. What gives . . . all his works, a fundamental unity is this passionate love of God, what Jacques would later call *amour fou* (mad, frenzied love)⁸⁸ and this notion of the 'friend of God' that Bloy speaks of, I have claimed, is important for Maritain. When listing the 'practical ways' of coming to knowledge of God, he lists the 'testimony of the friends of God' along with good moral acts and Poetic experience.⁸⁹ His brief discussion concerning the friends of God in *Approaches to God* highlights, quoting Bergson, the role of the saints in pointing us to a transcendent meaning of life by means of their service done in and through a love which is beyond measure,⁹⁰ which, as we saw in another context, Maritain called 'supra-moral'.

⁸⁷ Leiva-Merikakis, 'Léon Bloy and Jacques Maritain', p. 77.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ *AG*, p. 63.

⁹⁰ *AP*, p. 64.

Friends of God serve as what I call ‘revealers of Being’ in Maritain’s life and work, and this is most clearly the case with Bloy, whose personal example and literary work had a profound influence on Maritain. *Il n’y a qu’une tristesse*: ‘the only sadness is not to be a saint’, reads the last sentence of Bloy’s novel *La Femme Pauvre*, a proclamation celebrated by Maritain in his reflections on Bloy.⁹¹ As we have seen, Maritain’s attraction and eventual conversion to Catholicism were not primarily philosophical but existential, and the result of a desperate search for the meaning of Being. It is, then, the mysterious power of the Catholic faith to provide such a meaning, through the medium of Bloy’s example of Catholic piety and lay mysticism that led Maritain to become Catholic. And here we come to the necessary part played by mystery in mysticism or supernatural contemplation. In this connection, and concerning how the young Maritains came to regard their first meeting with Bloy, Raïssa relates:

What he was revealing to them is not capable of repetition in words: the tender of love of Christian brotherhood, that kind of trembling from mercy and fear which seizes, in the presence of another soul, a soul marked with the love of God. Bloy seemed to us the very opposite of other men—who hide their deficiencies in the things of the spirit as well as so many invisible crimes under the carefully maintained daubing of the social virtues. Instead of being a whited sepulcher like the Pharisees of all times, he was a charred, blackened cathedral. The white part was inside, deep in the tabernacle.⁹²

“‘Mystery is luminous and impenetrable’”, Maritain quotes Bloy.⁹³ The mystery of the personal example of the mystic corresponds to the mysterious, sometimes baffling notions and turns of phrase of mystical language. Another aspect of mystical language in this connection, in writers such as St. John of the Cross, Meister Eckhart and the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, for example, is the use of negative propositions about God in order to speak about Him (*via negativa*), or refusing to ascribe any knowledge of

⁹¹ *PG*, p. 212; see also: Maritain, ‘Introduction’, in Bloy, *Pilgrim of the Absolute*, p. 23.

⁹² Maritain, ‘Introduction’, in Bloy, *Pilgrim of the Absolute*, pp. 22–23.

⁹³ *UT*, p. 38.

God in His essence whatsoever (*apohasis*). Bloy also exhibits this aspect of Catholic mysticism in calling the main character of his early 1887 novel *Le Désespéré* ('The Despairing') 'Marchenoir' (meaning 'the one who walks in darkness'). And in a letter to Maritain in the early days of their friendship:

You are *seeking*, you say. O professor of philosophy, O Cartesian, you believe, with Malebranche, that truth is something *one seeks!* I declare that I never sought or found anything, unless one wishes to describe as a discovery the fact of tripping blindly over a threshold and being thrown flat on one's stomach into the House of Light.⁹⁴

'All his [Bloy's] literary efforts', Maritain says, 'consisted in projecting in the mirror of enigmas and similitudes the rays of this substantially luminous light.'⁹⁵ Having seen examples of Bloy's literary techniques, what are the themes and subject-matter of the novels and journals serving as rays of the divine light? As we see in *Le Désespéré*, *Mon Journal*, *La Femme Pauvre* and his letters, they are poverty, spiritual anxiety and purity, and suffering. These three mirror and give expression to Bloy's life, who saw his poverty and suffering as a necessary part of his Poetic vocation: 'Man has places in his heart which do not yet exist and into which suffering enters so that they may come to be. I would never finish if I wanted to describe the marvelous effects of suffering on man's faculties and on his heart. *It is the handmaiden of creation.*'⁹⁶ Bloy also sees suffering as a necessary part of his vocation to sanctity: 'Faith, Hope and Charity, and Sorrow which is their substratum, are diamonds, and diamonds are rare, as you have learned. They are very expensive, never forget.' He continues: 'Diamonds of such sort cost Prayer, which is, itself, a priceless jewel only wrested by conquest.'⁹⁷

Given Bloy's influence on Maritain's religious and mystical formation, this leads Leiva-Merikakas to say that 'For both of them [Bloy and Maritain],

⁹⁴ Bloy, *Pilgrim of the Absolute*, p. 278.

⁹⁵ Maritain, 'Introduction', in Bloy, *Pilgrim of the Absolute*, p. 20.

⁹⁶ Bloy, quoted in Bernard E. Doering, 'Lacrimae Rerum—Tears at the Heart of Things: Jacques Maritain and Georges Rouault', in John G. Trapani (ed.), *Truth Matters: Essays in Honor of Jacques Maritain* (Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association, 2004), p. 210.

⁹⁷ Bloy, *Pilgrim of the Absolute*, p. 291.

suffering is the primary activity engaged in by the saints as lovers of God for so long as the work of redemption remains incomplete; and this is not because of some hankering after Baroque dolorism but because they have clear insight into the necessary bond of identity uniting the believer to the Savior and his redemptive work.⁹⁸ That suffering is at the core of the Christian who aspires to sainthood for Maritain, as deeply influenced by Bloy, is abundantly clear when we read a letter that he wrote in reply to an anonymous girl, after Raïssa's death:

The Christianity you were taught is a child's religion. At seventeen your eyes have begun to open on the world as it really is. You are asked to realize that Christianity is a terrible mystery of love, and that the Cross is not a pleasant and comfortable figure of speech protecting those joys over which popular preachers wax so eloquent, but actually a gallows of horror on which God was hanged for love of us—because all the abomination of this world comes not from Him, but from man's freedom, which is the prime cause of evil. And God restores all things—invisibly by His love, and the love of His saints who lay down their lives for their friends. Perhaps what I am writing you here seems to make no sense, but I am writing it all the same because it is the truth, and someday you will see that it is.⁹⁹

For the Catholic, suffering is a means to participate in the Cross of Christ and consequently a means of purification and purging of the soul's desires. For Maritain it is the vocation of the saint to suffer for, and in the name of, Christ. Again: 'The saints participate throughout the course of time in the redeeming work of Jesus on behalf of the world. Their personal relation to the world is paradoxical and mysterious. For them, it seems to me, the world is above all an occasion for *dying to themselves* in order to be entirely delivered up by love to Love.'¹⁰⁰ The saint does this because 'things as they are are intolerable', and it is only by total self-renunciation, to the extent that the saint gives away their clothes, that the saint can enjoy freedom from the goods and pleasures

⁹⁸ Leiva-Merikakis, 'Léon Bloy and Jacques Maritain', p. 86.

⁹⁹ Jacques Maritain, quoted in Bernard E. Doering, *Jacques Maritain and the French Catholic Intellectuals* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 239.

¹⁰⁰ *PG*, p. 58

of the world, 'infected', as they are, for Maritain, 'with lying, injustice, wickedness, distress and misery.'¹⁰¹

As such, self-renunciation and the suffering which plays a major part in it—what may be called 'asceticism'—constitute a central element in Christian mysticism, and it is especially pronounced in St. John of the Cross. For example, he writes

[T]he purest suffering causes and entailed the purest knowledge, and, in consequence, the purest and loftiest joy which comes from deepest penetration. . . . Oh, that it might be perfectly understood how the soul cannot attain to the thicket of the wisdom and riches of God, save by entering into the thicket of many kinds of suffering. . . . the thicket of the Cross!¹⁰²

In this connection the saint speaks of both an actively endured and a passively endured 'night of the senses' as well as an active and passive 'night of the spirit' or soul, in which the soul, trusting of God, walks in darkness, relying upon no mental representation of God or of divine union.¹⁰³ The emphasis on ascetic means for reaching spiritual perfection is represented best in what Maritain refers to as the 'doctrine of the void' on the basis of St. John's *todo y nada*: 'everything and nothing'. In rather sublime poetic form St. John of the Cross teaches:

To reach satisfaction in all
desire satisfaction in nothing.
To come to possess all
desire the possession of nothing.
To arrive at being all
desire to be nothing.
To come to the knowledge of all
desire the knowledge of nothing.

To come to enjoy what you have not
you must go by a way in which you enjoy not.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 58–59.

¹⁰² St. John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, quoted in *DK*, p. 390.

¹⁰³ *DK*, p. 385.

¹⁰⁴ St. John of the Cross, 'The Ascent of Mount Carmel', in *SJCW(R)*, ch. 13 (11).

Of this 'nothing' that St. John of the Cross speaks of, the doctrine of the void, Maritain explains:

He is preaching neither mutilation nor suicide, nor the slightest ontological destruction of the least vein in the wing of the smallest gnat. His point of view is not that of the structure of our substance and its faculties: it is the point of view of our ownership of ourselves in the free use and moral exercise of our activity. And there he asks for everything. There we must give us all. The death he preaches is very real, more subtle and more delicate than material death and destruction, a vitally active and efficacious death, savored, free, which strikes to the heart of our most immanent activity, is accomplished in and by it, grows with it, adheres to it in the deepest intimacy. This death is called *self-surrender*. This death does not obliterate sensibility, it refines and makes it more exquisite; it does not harden the fibers of being, it softens and spiritualizes them, it transforms us into love.¹⁰⁵

In concluding his considerations of the death that is self-surrender, St. John of the Cross also brings them to a climax when he writes:

In this nakedness the spirit finds its quietude and rest. For in coveting nothing, nothing tires it by pulling it up and nothing oppresses it by pushing it down, because it is in the center of its humility.¹⁰⁶

Nothingness, which here also means self-surrender, as Maritain suggests—or better yet, the nihilation of the self in all desire unrelated to sanctification and all descriptions of God's nature—becomes a positive force, rather than a mere absence. It is the rest attained only by a humbling of self, by ways which one 'enjoys not', meaning ascetic purgation and suffering, which, as essential to what Maritain calls 'heroic passivity' as opposed to quietism,¹⁰⁷ allows for the gathering and focusing of spiritual energy and God's entering the soul. This we have seen in Bloy and it is with all of this—the use of hyperbolic and apophatic mystical language and of the sanctifying and *creative* role of suffering—that

¹⁰⁵ DK, p. 353.

¹⁰⁶ The Ascent of Mount Carmel', in *SJCW(R)*, ch. 13 (13).

¹⁰⁷ DK, p. 368.

we arrive at the unity of the Poet and of the mystic in the case of Bloy. The implication of this unity is that in at least in this case, unlike in the case of the obscure knowledge of God through the moral act, God is known directly by Bloy, in a contemplative union of love that, as we saw earlier according to Maritain's philosophy of art, 'inevitably' finds expression in the artwork.

In Bloy, precisely because there is the purging of knowledge and a humbling of self in the face of the mysteries of the divine, God is not an *object* of consciousness like a being in the world, but is an immediately felt, personal reality, the love of which (or of whom) can never be directly expressed, only suggested. Maritain writes poignantly in this regard:

[Bloy] was never willing to renounce completely the splendors of the tangible, in order to seek beyond, in the darkness of a purely spiritual contemplation, Him who is above all images and all thought. Perceptible and tangible signs of God—such were the objects of his never-stated hunger. Thus it is in the world of forms and images that the mystical keys have their repercussion, and there take shape the melodies of a most genuinely Christian sense of the absolute requirements of the Lord.¹⁰⁸

As late as 1968, Maritain affirms that the case of Bloy is unique in that in him there is a unity of the Poet and mystic, a dual vocation which requires that even in its most sublime forms, violence must be done to language and the art of the Poet in order for it to be ordered to Christian truth.

It is the office of all great [P]oets to surmount in some way or other, and at whatever price, this inadequation of the sign with respect to the mystery of life immanent in the reality signified. But in the case Léon Bloy—and it is, I believe, a unique case—since the reality signified is the infinite fire of the unfathomable God, it was necessary to do violence to art and to the works which the poet fashions in words, in order to bring them to a superhuman excess, which is still unworthy of the reality which they evoke . . .

Such is the task that Bloy had assigned himself as artist, and in which consumed himself: a supreme effort of [P]oetry which overflowed from his contemplative prayer and which, in comparison to the treasures glimpsed in that prayer, was like a

¹⁰⁸ Maritain, 'Introduction', in Bloy, *Pilgrim of the Absolute*, p. 9.

resplendent rag. For Bloy knew very well that the silence of adoration will always praise God better than any word.¹⁰⁹

We have here the overcoming of metaphysics, through the art and person of Bloy—God not known ontotheologically but by mystical insight in what I call ‘Infused-Poetic Contemplation’ (capitalized for the reason that I refer to the Poetry at the heart of all artistic creation already described, and seek to emphasize the *creative* function of the infusion of grace in this case, as opposed to infused contemplation *per se*). It is evident that such mystical insight is apophatic in virtue of its refusal to apply concepts and images to God as an *item of knowledge*. God is not known here, by Infused-Poetic Contemplation, in terms of *causality*, *esse* or *actualitas*, or even primarily as a maker or creator of the world.

On this point, it is worthwhile pausing to consider that in ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, Heidegger persuasively argues against the conception of thinghood as a unity of a manifold of sense impressions by pointing out that we never first perceive a series or even a jumble of sensations such as tones and noises but, rather experience things in the midst of the world in which we live, taken together and readily intelligible.

[W]e hear the storm whistling in the chimney, we hear the three-motored plane, we hear the Mercedes in immediate distinction from the Volkswagen. Much closer to us than all sensations are the things themselves. We hear the door shut in the house and never hear acoustical sensations or even mere sounds. In order to hear a bare sound we have to listen away from things, divert our ear from them, i.e., listen abstractly.¹¹⁰

Such an argument is clearly phenomenological in its essence,¹¹¹ and by this we come full circle, as it were, for the same argument can be made when it comes to God and how God is experienced by the mystic. What could be more

¹⁰⁹ *UT*, pp. 40–41. It is clear that, because Bloy was a novelist and diarist, Maritain is not referring to ‘poetry’ in the narrow sense of writing verses, but Poetry in the wider sense already explicated, which is why I capitalize the word here.

¹¹⁰ *PLT*, pp. 25–26.

¹¹¹ Husserl’s early categorization of phenomenology as a return to ‘the things themselves’ is echoed here.

obvious that God is not experienced as the '*causa prima*' or '*esse*', or any of the perfections or transcendentals of which He is the supreme analogate, whether it be the true, good, or beautiful? In speaking of God in such a way, we remain in the language of the metaphysician and not the mystic, and despite the fact that throughout the essays on mysticism in *The Degrees of Knowledge*, Maritain makes the case that the teachings of Aquinas and St. John of the Cross are complementary, he insists on distinguishing between ontological and mystical statements.¹¹² This because he not only wants to prevent heretical readings of St. John of the Cross (with whom he is mostly concerned), but also, and primarily, because he wishes to convey the way and the *experience* of the mystic insofar as it is possible.

It is true that a person can have a 'metaphysical experience' of God such as Maritain's describes with the intuition of being, but phenomenologically speaking, this is experience only of an unknown, impersonal X, as we see in both Jacques and Raïssa's descriptions of the intuition. Such an experience has nothing of the character of the supernatural mystical experience of intimate existential communion. In the case of the mysticism of Bloy, God is known and experienced as *mystery* and *suffering savior* and this is the phenomenology of mystical experience that Caputo fails to provide upon his deconstruction of Aquinas. There is the co-happening of the presencing of God ('suffering savior') and a withdrawal of God (God, revealed in the life, Passion and death of Christ withdrawing in ineffability, *mystery*). This, in my view, is at least one possible configuration of what Caputo calls an 'alethiological' experience of the presencing and withdrawal of God, who is Being.

Bloy's mysticism is therefore simultaneously and paradoxically also cataphatic in virtue of the fact that it remains strictly within the tradition of the Catholic religion, with a view to meeting the 'absolute requirements of the Lord' and to sainthood. Key to this is the necessary role of suffering in artistic creation and sanctification. Yves Simon, a friend of Maritain's for over fifty years, writes that 'From the beginning Maritain had the soul of a contemplative

¹¹² *DK*, p. 353, 357.

and that of an artist.’¹¹³ We can now see why this remark is so fitting. Something I wish to add in the context of visual art in the next section is Bloy’s strong belief in the value and essential mystery of the Sacraments in the Catholic spiritual life, and how this relates to Maritain’s mystical thought.

(ii) Tsakiridou’s ‘mystical aesthetics’

It useful to consider Cornelia Tsakiridou’s notion of the ‘mystical aesthetics’ because, while I do not adopt the term, the reflections that go into conceiving it provide an excellent way to push the insights thus far attained to their most radical conclusion. The sources which Tsakiridou employs are those I have just discussed—of the immanent relationship between the artist and God through the beautiful and of the role of suffering in the spiritual life of the Poet manifested in their artworks—but with a specific focus on *explicitly* Christian art, that, is, in both form and content, and Rouault’s in particular. I began this chapter by noting that it was adherence to a Christian conception of beauty as ‘a shining forth of the deep mysteries of reality’ which defined the work of Bloy and Rouault and that those mysteries were ‘those of God and human life and the relationship between the two.’

In this connection, Tsakiridou writes that for Maritain, Rouault’s religious art functions in an analogous manner to Byzantine icons in that the artist participates, in making an object for contemplation of divine things, such as the Crucifixion, in the Cross of Christ themselves—that, as Maritain quotes Fra Angelico, ‘to paint the things of Christ, the artist must live with Christ’—and this means that the virtue of art in this instance is *ascesis* (spiritual discipline) and the work of art is an aesthetic object for nothing less than mystical contemplation.¹¹⁴ This mystical contemplation upon what defines the artwork—its Christ-centredness, even while the artist need not employ a

¹¹³ John H. Griffin and Yves R. Simon, *Jacques Maritain: Homage in Words and Pictures* (Albany, NY: Magi Books, Inc., 1974), p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Cornelia A. Tsakiridou, ‘Vera Icona: Reflections on the Mystical Aesthetics of Jacques Maritain and the Byzantine Icon’, in John G. Trapani (ed.), *Truth Matters: Essays in Honor of Jacques Maritain* (Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association, 2004), pp. 225–226.

'religious technique'¹¹⁵ and the artwork need not adhere to strict rules of production as is the case for the production of Byzantine icons—Tsakiridou calls '*visio divina*' ('prayerful seeing') as analogous to *lectio divina* ('prayerful reading').¹¹⁶

'From Maritain's standpoint', writes Tsakiridou, 'the Cross is the *locus mysticus* (mystical place) of communion, the intersection and union of God and man, in which the *theanthropic* mystery is both finalized and opened to humanity.'¹¹⁷ As the artist approaches the divine as the subject of their art, any and all egocentric preoccupations that the artist may have are revealed and shattered by the '*charismatic being*' of the religious artwork as participative in 'What in [B]eing is transcendental, its goodness, beauty and truth'¹¹⁸ and activated by grace. Here we are reminded of why Poetry tends to the beautiful, which is that unlike sentimentality and the grotesque, the beautiful is eminently lovable and worthy of contemplation. Hence, the artwork that is at least in some way directed to the divine functions in the same way as the Cross in laying bare human weakness and sin insofar as the mysteries of the divine overwhelm all of our attempts to define, contain, or use it for our own advantage.

In the case of the artist, they must undergo an analogous *kenosis* (self-emptying) as that of Christ, as they find that their work inevitably fails to express the infinite mysteries of God.¹¹⁹ For this reason Maritain writes to his friend, the artist Jean Cocteau, that 'contemplatives and [P]oets understand each other'.¹²⁰ And this is why I claim elsewhere that in *The Responsibility of the Artist*—which deals with the relationship between art and morality—Maritain 'offers the Christian spiritual gift of Wisdom as the means to a positive freedom for the artist in his artistic and ethical life, precisely because wisdom and art are two independent absolutes, and art, while imitating the moral and spiritual virtues and the discipline required to attain them, is of [a] different

¹¹⁵ Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, quoted in Tsakiridou, 'Vera Icona', p. 240.

¹¹⁶ Tsakiridou, 'Vera Icona', p. 226.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 241–242.

¹²⁰ Maritain and Cocteau, *Art and Faith*, p. 83.

order altogether insofar as its activities and ends are concerned [with the source and end of wisdom being God contemplated and the end of art being the work to be made].¹²¹ In this connection, Maritain writes in *The Degrees of Knowledge* of the infusion of wisdom into the soul through love and grace as occurring ‘secretly and in darkness, so as to be hidden from the work of the understanding’,¹²² and quotes St. John of the Cross’ *Dark Night of the Soul*:

And it [the gift of wisdom] is not for this reason alone that it may be called secret, but likewise because of the effects which it produces in the soul. For it is secret not only in the darkneses and afflictions of purgation, when this wisdom of love purges the soul, and the soul is unable to speak of it, but equally so afterwards in illumination, when this wisdom is communicated to it most clearly . . . for, apart from the fact that the soul has no desire to speak of it, it can find no suitable way or manner or similitude by which it may be able to describe such lofty understanding and such delicate spiritual feeling.¹²³

And yet the great Spanish mystic wrote the most sublime tomes of mystical theology. If we follow Harmless in his call to always situate the mystic in the context of their lived experience, we ought also to remember that it was in fact during St. John of the Cross’ most painful periods, such as his imprisonment by his Carmelite brothers in Toledo between 1577 and 1578, that he wrote most of *The Spiritual Canticle*. In many cases, there is, in the mystic (like the artist, as we have seen), a compulsion to express their experiences or feelings of the beautiful and the true. ‘For all the hand-wringing about the ineffability of the mystical’, Harmless points out, ‘mystics rarely abandon words or lapse into silence. They are a singularly talkative lot and a singularly gifted group of talkers.’¹²⁴ Even ineffable mystical experiences, then, by no means preclude expression. How precisely Catholic mystics and artists express their feelings of the true and beautiful will, of course, be colored by their religious beliefs, and the mere fact of this confluence of positive religious belief and expression

¹²¹ Haynes, ‘Jacques Maritain’s Ethics of Art’, p. 73.

¹²² *DK*, p. 362.

¹²³ St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, quoted in *DK*, pp. 362–363.

¹²⁴ *M*, p. 228.

of so-called ineffable mystical experiences reveals the mutual dependence of the apophatic and the cataphatic in Catholic art and religion. This will be seen most clearly regarding the Holy Trinity, which Maritain calls the 'holiest mystery' of the Catholic faith.¹²⁵

In living according to charity and directing their work to the beautiful, the artist, says Maritain, can 'give himself totally twice at the same time, first to his God and second to something that is a reflection of his God.'¹²⁶ This *kenosis* in the Catholic artist and the mystic, wherein the dynamism of purgation, the stripping of knowledge and divine illumination of secret wisdom occurs, is why for Maritain even between non-Christian artists and mystics there is a 'distant analogy between aesthetic emotion and the mystical graces'¹²⁷ and why, as I quoted Maritain earlier, in genuine Christian art there is a 'final victory of a steady struggle inside the artist's soul, which has to pass through trials and "dark nights" comparable, in the line of the creativity of the spirit, to those suffered by the mystics in their striving toward union with God. Such was the case with Rouault.'¹²⁸ We see the unity of artistic and mystical insight in Rouault's paintings of Christ. In the 1929 *Christ en croix* or, as Tsakiridou suggests, in the 1932 *Christ Mocked by Soldiers*, 'the expansion of the line itself is made into an expressive object' and Christ is outlined in the same rough, powerful strokes of the bodies and faces of those around him—be it the soldiers mocking him or the distraught Mary and John—which implies, as Tsakiridou notes, that there is no 'marked domain of ugliness of virtue' and that the Cross gathers all in both suffering and the transcendence of suffering and redemption.¹²⁹ In Rouault's artworks, the Cross is the *locus mysticus* and invites *visio divina*. The Cross, says Maritain, is a 'place of supreme torments and the beatitudes of peace.'¹³⁰ The object which is the inspired artwork, the process of creating the work, and other kinds of participation in an artwork, such as appreciating and contemplating it, are all nothing less than

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

¹²⁶ Maritain, *The Responsibility of the Artist*, pp. 108–114.

¹²⁷ *PBC*, p. 152

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹²⁹ Tsakiridou, 'Vera Icona', pp. 243–244.

¹³⁰ *DK*, p. 385.

sacramental, an act of worship. The Sacraments themselves have a central place in the Catholic faith, understood as outward signs of inward or invisible divine grace. The most important Sacrament being the Mass, at which is believed to occur the transubstantiation of the bread into the Body of Christ, the Sacraments represent a clear cataphatic component to Catholic spirituality and mystical life in the sense that they are only understood and partaken in within the context of propositional religious beliefs. But, says Bloy, they are no less mysterious:

We are created that we may be saints. If anything is written, this surely is. Sanctity is so required of us, it is so inherent in human nature, that God presumes its existence, so to speak, in each of us, by the means of the sacraments of His Church, that is, by means of mystical signs invisibly making operative in souls the beginning of Glory. '*Sacramentum nihil aliud nisi rem sacram, abditam atque occultam significant.*' (A Sacrament is nothing other than a sacred, withdrawn and mysterious thing.) This sacred and mysterious thing thus alluded to by the Council of Trent has the effect of *uniting* souls to God. The most transcendent theology contains nothing stronger than this affirmation.¹³¹

Now, if the mystical artwork is sacramental in the same way as the seven Sacraments of the Catholic faith—that is, being an act of worship and mysterious outward sign of the grace of God, it is not unreasonable to infer from this that here we come across a different configuration of the presencing-withdrawing, 'alethiological' experience' of God, or Being. For mystical artworks, such as those by Rouault, reveal to us the presence of God in Christ, and yet the Cross represents mystery in all its darkness, of the divine, in virtue of an ineffable love, emptying itself of all power to redeem sin and suffering. This same *kenosis* must be the kind of 'comportment', to use Heidegger's term, that the Christian artist must embody in approaching the Cross.

¹³¹ Bloy, *Pilgrim of the Absolute*, p. 296. Bloy is here quoting one of the texts arising from the Council of Trent, *The Roman Catechism* or *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*—in particular the second part of the *Catechism* (from the seventh session of the Council), which pertains to the nature and administration of the Sacraments. See: *Catechismus Concilii Tridenti: PIIIV* (Paris: Gauthier Fratres, 1831), 'De Sacramentis in Genere', s. II.

(iii) The Artwork as *Locus Mysticus* and Site of Truth

Heidegger writes that the artwork is a 'setting-into-work of truth'¹³²—truth, again, not being understood as the correspondence between mental representation and extra-mental reality, but rather the unconcealment (*aletheia*) of beings. For Heidegger, the work of art is a happening of truth in this sense in virtue of a conflict, a 'rift' (*Riss*) immanent within truth itself, of 'world' and earth', wherein 'world' represents that nexus or horizon within which human beings live and die, and 'earth' represents that out of which 'world' is possible, and to which 'world' always sinks back.¹³³ One of Heidegger's most famous examples in this connection is a Greek temple, which, as something built, a work, 'gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being.'¹³⁴ The temple is a world for an historical people.

Heidegger also introduces to the conflict of the 'world' and 'earth' other elements, such as divinities, which consequently, as we have in fact seen, gives rise to a 'fourfold' of earth, sky, mortals and divinities.¹³⁵ We perhaps see the notion in embryonic form in the relatively 'early' later Heidegger in the essay 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in which the Greek temple, as it stands on the rock of a valley, 'encloses the figure of the god, and in this concealment lets it stand out into the holy precinct through the open portico', 'lets the god be present'.¹³⁶ This by way of consecration of the site in an activity that is one with the building of the temple, honoring the god's 'dignity and splendor'.¹³⁷

This world of the temple however, necessarily stands in relation to the earth on which it rests and out of which it is made. And in the putting to work the materials for the temple's construction, those materials, and the earth that surrounds the temple, are made to shine forth, not as mere stuff, as with

¹³² *PLT*, p. 72.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 61.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 148.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 40–42.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 42–43.

equipment, but as having a primordially that defies definition and any reduction to any world which is erected upon it.¹³⁸ Thus, even the divinities have as their ground that which is indefinable and ever-concealing. The temple, as holy site, is the site of the unconcealment of things and beings, but also, and necessarily, *concealment*— which, as we know, is essential for Heidegger’s notion of truth as *aletheia*.

We here find ourselves, then, back to the concept of ‘de-severing’, of the lack of distance or availability of things in the world to Dasein. But in a negative sense, because the art work, as the location of the conflict between world and earth and the site of unconcealment of the way all the beings in the work are at play, is not merely present like other objects in the manner of equipment, but rather *stands out*, as an object of truth and beauty.¹³⁹ Beginning also with the activity of the artist—whether painter, sculptor or poet—but going far beyond the artist and the conception of art for the satisfaction of mere subjective, aesthetic taste, Heidegger thus shares with Maritain the essential insight concerning the nature of genuine art as ‘*the becoming and happening of truth*.’¹⁴⁰ In this connection, and on the basis of the preceding discussion, I posit that the Cross, both symbolically and existentially understood through what I have formulated as the connatural mode of Infused-Poetic Contemplation, and as a simultaneous unconcealment of the presence of God and the concealment of the divine in the mysteries of the Incarnation would be for Maritain what Heidegger is referring to by the rift and fourfold in which revelation and mystery are always in play (as, for example, in the Greek temple). Understood in this way, by the formal means of knowledge of Infused-Poetic Contemplation, the poetic-mystical experience of the Cross can also be taken as what Caputo means by an ‘alethiological’ experience of Being.

We thus arrive once more at the essential relationship between artistic experience and mystical experience. But if it seems that I am claiming too much for Heidegger’s thoughts on art insofar as it can be used for a pre-

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 44–45.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 69.

metaphysical interpretation of Maritain's central notions of connaturality and Poetry, perhaps we ought to look to Heidegger's own claims regarding Poetry.

It was said in Part I that Heidegger took the poet as the model for the meditative attitude, of the thinking of Being—*Denken*. Heidegger says: 'Poetry and thinking meet each other in one and the same only when, and only as long as, they remain distinctly in the distinctness of their nature.'¹⁴¹ This means that whatever Heidegger takes poetry in this instance to be, there is a very strong connection between it and *Denken*.

In the passage just quoted, Heidegger makes an important distinction between sameness and identity, with sameness being 'the belonging together of what differs, through a gathering by way of the difference', that is, of elements that can be brought together in virtue of their very differentiation into 'an original being-at-one.'¹⁴² In contrast, identity or equality reduces the elements 'into the dull unity of mere uniformity.'¹⁴³ *Denken* and poetry are the same but not identical, or, it could be said, synonymous terms. The implication is that if *Denken* contains a mystical 'element', and *Denken* is the same but not identical with poetry, the mystical element in Heidegger contains at least something analogous to poetry. Is this *Poetry*, understood in Maritain's terms, such that Maritain and Heidegger meet on the relationship between Poetry and mystical experience?

Poetry, or *poiesis*, is, for Maritain, ontologically prior to both Poetic Knowledge and Infused-Poetic Contemplation and as such it is what makes the vocation of the artist possible. Poetry, as we know, is the 'secret life' of all the arts, the intentional and affective communication between the human self and the things of the world and with an essential tendency to creation of beautiful works. For Heidegger, by comparison, '*All art, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what is, is, as such, essentially poetry.*'¹⁴⁴ He also says, more directly, that 'Art, as the setting-into-work of truth, is poetry' and that the 'nature of poetry . . . is the founding of truth.'¹⁴⁵ Here Heidegger is

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp. 216–217.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 70 (original emphasis).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 72.

referring, like Maritain, to 'poetic composition' in a 'wider sense', as that which mysterious making which brings the artwork to presence.

But, as we have already seen, Heidegger goes further than this, and says that poetry is the meditative attitude for the letting-be of Being *par excellence*. For Heidegger language is the 'house of Being', and poetry, 'by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance', is a 'projecting' into the clearing of what can come to be present, so long as, and on condition that, language is not conceived as a mere tool to be manipulated and for the manipulation of the world. Heidegger goes so far as to say that contrary to the view that human beings are the 'master and shaper of language', 'language remains the master of man.'¹⁴⁶ How this can be the case can be understood when we consider again the fact that it is only in virtue of the power or capacity of language given to human beings (or Dasein) that any conscious, self-reflective experience of the world as world is at all possible. Language *gives* us the opportunity to ask the question of the meaning of being—of our own being, of beings, and the Being of beings; and for this reason, we owe language a great debt.

With language considered as *poiesis*, rescued from the conception of it as tool, we can begin to see why Heidegger would describe poetry as the 'saying of world and earth, the saying of the arena of their conflict and thus of the place of all the nearness and remoteness of the gods' and that 'Poetry is saying of the unconcealedness of what is.'¹⁴⁷ We can also see why, for Heidegger, poetry—or, as he also calls it '*poesy*'¹⁴⁸—in the *narrow* sense of writing verses, 'has a privileged position in the domain of the arts.'¹⁴⁹ As George Pattison says: 'Heidegger experienced the work of art as offering a way to break the grip of technologically orientated thinking, a way to a more originary encounter with things, and, in that encounter, to a disclosure of the world constituted as and by the fourfold of earth, sky, mortals and gods.'¹⁵⁰ In

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 213.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁵⁰ *TLH*, p. 160.

this connection, poetry, as ‘the art of language’,¹⁵¹ a peculiar form of language that typifies *poiesis* as a making and ‘setting-into-work’, is uniquely suited to self-effacement on the part of the human speaker (the poet)—uniquely suited to *listening* and waiting upon the disclosure and unconcealment of beings in Being.¹⁵² Poetry, more than any other art form, allows for the unconcealment and shining forth of beings. This is because, as we have seen, the poet transcends a propositional understanding of the conveyance of meaning through language, but also the conception of truth as univocal and in terms of *adequatio*.¹⁵³

For Heidegger, it is with the poetry of Hölderlin in particular that we can not only have a pre-metaphysical, pre-ontotheological experience of Being, but, because Hölderlin was a modern with the uniquely modern experience of alienation from Being, also begin to make new paths in *Denken*.¹⁵⁴ In Hölderlin’s case, ‘the poet’, as Pattison says, ‘speaks what the philosopher is to think.’¹⁵⁵ And in his discussions of Hölderlin’s words, ‘poetically, man/Dwells on this earth’, Heidegger describes poetry as a ‘mysterious’ ‘measuring’ of the human being or Dasein’s dwelling on earth, understood, again, not as mere building but as ‘the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth’ and which takes account of their rootedness on the earth—a rootedness that is only possible by virtue of the existential anchor (that is, source of meaning) that are the divinities and gods which the poet makes manifest even as they withdraw in mystery.¹⁵⁶ Perhaps here we find Maritain and Heidegger again meeting on the profoundest of elements of genuine art and poetry: the contact between the artist and the divine, and the concealment of the divine even as the poet pens their poem or, as in the cause of Rouault, paints their painting.

Yet, as Heidegger continues to ‘follow in thought’ what Hölderlin writes of the ‘poetic dwelling’ of Dasein, such as in the essay ‘ . . . Poetically Man Dwells . . . ’, the ideas and terms that Heidegger brings into play—such as

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁵² *PLT*, pp. 71–75, 219–227.

¹⁵³ *TLH*, p. 170.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 156–157.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹⁵⁶ *PLT*, pp. 155, 216–223.

“spanning” the “on the earth” and the “beneath the sky”, and ‘the sights of the sky’¹⁵⁷—become increasingly vague and perhaps quite mystifying, with no clear structure of articulation of what Heidegger means to say, such that one never feels one comfortably comprehends what he writes. This is because, to borrow a quote of Gerald Bruns that Pattison employs: ‘His [Heidegger’s] writings on language and poetry do not represent the unfolding of a theory. They are rather a lingering with a subject matter . . . acknowledging Parmenides’ judgment ‘that everything that lies before us is ambiguous’.¹⁵⁸ And consequently:

The folly of trying to follow closely . . . his later writings, comes out very forcefully when you try to stop, because there is no natural stopping place, no place of arrival, where everything falls into place and you can say, ‘Well now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over’.¹⁵⁹

But partly because of the dazzling array of vague concepts and turns of phrase, it is also never clear as to whether Heidegger is attempting to delineate the themes and concerns of Hölderlin or delineate the lines of his interpretation of Hölderlin’s poetic expression. This, as Pattison suggests, however, would be what sets *Denken* apart from a merely representational understanding of both truth itself and philosophical discourse. With regard to Hölderlin in particular, it is not that Heidegger sets out to formulate and summarize some sort of philosophical system underpinning their writings, for such an undertaking would be to reduce each of Hölderlin’s poems and to ignore the fact that what is said actually ‘overreaches the self-understanding of the poet’ and that, following the principle of deconstruction set out in the introduction, ‘the truth of poetry is not only in what is said, but also in what is left in silence’.¹⁶⁰

Both of the concerns outlined above are the very ground of Maritain’s critique of Heidegger’s later thought. Even if there is, as Caputo suggests in *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought*, a certain analogy with

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 218, 223.

¹⁵⁸ Gerald L. Bruns, *Heidegger’s Estrangements: Language, Truth, and Poetry in the Later Writings* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 150.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 174.

¹⁶⁰ *TLH*, p. 170.

Heidegger's 'poetic' thinking and mysticism, Heidegger attempts, according to Maritain, to make a philosophical system out of an essentially poetic intuition, which, in the end, leads to a species of natural mysticism in the attempt to enter into contemplation of Being in itself.¹⁶¹ In Heidegger, Maritain argues, 'intuivity . . . takes on the whole work of conceptualization', but 'to expect from poetic intuitivity the elaboration of philosophic concepts and their organization into a formal body of knowledge is to ask the impossible.'¹⁶² Why this is the case for Maritain is clear from the foregoing discussions of Poetry and metaphysical knowledge. Whereas Poetry in virtue of its being a connatural, affective intercommunication between the human soul and the things of the world tends towards the creation of a work, metaphysical or philosophical knowledge reaches for truth, which for Maritain is not something made but is rather an atemporal, unchanging, divine name. Maritain goes into further detail:

Far from working on intelligible natures grasped in a mental word, thought (Heidegger's obscure *Denken*) concentrates on what it can still hold on to of the fleeting content of its intuition when it tries to desubjectivize that intuition before (and for the purpose of) conceptualizing or intellectualizing it in metaphysical terms.¹⁶³

In virtue of the fact that *Denken* can never take Being as an object of thought, that it can only ever be concerned with beings in the world, we might agree with Maritain in his assessment. In discussing Heidegger's approach to Nietzsche, Pattison discerns Heidegger's fundamental hermeneutical principles, one of which is that *Denken* 'do justice to time', by which is meant thinking does not attempt to capture reality in static images or representational concepts.¹⁶⁴ For Heidegger, as we have seen, time is the horizon of all human experience, of all presencing of beings. For the later Heidegger, therefore, attempting to capture reality in a philosophical system 'necessarily belies the

¹⁶¹ *UT*, p. 324.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 324–325.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

¹⁶⁴ *TLH*, p. 115.

temporality that utterly permeates the human way of being-in-the-world and from which thinking itself cannot be excepted.¹⁶⁵

In this sense we can see a clear analogy between *Denken* and mysticism, for as *Denken* is not an attempt to define or contain but to express and explore Being, the mystic attempts to express their experience of divine reality—in inadequate terms, precisely insofar as the experience is ‘ineffable’ and ‘transient’, to use William James’ ‘marks’. But we also have even more reason to insist on a gulf that exists between Maritain’s Christian mysticism and the mystical element in Heidegger’s *Denken*, for *Denken* is not concerned with a personal relationship between the thinker or the poet and divine reality also conceived in terms of personality. While Maritain’s mysticism and Heidegger’s *Denken* both operate on the supra-moral level, *Denken*, we have seen, is neither concerned with the human person of the thinker or poet nor with producing anything like recognizable and existentially relatable content by which to live our lives. While Heidegger speaks of the presencing and concealment of Being in human life and human history, there appears to be no dialogue between the thinker or poet and divine reality, but only a retrospective ‘monologue’, as Pattison says,¹⁶⁶ on the movement and revelation of Being on the part on the part of the thinker. The degree to which Heidegger’s lack of any search for relationship, or, indeed, communion with ultimate reality, as well as the conception of the divine in the plural and in terms of the ‘sky’ is due to the influence of Hölderlin’s Hellenism,¹⁶⁷ would, I suggest, be an interesting theological subject for further investigation, but which must be set aside here.

It is in complete contrast with Heidegger, that for Maritain, the artist, in approaching such religious works, must be overwhelmed by fear and trembling, must be aware, passively but intensely, of divine inspirations which demand expression in some figuration. The artist, then, must approach the artwork as nothing less than sacramental, and, in the case of Rouault’s paintings of Christ, Tsakiridou says, ‘as an invitation to prayer.’¹⁶⁸ Because

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 126.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 165–167.

¹⁶⁸ Tsakiridou, ‘Vera Icona’, p. 244.

the divine must be approached and contemplated by the artist in such a manner, what we see here is James' 'marks' of the mystical, which are at least three in this instance: ineffability, passivity and a noetic quality. Unlike what I identified as the 'core' emphasis of James, however, we also see explicit Christian subject-matter, employing distinctly Christian theological and mystical notions, such as the divine *kenosis*. I therefore believe Tsakiridou's notion of 'mystical aesthetics' in Maritain is legitimate insofar as it focuses on explicitly Christian art. That said, however, precisely because the term 'aesthetics' focuses on the sensual aspects of art rather than on the transcendental of beauty and therefore on the ontological, I prefer my concept of 'Infused-Poetic Contemplation.' Tsakiridou is certainly not unaware of the distinction between the aesthetic and the ontological, because she writes that, for Maritain, it is in virtue of grace that the artist is inspired to create an artwork that is truly Christian, and that it is in virtue of this 'that its ontology is mystically formed and awaits recognition.'¹⁶⁹

The upshot of Tsakiridou's exploration of Maritain's conception of mystical in Christian *visual* art (such as in Rouault), is that we come to see in a far clearer manner the role of the cataphatic, doctrinal, and sacramental in Maritain's mysticism as present in Infused-Poetic Contemplation. And because of this, we might disagree with Maritain as to whether Bloy is a 'unique' case when it comes to the convergence of the vocations of the Catholic artist and the Catholic mystic in possession of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. For in *The Degrees of Knowledge*, Maritain relies on both the poems and mystical exegesis of no less a figure than St. John of the Cross for his mystical theology, and of course both the poems and commentaries of the latter are some of the most celebrated in Western Christianity for their beauty and profundity. In St. John of the Cross, then, we have another example of the convergence of vocations and Infused-Poetic Contemplation. Are there more? Potentially all Catholic poet-mystics who are sufficiently advanced in the mystical life to enter the spiritual marriage.

One possible case is Jacques' wife Raïssa, who, as an accomplished

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 240.

poet and spiritual writer herself, collaborated with Jacques on other works pertaining to contemplation and mysticism. These include the early work *Prayer and Intelligence* and the later *Liturgy and Contemplation*, with the former, first privately printed in 1922, ten years before *The Degrees of Knowledge*, heavily relying on the mystical theology of St. John of the Cross. In fact, Maritain relates in *The Peasant of the Garonne* that he owes his understanding of contemplation to Raïssa and her sister Vera:

They taught me what contemplation in the world is. I myself was a laggard, a laborer of the intellect, risking by the very fact to think I was really living certain things because my head understood them a little and my philosophy could dissert upon them. But I have been taught, and taught well, by the experience, the sorrows and the insights of these two faithful souls. That is what gives me the courage to try to give witness to them, in speaking there of things that are above me, knowing well that to have been instructed by example and on the job does not make it easy, far from it, to translate what one has learned into ideas and words.¹⁷⁰

While I did not include a study of the religious thought of Raïssa Maritain in this study for reasons which were made clear, it is not unreasonable, on the basis of Maritain's testimony and the biographical facts alluded to throughout, to regard Raïssa as a major influence on Maritain's thinking—not just in the obvious sense of being his wife, but also a mystic with whom he lived his own mystical vocation. That one of Maritain's earliest works—*Prayer and Intelligence*—was a short text on mysticism written with Raïssa is important for my thesis, for it shows a preoccupation with the mystical even as Maritain rejects Bergsonianism and becomes a devotee of Aquinas some fourteen years prior. There is, I argue, a clear trajectory in Maritain's life and thought, an evident privileging of mystical experience over metaphysical knowledge—even if he was unaware of it.

With this in mind, it is, however, to Maritain's reflections on St. John of the Cross which I return to conclude this study. For what Maritain says on the

¹⁷⁰ PG, p. 196.

basis of St. John of the Cross' writings of mystical experience and the Holy Trinity will serve to clarify the contours of the relationship between the apophatic and cataphatic in his mystical theology and fully establish his mysticism as immanent throughout his life. With this the deconstruction of Maritain's metaphysics and the overcoming of metaphysics in Maritain through Infused-Poetic Contemplation will be complete.

Love Gleaming in the Dark: The Mystical in Maritain

‘The light of God-given contemplation is the ardor of love
gleaming in the dark.’¹

1. *Apophasis and Caritas*

In this concluding chapter, I build upon what has been said in the previous chapter of the overcoming of metaphysics and ontotheology through Poetic-Infused Contemplation by way of identifying instances of Infused-Poetic Contemplation in Maritain himself. I want to show, by means of recourse to the mystical poetry of St. John of the Cross, that it is only when two conditions are met in Maritain’s writing that there can be a decisive overcoming of metaphysics. The first is that the vocations of the mystic and the poet converge in art born of Infused-Poetic Contemplation. The second is that Maritain speaks in the same poet-mystical language, not just of mystical experience of God, but even the highest kinds of mystical experience of God. This, for him, is an experience of the life of the Holy Trinity. I will show, in addition, that it is through the Infused-Poetic-Contemplative experience of God in Maritain that we can best understand what I have called the mutual dependence of the cataphatic and the apophatic in Maritain’s mystical theology.

(i) *An Inspired Verse*

In light of the discussion of Infused-Poetic Contemplation in the wider context

¹ *MAG*, p. 35.

of Maritain's philosophy of art, it is nothing other than a statement of fact to say that both technical artistic knowledge and religious or theological knowledge are applied by the Catholic poet-mystic in providing what Heidegger calls the essential createdness of the artwork. But precisely insofar as the creation of an inspired or even mystical artwork is a sacramental event, the technical and theological knowledge employed in its createdness are not, for Maritain, the end or purpose of the work. For if art is by definition 'free' insofar as it is ordered to the self-sufficient, transcendental value of the beautiful, how much more so is a mystical work ordered to experience of the divine?

'If to know is what you want—and knowledge must be desired—study metaphysics, study theology', Maritain says.² But this is not what makes the Catholic artist or the Catholic mystic who seeks mystical union. 'If divine union is what you want', Maritain continues,

and you succeed in attaining it, you will know a great deal more, but precisely in the measure that you go beyond knowledge—and in such a dispossessed fashion that you should in truth say: *I was reduced to nothing and I knew no more*. Beyond knowing? That is to say, in love; in love transilluminated by the Spirit, compenetrated by intelligence and wisdom. *For now my exercise is in loving alone.*³

Here Maritain seems to be suggesting that mystical union with God, which takes place through love, requires some sort of abandonment of positive knowledge of God—the kind of knowledge yielded by metaphysics and theology. With this quote, then, we arrive at the extraordinary relationship between (i) the love or charity (*caritas*) shared by God and human persons, (ii) positive Christian belief engendered by propositional and cataphatic statements of God's nature (such that we know with what divine reality we want a union of love), and (iii) the apparently necessary transcendence or negation of positive knowledge about God and self (*apophasis*) in Maritain's mystical theology.

² *DK*, p. 371.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 371–372 (original emphasis).

Now, it is not accidental that it is only in the final pages of *The Degrees of Knowledge* that Maritain explicitly turns to St. John of the Cross' descriptions of mystical union with the three divine Persons of the Holy Trinity. As has been related, for Maritain, the Trinity is the 'holiest mystery' of the Catholic faith, and for much of the history of Western Christianity since the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople in the fourth century, belief in the Trinity has defined the Christian. Mystical experience of the Trinity, according to St. John of the Cross, who is the 'Mystical Doctor' of the Catholic Church, is the 'fruition' that the soul 'will enjoy in the beatific vision' but is also possible for those who have entered the spiritual marriage in this life.⁴ As such, it is also the highest kind of experience-knowledge humanly possible. Maritain writes:

At this summit of the spiritual life and of mystical experience the soul emerges expressly into the depths of the holiest mystery of Christian revelation . . . The reason is that from the very outset, its contemplation . . . has led the soul, not to the One of the philosophers, not to God unknown as if from without and by His effects, but to God attained in His own divine essence, to the Deity Itself and as such, who in His absolutely proper and intimate life, is a Trinity of Persons, a resplendent and tranquil society of Three in the same indivisible essence of light and love . . . Essentially supraphilosophical, because its proximate and proportioned principle is faith illuminated by the gifts, mystical experience tends from the beginning to loving and fruitful knowledge of three uncreated Persons.⁵

As shall see, for Maritain and St. John of the Cross, the mystical experience of the Holy Trinity is expressible only in language that is at once mystical and poetic. In this connection, Maritain focuses in on two lines from a stanza of a later redaction of *The Spiritual Canticle* by St. John of the Cross himself. I shall present them in the original Spanish, followed by the English translation of the original Spanish by Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, Maritain's French translation, and finally the English translation of Maritain's French version by Gerald Phelan.

⁴ St. John of the Cross, 'The Spiritual Canticle', in *SJCW(R)*, st. 39 (1).

⁵ *DK*, p. 403.

*aspira por mi huerto,
y corran sus olores,*⁶

breathe through my garden,
let its fragrance flow,⁷

*Souffle à travers mon jardin
pour que ses parfums se résplendent.*⁸

Breathe through my garden
That its perfumes may breathe forth.⁹

Maritain has recourse to this verse on three occasions, which is suggestive of its importance. On the basis of Maritain's brief exegesis, it seems that the 'garden' St. John of the Cross speaks of refers to the entire being of the soul.¹⁰ The fragrances, on the other hand, refer to the gifts of the Holy Spirit: the '[s]pirit of filial fear, the spirit of piety, spirit of understanding, spirit of counsel, spirit of fortitude, spirit of knowledge, spirit of wisdom; by the seven gifts which it touches off and animates in the soul, the Spirit brings the soul to mystical union and exhales within it the sweetness of God.'¹¹ More important for the present discussion on mystical experience of the Holy Trinity, however, is the dynamism that strikes us in the second line of Maritain's French and Phelan's English versions of the stanza. Whereas in Kavanaugh and Rodriguez's translation, the fragrance of the garden of the soul appears to be passively waiting for God to breathe into the garden so that it may act or move, in both Maritain's French version and Phelan's translation we see that the fragrance or perfumes are themselves agents, breathing forth. The reflexive pronoun *se* in the French clearly indicates that the fragrances are themselves agents, and

⁶ *SJCW(R)*, 'The Spiritual Canticle' st. 26 (I am here citing the poem on p. 48 in Kavanaugh and Rodriguez' edited collection of St. John of the Cross' poetry and not St. John of the Cross' full work).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Jacques Maritain, *Distinguer pour unir ou Les degrés du savoir* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer & Cie, 1946), p. 725.

⁹ *DK*, p. 387.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 365–366, 387–388, 400; St. John of the Cross, 'The Spiritual Canticle', in *SJCW(R)*, st. 18 (5).

¹¹ *DK*, p. 387 (original emphasis).

act upon themselves. The difference, while apparently negligible, is in fact of central importance. As St. John of the Cross himself writes:

It should be noted that the bride [the soul] does not say 'breathe into my garden' but 'breathe through my garden,' for there is a considerable difference between God's breathing into the soul and his breathing through the soul. To breathe into the soul is to infuse graces, gifts, and virtues. To breathe through the soul is to touch and put in motion the virtues and perfections already given, renewing and moving them in such a way that of themselves they afford the soul a wonderful fragrance and sweetness. . . .¹²

At the height of the spiritual marriage the soul is utterly passive as God acts upon the will through the theological virtues and gifts which have already been attained by the human person.¹³ But if the theological virtues have already been attained, is this attainment not in contradiction to the passivity just spoken of? If the soul is passive, how exactly have they been 'attained'?

Following Aquinas, Maritain distinguishes between 'acquired' contemplation and 'infused' contemplation. It should be noted that both types of contemplation are supernatural in having God as their object. Now, the former Maritain describes as an intermediary degree of contemplation 'between metaphysical speculation and infused contemplation' and which is 'like the fruit of the exercise of meditation'—meditation being understood here not as analogous to the wordless Buddhist *samadhi* but rather the mental concentration on an object. Examples of the meditation involved in acquired contemplation include all discursive prayer, such as the Rosary and the liturgy of the Mass.¹⁴

Infused contemplation, by contrast, only occurs, Jacques and Raïssa write, quoting Garrigou-Lagrange, 'when the three signs mentioned by Saint John of the Cross, and before him by Tauler [disciple of Eckhart], are clearly present: 1) meditation becomes impossible; 2) the soul has no desire to fix the imagination on any particular object, interior or exterior; 3) the soul delights in

¹² St. John of the Cross, 'The Spiritual Canticle', in *SJCW(R)*, st. 18 (5).

¹³ *DK*, p. 387–388.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 297–298.

finding itself alone with God, fixing on Him its loving attention.’¹⁵ We have already seen that for Maritain, infused contemplation, as essentially supernatural, presupposes the activity or infusion of divine grace in the soul and the possession of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The defining characteristic of infused contemplation I wish to focus on in relation to St. John of the Cross’ mystical verse is, therefore, its non-discursive quality.

In *Liturgy and Contemplation*, Jacques and Raïssa write of the ‘prayer of the heart’, in contradistinction to ‘prayer of the mind’, which correspond to infused and active contemplation respectively. Unlike the prayer of the mind, which ‘requires all of our attention . . . and the actual exercise of our faculties’,¹⁶ the prayer of the heart is a silent, even ‘unconscious’ prayer in which the person is ‘constantly recollected in God’.¹⁷ And in this connection, Jacques and Raïssa quote the verse of Psalm 45, ‘Be still, and know that I am God!’,¹⁸ to suggest the need for inner silence for any recollection of self in God whatsoever (which Christianity would demand for spiritual perfection).¹⁹ Non-discursive contemplation, Maritain relates, was insisted upon by St. John of the Cross for the reason that inner silence allowed the soul to be aware of the workings of God within itself.²⁰ This is the apophatic element that Maritain, St. John of the Cross and Eckhart share. For Eckhart, combining the texts of Wisdom and Job, says: ‘In the midst of silence there was spoken within me a secret word.’²¹ This is Eckhart’s famous doctrine of the birth of God in the soul—the ‘word’ referring to the *logos*, which is Christ.²² And it is here where the importance of Maritain’s interpretation of St. John of the Cross’ image of the ‘breathing’ of the fragrances of the soul’s garden lies for the overcoming of metaphysics through Infused-Poetic Contemplation. For Maritain writes that this breathing is associated with the operations of the Holy Trinity, and, as

¹⁵ Réginald Marie Garrigou-Lagrange, *Perfection chretienne et Contemplation*, quoted in *PI*, p. 51.

¹⁶ *PI*, p.

¹⁷ Victorina Osende, *Fruits of Contemplation*, quoted in *PI*, p. 54.

¹⁸ NRSV; Catholic Edition.

¹⁹ *PI*, p. 60.

²⁰ *DK*, p. 366.

²¹ Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works*, p. 30.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 259–260.

such, is 'what is most mysterious in the Saint's teachings'.²³

Again, in the spiritual marriage there is a total self-surrendering and self-giving in love to God on the part of the soul, but even this self-giving is not to be understood as the sovereign act of the soul alone. It is because God is the 'principal agent', as Maritain says,²⁴ infusing the soul with grace and bestowing the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the theological virtues, that, as Maritain quotes St. John of the Cross:

The will of the soul that is converted into the will of God is then wholly the will of God, and the will of the soul is not lost but becomes the will of God. And thus the soul loves God with the will of God, which is also her own will; and thus she will love Him even as much as she is loved by God, since she loves Him with the will of God Himself. . . . [T]herefore the love of them both is one love.²⁵

Note, however, that nowhere do Maritain or St. John of the Cross say that the human soul is annihilated or destroyed. The human *persona* remains. It does not fall like a drop in a vast ocean of divinity or become a mere automaton, even if God is the 'principal agent'. As such, there remains a multifarious horizon of experience for the human *persona*. Concerning the beatific vision, Aquinas himself makes the distinction between (a) the object of praise and worship, which is God, and (b) the act of worshipping.²⁶ From this we can also intuit (c) the worshipper, such that the *persona* is not merely subsumed into God, ceasing to exist. To live in heaven, according to the New Testament, is 'to be with Christ',²⁷ but we retain our identity as persons, and as such, are given 'new name . . . which no one knows except him who receives it.'²⁸ When we consider that there remains some kind of personal human experience in the divine union, the distinction between entitative language and mystical language in fact proves invaluable for a phenomenology of mystical

²³ DK, p. 400.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 364, 366.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 397.

²⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London, R. & T. Washbourne, Ltd., 1911), Ia, 26, 3.

²⁷ Philippians 1:23 (NRSV; Catholic Edition).

²⁸ Revelation 2:17 (NRSV; Catholic Edition).

experience. For in virtue of the extant *persona* there remains a conscious *participation*, the active *living* (and not merely *existing*) of the soul such there is a genuine relationship (or rather, marriage) between the soul and God. And it is because of this that the soul gives

Not only itself and its all, but that which is its all [and] more than its all, its inward self and its life more than its own life and inwardness. For God has given to the soul, as to a true spouse, rights over Him, and made her the proprietor of His goods; she may dispose of them, give them to whomsoever she will. Thus, she gives God to God; her act of love, measured and finite in itself, gives to God, by the infinite love of God, the infinite Himself, an immeasurable gift. This gift evidently must not be understood as of the entitative order, as if the soul had the power of exercising an act upon God and adding to His perfection, enriching God's being by its own being; for this would be absurd. It is a very real gift, but a gift which is effected in the . . . actuality of love, of the wholly immanent immaterial activity which takes place without involving the slightest entitative mutation (for it is *actus perfecti*) and achieves what matters most in the world, within the universe which the soul is to herself.²⁹

There is, then, action on the part of the human *persona*, and, as such, a genuinely mutual self-giving in the relationship between it and God. This underlies the dynamism of the second line of St. John of the Cross' verse, '*That its perfumes may breathe forth*', for the human *persona*, even if through the will of God, *effects* the breathing, the transformative power of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But having come so far with no positive conclusive answer to the pressing question of ontotheology in mystical experience as of yet, there arises this preliminary question: Does this underlying ontology of God and human *persona* mean that for Maritain ontology in fact determines the experience of the mystic? That is, do the inviolable ontological distinctions between God and human soul, as Creator and creature, eternal and finite, *ipsum esse subsistens* and *ens*, in the end serve to set the parameters of what can be experienced in union with God? Put more directly, do we remain in the

²⁹ DK, p. 398.

realm of ontotheology even as pertaining to the spiritual marriage and the beatific vision?

To all three questions, it can be answered ‘yes’, as long as we speak in the language of Maritain the metaphysician. But in another, and much more important sense, it can, I claim, be answered with a definitive ‘no’. There is in Maritain, I argue, an alethiological experience of the Trinity when the experience is had through what is the prior field of Infused-Poetic Contemplation, prior to—and this is crucial—metaphysics, but *not* religious faith, as we see in the manner of Maritain’s initial coming to faith as related in chapters three and four, and to which I shall return later.

(ii) Mystical Experience as Trinitarian Experience

It is of the breathing of fragrances of the soul’s inner garden that St. John of the Cross writes that the ‘Holy Spirit . . . raises the soul so that “she may breathe in God the same breath of love that the Father breathes in the Son and the Son in the Father, which is this same Holy Spirit that they breathe into her in the said transformation.”³⁰ Maritain follows St. John of the Cross in appealing to John 27:24, where Christ prays ‘Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.’³¹ The crucial point of interpretation for Maritain is when St. John of the Cross says that when Christ is praying to God the Father that the souls entrusted to him by the Father be with Him, Christ means also by this ‘that they [human souls] may work in Us by participation the same work which I do by nature, namely, breathe the Holy Spirit’.³² Taken in light of the foregoing mystical statements that the soul becomes God by participation, in a union of ‘one spirit and love’, Maritain writes:

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 400.

³¹ NRSV; Catholic Edition.

³² *DK*, p. 401. The Kavanaugh and Rodriguez translation is almost identical.

[T]he Father, wishing us to be one as They [the Father and the Son] are one, the Son in us and He in the Son, and loving us as He loved the Son, will bestow upon us [as says St. John of the Cross] ‘the same love as to the Son, though not naturally, as to the Son, but . . . by *unity and transformation of love*. . . .’³³

And we recall Maritain saying:

At this summit of the spiritual life and of mystical experience the soul emerges expressly into the depths of . . . God attained in His own divine essence, to the Deity Itself and as such, who in His absolutely proper and intimate life, is a Trinity of Persons, a resplendent and tranquil society of Three in the same indivisible essence of light and love. . . . [M]ystical experience tends from the beginning to loving and fruitful knowledge of three uncreated Persons.³⁴

The human *persona*, then, has a very real experience of, and really does partake in, the life of the Holy Trinity. Maritain quotes St. Augustine: ‘*The realities we will one day enjoy are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*.’³⁵ How precisely does this occur? Maritain as philosopher-theologian is keen to point out, as is St. John of the Cross himself, that in all of this there is no entitative or ‘natural’ transformation of the soul into that of the Persons of the Trinity. Whereas Eckhart engages in theory and system building, St. John of the Cross ‘strictly adheres to what alone is warranted by his experience’, and with this qualification on the nature of his mystical statements, the notion of the soul’s participation in the operations of the Holy Trinity does not occur ‘in an entitative manner, even by participation, with the divine processions [of the three Persons of the Trinity].’³⁶ ‘[T]he saint is not using the language of the speculative theologian; there is absolutely no question here, from any point of view, of an entitative participation of the creature in the uncreated act of love by reason of which the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.’³⁷ Both Maritain and the saint are evidently relying here upon the Patristic notion

³³ Ibid., p. 401.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 403.

³⁵ St. Augustine, quoted in *DK*, p. 403 (original emphasis).

³⁶ *DK*, p. 400.

³⁷ Ibid.

of *'perichoresis'*, 'circumincession', or what Robert Barron calls 'coinherence', which refers to the interrelating and interpenetration of the Persons of the Trinity.³⁸ The Persons of the Trinity, because they are considered, in light of divine revelation and the Magisterium of the Church to be *one* God, rather than *three different gods*, are considered not in an Aristotelian manner as separate substances juxtaposed to one another but rather as 'a communion of love' such that God is 'like a harmony or a musical cord.'³⁹ 'At the most fundamental level of existence', says Barron, 'substance and relationship utterly coincide. To be is to be in rapport with another, for the Father is the Father only in relation to the Son, and the Son is the Son only in relation to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is nothing but the relationship between the Father and the Son.'⁴⁰

But if the question 'How precisely does this occur?' is pressed, we can go no further, for we find ourselves standing, or rather swimming, in the 'depths of the holiest mystery of Christian revelation',⁴¹ which is the nature of the Holy Trinity. Consequently, the question of *how* the human soul experientially participates in the life of the Trinity is equally unanswerable on a metaphysical level. As St. John of the Cross says: 'No knowledge or power can describe how this happens, unless by explaining how the Son of God attained and merited such a high state for us, *the power to be children of God*, as St. John says [John 1:12].'⁴² We can thus only go in a circle, for St. John of the Cross immediately follows this with the same interpretation of the prayer of Christ given above. There is, then, no understanding beyond this point.

Even so, Heidegger and Caputo would certainly claim, Maritain and St. John of the Cross conceive the Trinity as pure and eternal presence. Moreover, there remains the ontological distinction between God and the human *persona* and even an experiential differentiation between God and the human *persona* in the field of experience of the *persona*, such that God is an intentional object.

³⁸ Robert Barron, *Exploring Catholic Theology: Essays on God, Liturgy, and Evangelization* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), p. 32.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *DK*, p. 403.

⁴² *SJCW(R)*, st. 39 (5).

To this, again, I say 'True'. Maritain even says that the union of love is rendered possible by 'an act inwardly referring the soul to the Trinity as object'.⁴³ Yet, almost in the same breath, Maritain also says:

The soul may be said to breathe forth the Spirit of love with the Father and Son inasmuch as, turned toward the Father and Son as objects of her love, she loves them (the while the Holy Spirit receives absolutely nothing from her) with the same love which in God breathes forth the Holy Spirit and in the same sense in which it 'gives God to God.'⁴⁴

If one is not too dazzled, what is one to make of all this? It is not an overstatement to say that in half of what Maritain says, his conception of mystical union—the spiritual marriage and the beatific vision—is pure ontotheology, but in the other half, God is not mere presence, but a dynamic, communion. This is a communion of Persons, as Barron says, of 'coinherence', in contradistinction with juxtaposed objects—and the soul's union with God is expressed poetically in the mystical verse and prose as a 'breathing', the mystical-poetic expression being fully adopted by Maritain not as a *mere* rhetorical device but as a metaphor which is nonetheless *true*. On the one hand, we see Maritain constantly reminding the reader of what he takes to be the inviolable laws of Thomistic metaphysics—necessary to prevent heretical interpretations of St. John of the Cross' profound statements of mystical theology (such as taking the soul's participation in the life of the Trinity as *ontological* union with God). On the other hand, however, God, even as Trinity, is conveyed to us as absolutely ineffable and infinite mystery, but mystical union with God seems to be expressible in mystical and poetical language employing the metaphor of the soul's 'breathing' in dynamic union with the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Indeed, Maritain also affirms God's capacity to suffer, in virtue of the fact that as an essential element of their faith the Christian must believe that God has 'for us the *feelings of a Father*'.⁴⁵ This particular conviction must be also affirmed but admitted to be beyond human

⁴³ *DK*, p. 401.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 401–402.

⁴⁵ *UT*, p. 263.

understanding—or at least within the conceptual framework of Thomism. The ability of God to suffer, Maritain says, leads us, ‘beyond theology’,⁴⁶ leaving ‘us blind when we try to discern, except metaphorically, what its exemplar is like in God.’⁴⁷

And this is worth noting, for we surely do not simply remain in the domain of the problem of the inability of analogical concepts to capture the divine essence—that is, the moment, as Maritain says, when ‘our concepts’, referring to the divine and ‘while keeping their proper meaning, are absorbed into its abyss’ in virtue of the fact that ‘what is signified by them breaks loose—we don’t know how—from *our manner of conceiving*’.⁴⁸ It is not just that, in virtue of the infinity of the supreme act or *esse* of God that ‘each of the concepts by which we come to know God’s divine perfections opens out, like a river does into the sea, into an infinity of splendors unknown to us.’⁴⁹ For what power would Heidegger’s critique of Western metaphysics as ontotheology have if all of this simply amounted to a misunderstanding of Thomistic doctrine? Caputo’s confrontation between Heidegger and Aquinas would have no grounds. John Knasas, however, argues that just such a misunderstanding is indeed at work.

Knasas is a contemporary Thomist who has written in support of Etienne Gilson’s criticism of Maritain’s intuition of being as that which typifies metaphysics. Knasas, however, argues for a Gilsonian rather than Maritainian defence of Aquinas against Heidegger’s charge that Aquinas is guilty of the ‘oblivion of being’. Knasas argues, in congruence with Caputo, that for Heidegger, being is the *a priori* transcendental horizon for the coming-to-be of all beings.⁵⁰ As Knasas renders Heidegger, the transcendental horizon is that which allows all beings to be, including God, for God, modelled on the ability to *make actual*—as we saw earlier—is regarded by Heidegger as the ‘highest

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 253.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 255.

⁴⁸ *MAG*, pp. 30–31.

⁴⁹ *UT*, p. 252.

⁵⁰ John F. X. Knasas, ‘A Heideggerian Critique of Aquinas and a Gilsonian Reply’, in Roman T. Ciapalo (ed.), *Postmodernism and Christian Philosophy* (Mishawaka, IN: American Maritain Association, 1997), pp. 130–131.

being'. The claim that Aquinas and Maritain's 'real distinction' between essence and existence sufficiently provides for an acknowledgment of an ontological difference between Being and beings would, therefore, only play into Heidegger's hands. Caputo himself therefore argues that 'The Scholastic who wishes to respond to Heidegger's critique has to come to grips with the whole premise of transcendental philosophy.'⁵¹

Knasas rejects this call to concede to Heidegger and instead affirms an *a posteriori*, abstractive approach based on the distinction between sensible and immaterial objects. Knasas argues elsewhere that while *esse* is always the act of some entity or body experienced by the subject, it is *not given in experience* that *esse* can actuate more than bodies (i.e. immaterial realities including souls, angels, and other such forms). For Knasas, therefore, Maritain's conception of the intuition of being 'claims more from experience than experience can give' and in fact presupposes prior knowledge of an immaterial being or power able to actualise immaterial things.⁵² According to Knasas, Heidegger argues that the common being (*ens commune*) of the metaphysician—that in which all beings share in order to be—should be regarded as an *a priori*, and given that God is that which in which all other beings, sensible and immaterial, participate for their existence, God is to be identified with this *ens commune*. But, Knasas says:

Aquinas relates God to *ens commune* not as an instance thereof but as the transcending cause of *ens commune*. God is not under *ens commune* but above it. It is true that Aquinas sees *esse* as analogically common to God and creatures. But again one must be careful to conceive this position correctly. The analogon of *esse* is not even intelligibly prior to God. Rather, the divine analogate instantiates the analogon. God is *esse subsistens*. All other *esse* is *esse accidentale*.⁵³

⁵¹ HA, p. 98.

⁵² John F. X. Knasas, 'How Thomistic is the Intuition of Being?', in John F. X. Knasas (ed.), *Jacques Maritain: The Man and His Metaphysics* (Mishawaka, IN: The American Maritain Association, 1988), p. 86.

⁵³ Knasas, 'A Heideggerian Critique of Aquinas', p. 132.

It is because *esse* allows us to abstract to the cause of beings, to the *esse subsistens* at a later stage in metaphysics rather, that Knasas believes Heidegger to be wrong in his insistence that the ground or horizon of beings be an *a priori*. The implication, and Knasas' point about Maritain's approach, even though he never makes it so explicit, is that if a total perception or intuition of being as that by which beings are beings is required at both the outset and summit of the metaphysical enterprise, as it is in Maritain, then this constitutes a more or less *a priori* conception of being—which contradicts the Aristotelian and Thomistic epistemology that Maritain intends to defend and which renders God a mere being among beings. This is why Knasas prefers a 'much less ample notion of being', which, as abstractive, begins with sensible experience and the simple apprehension that a thing *is* and that that is different from *what* it is *before* proceeding to posit immaterial realities and their cause. This, for Knasas, Heidegger cannot possibly conceive, because he insists (and arbitrarily so) that being is an *a priori*:

Contrary to Caputo's opinion, Gilson's thesis in *Being and Some Philosophers* that Aquinas alone was sufficiently attentive to the existential side of being is relevant for answering Heidegger's charge of the oblivion of being among Western philosophers. Aquinas does not forget what Heidegger calls Being in the ontological difference. Aquinas just moves it to a latter stage of *a posteriori* metaphysical reflection. If anyone has an oblivion of being, it is Heidegger. Heidegger seems to be unaware of the merely existential notion of being by which Aquinas initiates metaphysics.⁵⁴

Knasas' motivation is to rescue the Thomist (and even Christian) distinction between Creator and creature, between *ipsum esse subsistens* and *esse accidentale*. He argues that 'Being is always found with beings because it is simultaneously derived from them',⁵⁵ and, on a deeper level: 'The analogon of *esse* is not even intelligibly prior to God. Rather, the divine analogate instantiates the analogon. God is *esse subsistens*. All other *esse* is *esse accidentale*. Aquinas traces *esse accidentale* to God not only causally but also

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 136.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 131.

intelligibly. In sum, for Aquinas, unlike for Heidegger, even intelligibly speaking, nothing exists prior to God.⁵⁶

With all this having been said, however, it seems to me that Knasas is missing Caputo's point, which is precisely that so long as we are talking about Beings in terms of cause, we are led away from 'that which grants Being as the subject matter for metaphysics.'⁵⁷ We remain in the realm of mere presencing, or *Anwesen*, which is to say within only one modality of being emerging from the *Ereignis*, the event of the happening of Being, remaining unable to step back to consider that which even makes the event possible. Again, it is not *esse* that allows Aquinas and Maritain to avoid ontotheology, for *esse* is again cast in terms of *actualitas*, which is what we can call the ontotheological principle of 'making present'. While Gilson and Knasas regard *esse* as the highest perfection and that which preserves the 'real distinction' between essence and existence in all beings that are not God, for Heidegger, *esse* is both a symptom and a cause of 'annihilation of being', of the forgetting of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*). One of Caputo's main methods, we have seen, is to push the notion of *esse* to its Eckhartian extreme, to the point where, along with *ratio*, it breaks down under its own weight. As it does, we begin to see the mystical that is both its inspiration and end. I agree with Thomas Sheehan who, in a review, declared that 'Caputo has undone, once and for all, the neo-Thomistic claim that at least one formation of being in the history of ontology—what Aquinas identified as *esse*, an entity's act-of-being—escapes Heidegger's charge of the "oblivion of being".'⁵⁸

Let it be said that for his part, Maritain is, like Aquinas, caught up in causal language, spell-bound as it were to the scholastic machinery of his master. Even when it comes to his claim that there is in God an '*unnamed and unnamable*'⁵⁹ capacity of God to suffer, Maritain insists upon the usage of Thomistic categories of participation, perfections and imperfections, and calls upon his readers to 'understand these things and do as best we can, advancing

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁵⁷ *HA*, p. 3

⁵⁸ Thomas Sheehan, 'A Way Out of Metaphysics?', *Research in Phenomenology*, 15 (1985), p. 231.

⁵⁹ *UT*, p. 255.

little by little'. Not only this, but he makes the rather startling statement that by such means he endeavours

to show that we must not leave it to the poets but must work to integrate it into theology—the great mystery of what, in an infinitely happy God, corresponds to what suffering is in us, not with regard to the frightening mark of imperfection it implies, but with regard to the incomparable grandeur that it also reveals . . . It seems to me that this great mystery opens up a singularly vast domain, over which the tyranny of words has too long cast its interdict, to theologians, who alone are properly armed to treat it by strict methods of reason planted in the faith.⁶⁰

Maritain is, in fact, immersed in ontotheology, and it is only through careful retrieval of his underlying motivations and insights (which he would certainly endorse) that we go beyond causality and even the notion of *esse* to the non-metaphysical experience of the mystic, to what, in Heideggerian language, is 'alethiological'. With regard to the attendant theory of participatory Being, Caputo in fact builds upon Max Müller's thesis that the Thomistic theory of the participation of Being sufficiently answers the charge that Aquinas, as a thinker of *actualitas*, also serves to complete the oblivion of being.⁶¹ Caputo writes that the doctrine of participation 'must cease to be a causal theory which articulates the dynamics of the creative action and become a doctrine of presencing'.⁶² This is the religious alethiology that has been spoken of, and it is by means of a deconstruction of Maritain, situating him in his biographical, historical and religious context, that I am attempting to show that this religious alethiology can be found in his life and philosophy. This deconstructive situating of Maritain encompasses identifying the 'friends of God' in Maritain's life that are for him 'revealers of Being', and by a stripping away of Thomistic metaphysics in Maritain's Infused-Poetic-Contemplative meditations on Léon Bloy's mystical prose, Georges Rouault's paintings and St. John of the Cross' mystical verses.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 263.

⁶¹ *HA*, pp. 241–243, 283.

⁶² Ibid., p. 283.

(iii) Breaking Through: Poetic-Mystical Language

With this in mind, and to unravel the apparent paradox in what Maritain says of mystical union, a two-fold strategy of 'breaking through' ontotheology must therefore be employed. The first step is differentiating between metaphysical language and poetic-mystical language in those influencing Maritain's reflections on God and mystical union and in Maritain's reflections themselves. The difference, for the purpose of retrieving a pre-metaphysical tendency in Maritain, is not that one language is a true way of expression or refers to what is true, whereas the other is not or does not. Rather, the important difference for the purposes of this study is the *kind of truths* they express, or invite one to enter into. The difference in *mode* of expression between metaphysical poetic-mystical statements is obvious and irrelevant to the charge of ontotheology. It is the content that matters.

The second (and conclusive) step of the strategy that will be employed is determining which of the two kinds of language, metaphysical or poetic-mystical, for Maritain, expresses or invites one to participation in the *highest* truths about God and mystical union. This cannot be done by merely repeating Maritain's own statements on the 'degrees' of knowledge, that metaphysics, as I quoted Maritain in the introduction, 'awakens a desire for supreme union, for spiritual possession completed in the order of reality itself [of which metaphysics] cannot satisfy'.⁶³ Against any and all types of natural mysticism, neo-Platonism, theosophy and idealism, Maritain is adamant that mystical wisdom is higher than metaphysical wisdom in its being a connatural experience-knowledge of God's essence and inner life, and that human love and poetic experience (not what I called Infused-Poetic Contemplation) are the most significant natural analogies of mystical experience. But having had a tour of Maritain's treatments of mystical union, we have seen that half of his utterances remain saturated with ontotheology. Determining the primacy of mystical language over metaphysical language can only be determined by returning to Maritain's treatment of mystical experience of the Holy Trinity in

⁶³ DK, p. 7.

light of St. John of the Cross and the salient facts in Maritain's biography. The upshot of this is that we can immediately see that despite the rather tortuous back-and-forth of the preceding discussion, much progress in this two-step strategy has already been made.

Maritain's conceptions of God and mystical union are not ontotheological in character so long as he speaks in the language of the poet-mystic, very much reliant on St. John of the Cross, as we have, for example, in the representation of the union of the soul with the Persons of the Trinity in God 'breathing through' the garden of the soul and the fragrance of the soul themselves 'breathing forth'. Such language is clearly mystical, and not metaphysical, only if, and as long as, *the language employed draws neither explicitly from the principles of 'efficient' causality and entitative distinction nor from other ontotheological tropes, such as conceiving God as presence in visual metaphor—except, of course, where this is unmistakably poetic* (this is not to say *untrue* or *less true*). It is *only* when he speaks in the same language of the poet-mystic (Bloy and St. John of the Cross in this case) that is, through Infused-Poetic Contemplation, that a deeply embedded pre-metaphysical, mystical tendency is revealed in Maritain's thinking—and which is, in fact, the driving force behind his philosophical utterances. The inspired words of the poet-mystic, in which God and the mystical experience of God are not overlaid with or even resting on a metaphysics of *esse* and *essentia*, but are, in Caputo's terms, coming from a place of an 'alethiological' experience of the presencing and withdrawal of God, is what we seek here.

Admittedly, the boundary between the metaphysical and the poetic is anything but water-tight. It is in fact quite porous, and especially so when we consider notions such as the 'beatific *vision*.' But it is the distinction between the two which allows Maritain to contribute quite radical developments of Thomistic philosophy of religion. Central Christian beliefs, such as the existence of heaven, are, for Maritain, conveyed as metaphors for the transcendence of God (metaphor being essential for poetic language, and again, no less true than metaphysical statements, albeit of a different kind of truth). And again, Maritain speaks of 'a mysterious perfection, which is in God

the unnamed exemplar of suffering in us',⁶⁴ which he goes on to say, 'implies limitation and imperfection in its very notion and so cannot be said of God except metaphorically, but which in the reality to which it refers as we *experience* it, does designate a perfection'.⁶⁵

It is also because of this distinction that the vocations of the artist and the metaphysician are radically different. And it is because the Christian artist does not rely on *ratio*, does not continually seek to *know*, as does the philosopher, that they, like the Christian mystic, must undergo a *kenosis* of self in their contemplation of the divine, such that the Christian artist and Christian mystic understand each other, as Maritain says. '*I was reduced to nothing and I knew no more. Beyond knowing? That is to say, in love. . . . For now my exercise is in loving alone.*'⁶⁶ The artist, as we have seen, recognizes in the beautiful that which is most real, most lovable, and in the case of Christian artists who pursue the divine as their very subject matter, such as Bloy, Rouault, Raïssa Maritain and St. John of the Cross, this is precisely where the convergence of the artist and mystic converge—their knowledge not arising from or expressing metaphysical principles, but mystical truths of love, because love is their mode of knowing.⁶⁷ As St. John of the Cross speaks of the 'spiritual marriage', and of the breathing between the human soul and the Persons of the Trinity, so does Bloy speak of the '*Friend of God*' who finds themselves 'speaking to God as a lover speaks to his beloved.'⁶⁸

Now, the question needs to be asked: does Maritain *himself* employ mystical-poetic language to express divine truth and experience of mystical union? Other than having recourse to St. John of the Cross' metaphor of the 'breathing' between the human soul and the Persons of the Trinity, we have, indeed, already seen that Maritain employs poetic-mystical language to express mystical union analogically—which is where the utility of the doctrine of analogical being for our purposes lies. We recall that Maritain says that when

⁶⁴ See Part I, section five of the present study: 'Petit Frère de Jésus', in the chapter 'Truth Among Saints'.

⁶⁵ *UT*, p. 261.

⁶⁶ *DK*, pp. 371–372 (original emphasis).

⁶⁷ See Part II, Chapters 2 and 3.

⁶⁸ Leiva-Merikakis, 'Léon Bloy and Jacques Maritain', p. 77.

two people are united in the deepest love, each becomes ‘a part which no longer exists except through and in that All which is his or her All. . . . in the magic and the spiritual “superexistence” of love . . . [which is] precisely what is in itself impossible and makes no sense in the order of mere existence or simple being.’⁶⁹ Of artistic experience, Maritain writes that the [P]oet ‘completes the world of creation; he cooperates in divine balancings, he moves mysteries about; he is in natural sympathy with the secret powers that play about in the universe. A slide down the inclined plane of heaven, a push from grace: the sleeper will change sides, and will wake up with God.’⁷⁰

The latter quote, which suggests that the [P]oet is participating in the creative acts of God while remaining in ignorance of the fact until they ‘wake up’ from a certain sleep, is particularly pertinent to what I claim is a relationship of mutual dependence between *apophasis* and *caritas* in the overcoming of metaphysics in Maritain. For in ‘Song of Songs’, a translation of and commentary on the biblical poem *Song of Songs*, which, as I previously related, was originally published as the final chapter in Maritain’s final book in 1973—in rather remarkable parallel to Aquinas, whose last work was a commentary on the same text⁷¹—Maritain gives what he calls a ‘*completely open reading*’⁷² of the poem and of the sleeping of the Shulamite woman, who is one of two main characters in the poem, along with her lover.

This commentary, Maritain tells us, he originally wrote for private use, reading the *Song* or ‘Canticle’ ‘*in the way that pleases me most,*’ rather than being for the purpose of contributing to the field of scientific biblical exegesis.⁷³ Knowing neither Hebrew nor Syriac, he says, the translation of the poem was done by way of collating existing French translations and he ‘hoped that, put in the form of a French poem sprung from a single continuous burst of inspiration, its incomparable beauty would become apparent in such a way as would satisfy my need for poetry, something that literal translations generally

⁶⁹ UT, p. 169.

⁷⁰ MAG, pp. 24–25.

⁷¹ See Part I, Chapter 3.

⁷² UT, p. 443.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 475.

do not do.⁷⁴

Maritain identifies three traditional kinds of interpretation of the *Song*: first, that it refers to the history of the Jewish people in their relationship with God, second, that, following the Incarnation, it prophetically refers to the mysterious union of Christ and the Christian Church, and third, that it refers to 'the love between God and the soul that has abandoned itself completely to Him in the secret of mystical contemplation.'⁷⁵ All of these are *true*, says Maritain,⁷⁶ and this confirms what was said earlier about poetic language, particularly metaphor, being just as able to convey truth about God and mystical union as metaphysical propositions, for Maritain, as well as the fact that truth for him, can be of many different kinds, as with poetic meaning. But what unites them, Maritain says, is that the poem is 'inspired from above, singing in a spontaneous impulse of the soul, about absolute love'.⁷⁷

What Maritain calls a 'reflexive reading' of the *Song* according to the second interpretation would be concerned with '*the lived spiritual experience lived out by the person of the Church, the Bride of Christ, in her innermost self, in her relationship with her Spouse*, with the stages of the progress of her indefectibly holy love, together with the vicissitudes, the purifying dark nights, the renewals of more profound union with the Beloved.'⁷⁸ The problem with providing such an interpretation, however, has been the historical problem that patristic commentators could not consider the Church's own history, in virtue of the fact that it had yet to unfold. As such, there could be no allegorical reading of the poem as an allegory of the relationship between Christ and the Church, and a complete reflexive reading according to this interpretation has yet to appear. This Maritain sets out to provide, in order to bring out its 'prophetic and Christian' meaning.⁷⁹

The most interesting element of Maritain's interpretation for our purposes, as I indicated, is his deviation from traditional readings of the

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 446.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 444.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 443–444, 448.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 446.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 447 (original emphasis).

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 445.

sleeping of the Shulamite. Maritain is concerned with the ‘mystery’ of the ‘Person’ of the Christian Church, this Person taken to be ‘an ontological person properly so called, a created person made up of a multitude’.⁸⁰ This Person that is the Church, is the Bride of Christ, represented here by the Shulamite. And in her capacity as a person, the Church is liable to failure and infirmities with respect to her relationship to God, but with the qualification that a distinction has to be made between the Person of the Church strictly speaking, who remains ‘constituted from above’ and without fault, and the ‘members’ or *personnel* of the Church, who are the imperfect human beings that make up its hierarchies.⁸¹ The failures of the Church’s personnel, we see, for example, Maritain says, in the Inquisition.⁸² There are, then, periods of darkness that the Church has to live through.

But, says Maritain, whereas traditional commentators have argued that the Shulamite’s sleeping signifies negligence and a forsaking of God on the part of the Shulamite—who has traditionally been taken to be Israel or the Bride of Christ—the *Song* actually contains ‘*absolutely no reproach*’ with regard to her.⁸³ Upon reading the *Song*, ‘what is certain’, Maritain writes, ‘is that, however serious it is, the damage caused within the personnel of the Church and by that personnel are far less important in the eyes of the Bridegroom than progress in charity in the Person of the Church, in its living relationship of love with Him.’⁸⁴

Suggesting an alternative approach to interpreting the apparent inactivity of the Shulamite, Maritain writes that ‘Between sleep and the night there are surely certain affinities’.⁸⁵ And what we find are four different kinds of sleep and night in the *Song*, interpreted by Maritain to be a kind of contemplation in mystical union. The first is the Shulamite falling asleep in the arms of her Beloved, which Maritain calls ‘the silent ardor of holy

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 456.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 461–463.

⁸² Ibid., p. 464.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 452.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 469.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 464.

contemplation, with eyes closed to everything else.⁸⁶ Maritain inserts this line in the first part of the poem, in which we find the same metaphor of breathing as in the previous discussion:

Alone with each other! The two of us in a single breath of love.⁸⁷

The second night takes place after '*the night of the senses*', which Maritain takes to be the same spiritual purification spoken of by St. John of the Cross. Thus Maritain's version of the *Song* reads:

In my bed, through the long dark nights,
I sought my soul's true love.
I sought him but did not find him.⁸⁸

Maritain says this dark night is the 'mystery of nothingness' of the creature that is the correlative of the 'mystery of God'.⁸⁹ The Shulamite, the Church, or, understood in St. John of the Cross' terms, as the individual human soul, 'must first pass through the night, before being led into the silence and peace of a contemplation that is this time more profound and more abandoned than that of the first sleep, so that she may grow in charity'.⁹⁰

The third sleep is referred to only in one line:

I am asleep, but my heart is awake.⁹¹

Maritain says that in this sleep, which falls over the Shulamite, nothing remains of any gentleness or sweetness, but she is nevertheless 'at the very depths of her being . . . anxiously attentive to the slight indication of her Lover's

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 465.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 481.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 483.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 465.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 487.

approach.⁹² This is the dark night of the soul, the 'abyss' which

precedes and acts as an immediate preface to that great night in which the highest and most precious powers of the soul will be bound and in which the soul will be besieged by temptations to go astray, under the crushing weight, felt in the heart, of having been abandoned by God.⁹³

Maritain writes that it is at this point which the Beloved appears and knocks at the door, but the Shulamite answers too late, and he disappears. And this is preceded by the deepest suffering of the soul, expressed in the lines:

My soul almost left my body,
I could do no more than cry after him,
I looked for him but did not find him.
I called to him, but he did not answer.⁹⁴

Upon which she is brutally attacked:

The watchmen came across me
As they made their rounds about the city.
They beat me, they wounded me,
They tore off my cloak,
These guardians of the city walls.⁹⁵

Nevertheless, the Shulamite's desire for her Beloved grows, and there is a final sleep, in which 'the love between the Bridegroom and His Bride reaches its consummation.'⁹⁶ The Shulamite entreats the Beloved: 'Let me dream in your arms', even as she says: 'A dream? No, this is holy reality' and that love 'exults forever beyond all sleep'.⁹⁷ What does this apparent contradiction suggest? Dunaway says that 'the sleeping of the Shulamite Beloved is an allegorical picture of the spiritual faculty of vision that can take place only in the serenity

⁹² Ibid., p. 467.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 468.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 487.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 487–488.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 469.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 492.

of contemplation.⁹⁸ This we can see when the Shulamite says: 'I am asleep, but my heart is awake'. In four passages pertaining to sleep, Dunaway points out, Maritain's translation

adds specific phrases to describe the sleep as contemplative rest—She [the Shulamite or Bride] 'abandons herself to rest [*s'abandonnent au repos*] ... Her eyes rest in plenitude [*reposent en plénitude*] ... Let me dream in your arms ... Dream? But this is holy reality [*Laisse-moi rêver dans tes bras ... Rêve? Mais c'est la réalité sainte*]," and, finally, she asks how one could awaken love 'now that in the Beloved, it exults forever beyond sleep [*maintenant qu'en l'amante / Il exulte à jamais au-delà du sommeil*]?' Thus, Maritain rejects out of hand any interpretation that would suggest that the sleeping episodes signify any sort of acedia or truancy on the part of the Beloved, who instead is now seen by her Bridegroom as the one rendered perfect by her fixed gaze, the soul lost in the wonder of contemplation.⁹⁹

The sleeping of the Shulamite, then, does not represent mere idleness or even disinterestedness, but the highest kind of contemplation, only possible after having endured dark nights. And this poetic metaphor of contemplative union with God is not a one-time event in Maritain's writings. One might be surprised to learn that Maritain briefly alludes to just this idea elsewhere, in the lecture *Man's Approach to God*, where he speaks of the suppression of concepts in mystical contemplation. 'In such an experience', Maritain writes, 'distinct concepts keep silent, they sleep as the Apostles slept on the Mount of Olives. . . . The light of God-given contemplation is the ardor of love gleaming in the dark. That is why this supreme wisdom, this supernatural knowledge of love, is described as a giving up of knowing and an unknowing [to quote Pseudo-Dionysius], *a ray of darkness for the intellect*.'¹⁰⁰ And here it is well worth quoting Pseudo-Dionysius, for here in Maritain we see the strongest affirmation of the value of *apophysis*:

⁹⁸ Dunaway, 'Maritain on the Song of Songs', p. 317.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

¹⁰⁰ *MAG*, p. 35 (original emphasis).

Do thou, then, in the intent practice of mystic contemplation, leave behind the senses and the operations of the intellect, and all things that the senses or the intellect can perceive, and all things which are not and things which are, and strain upwards in unknowing, as far as may be, towards the union with Him Who is above all things and knowledge. For by unceasing and absolute withdrawal from thyself and all things in purity, abandoning all and set free from all, thou shalt be borne up to the ray of divine Darkness that surpasseth all being.¹⁰¹

A key to understanding Maritain's approach to the Song, says Dunaway, 'is to remember that it has nothing to do with discursive knowledge.'¹⁰² And indeed, Maritain says at the outset:

[T]his is not [in fact] an allegorical poem. Like every great poem, it is an enigmatic poem, in which there is no question of evoking ideas, but rather a question of obeying, in order to give it voice, a spontaneous impulse of the soul that is completely intuitive and supra-conceptual, and in which the resonances of words reverberate endlessly, but which nevertheless goes straight to its object: And this object is 'absolute love.'¹⁰³

It is of great consequence that Dunaway sees Maritain's interpretation and translation as a perfect example of the connatural mode of knowledge which is poetic experience. This, we know, is a resonance between the artist and beautiful, lovable, aspects of things.

Maritain, on the other hand, precisely by entering into the poet's character through connatural knowledge is able to understand that the poet of the Song of Songs, while he certainly was extensively and painfully aware of the many infidelities of the chosen people, was able to leave that knowledge buried in his subconscious during the composition of the inspired poem.¹⁰⁴

Thus Maritain's interpretation and translation of the *Song* demonstrates to us an Infused-Poetic-Contemplative understanding of mystical union in his

¹⁰¹ Pseudo-Dionysius, quoted in William Johnston, *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2000), p. 33.

¹⁰² Dunaway, 'Maritain on the Song of Songs', p. 318.

¹⁰³ *UT*, p. 443.

¹⁰⁴ Dunaway, 'Maritain on the Song of Songs', p. 319.

thought. What is here being represented is not merely human love as an analogy of mystical union, but the very dynamics of mystical union itself—and we have witnessed a recurrence of the theme of the mutual dependence of *apophasis* and *caritas* in the contemplative sleep of the Shulamite.

Is Maritain truly a poet? Perhaps we see something of the poet in Maritain here insofar as there is intentional emotion present in his verses, which are themselves quite beautiful even in translation. But what I am most concerned with is the *content* of the poetic-mystical text that Maritain produced as it pertains to mystical experience. It is enough to find that Maritain affirms the validity of, and attempts to effect, poetic-mystical means of expressing mystical union that have absolutely no trace of ontotheology. There is, in Maritain's mystical theology, a necessary element of 'unknowing' in the act of love that brings the human soul in union with the supreme mystery of the Triune God. The mystery of God and mystical union with persons of the Trinity, and the act of *apophasis* necessary for the soul to commune with the Holy Trinity, together constitute one of two parts of an alethiological conception of the divine and our experience of it. Perhaps the best expression that we have found is in the 'mystery of nothingness' experienced by the Shulamite as the necessary corollary of the 'mystery of God' in the dark night of the senses.

(iv) Breaking Through:

Visual *versus* Mystical Experience of the Trinity

We come now to the second step in retrieving an alethiological experience of God and mystical union in Maritain, and that is determining which kind of language for Maritain, metaphysical or mystical, expresses or invites one to participate in the *highest* truths about God and mystical union. If there is in Maritain a pre-metaphysical tendency, then it becomes necessary to show that mystical language relates to the highest truths of God and mystical union for him. I have said that in pursuing this, one cannot merely repeat Maritain's own statements on the primacy of mystical knowledge in the degrees of knowledge. One must have recourse to the experience of mystical union with the Persons

of the Holy Trinity (which is, for Maritain the summit of mystical experience), and of the salient facts of Maritain's biography.

It is precisely concerning experience that Jacques and Raïssa write that when the soul has progressed far enough in contemplative union, it 'no longer thinks of anything but loving.'¹⁰⁵ There is an *apophysis* that renders the mystical union possible, and, as far as the mystic of infused contemplation is concerned, even prior to the spiritual marriage, during the spiritual 'betrothal', the soul, Maritain says, has knowledge of God 'stripped of all accidents and images.'¹⁰⁶ In the final pages of *The Degrees of Knowledge*, some forty years before the publication of 'Song of Songs', Maritain also distinguishes between '*mystical experience of the life of the Trinity*' proper to infused contemplation and '*intellectual vision of the Trinity*', which belongs to the order of *charismata*,¹⁰⁷ an order of the 'manifestation' of the Holy Spirit which includes healing, miracle-working, prophecy, the discernment of spirits, speaking in tongues and the interpretation of such language.¹⁰⁸ With respect to the spiritual marriage, Maritain writes of this distinction:

Intellectual vision of the Trinity is not essential to the spiritual marriage. But *mystical experience of the life of the Trinity*, insofar as it can proceed only from the essential principle of infused contemplation . . . such experience is one of the essential privileges of this state of transformation. While it requires, and because it requires, the highest knowledge on this earth of the abyss of unity, this state is explicitly and formally related to the life of the Trinity: such is the doctrine of St. John of the Cross. Dionysius the Carthusian gives the same teaching. . . . This is . . . why we believe that, no matter how high a mystical experience springing from a merely implicit supernatural faith may rise outside the visible membership in the Church of the Incarnate Word, it never rises to this point.¹⁰⁹

Here Maritain affirms the primacy of non-visual experiences and conceptions of the Holy Trinity. It is only when the soul has endured the dark nights of the

¹⁰⁵ *PI*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁶ *DK*, p. 388.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 404–405.

¹⁰⁸ 1 Corinthians 12 (NRSV, Catholic Edition).

¹⁰⁹ *DK*, pp. 405–406.

senses and of the spirit that it is truly able, by a necessary *apophysis* of all knowledge and an absorption of its will into the will of God, to enter into the mysteries of Christianity and the *life* of God. This is in contradistinction to what one might *think* God is, one's conception of God being permeated by images drawn from the imagination and always, as is the case with visionary experiences such as apparitions, embroiled in the complication of what the Church calls 'discernment of spirits': knowing where each given appearance of a supernatural reality comes from, and judging whether it is good or evil in disguise. The Infused-Poetic Contemplation of St. John of Cross, manifest in the two verses cited at the beginning of this chapter, leads Maritain to a non-metaphysical understanding of the experience of the Holy Trinity in the spiritual marriage and the beatific vision. The language of the mystic, Maritain says, is 'necessarily other than the language of philosophy.'¹¹⁰ St. John of the Cross is not concerned with metaphysical or theological knowledge of God, nor really 'telling us what perfection is, as leading us to it', being a 'practitioner of wisdom.'¹¹¹ In mystical experience of God, there is a stripping of all representational imagery, and as such, of the conception of God as mere presence, and the subject-object dichotomy. As Caputo says, 'There is a question, not of looking at God, but of yielding to His embrace'.¹¹²

Can this be confirmed by those most influential in Maritain's life and thought other than St. John of the Cross? Certainly Bloy, to whom Maritain owes his religious faith, uses visual imagery, but in a decidedly *poetic* fashion, according to the qualifications set out above. It need not be pointed out that Bloy was certainly *not* a metaphysician or philosopher. His prose does not make its way by means of *ratio* to logically necessary conclusions. Rather, as we have seen, Bloy's prose is mystical, employing both mystical methods of expressing divine truth and mystical union, such as assertion, hyperbole, the symbolic, and mystery. Bloy, Maritain says, is a case in whom the vocations of the mystic and the poet converge, the writer's soul enduring 'the tears of a

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 336, 338.

¹¹² *HA*, p. 277.

most harsh mysticism in an atmosphere of violence and passion.¹¹³ We recall that it was because Jacques and Raïssa Maritain read Bloy's *La Femme Pauvre* that they wanted to meet Bloy. 'Reading *La Femme Pauvre*', Raïssa writes, 'we passed through the literary form as the spirits, they say, pass through walls, to go directly not to the author but to the man, the man of faith illumined by rays of that strange thing, so unknown to us—Catholicism—and so to speak identified with it.'¹¹⁴ It was only years later that Martiain, on the advice of Raïssa, began to read Aquinas, and we have also seen that in the period immediately following his conversion to Catholicism, Maritain in fact exhibited an anti-philosophical strain.¹¹⁵ One is compelled to admit that Bloy's influence on Maritain is decidedly non-ontotheological. But what about even before Maritain met Bloy? What led him to want to meet him? Before I approach this question in the next and final section, the place of Rouault's paintings in Maritain's thinking on mystical experience ought to be considered.

What are we to make of Rouault's paintings? Is it the case that for Maritain, Rouault's visual Christian art is of less mystical value than Bloy's or St. John of the Cross' mystical writings? It seems to me that because Maritain gives Rouault's art such a place of prestige in his thought, and, as we have seen, it could be said that his paintings of the Cross and Passion of Christ have for Maritain a mystical value, this cannot be the case. What needs to be remembered, however, is that each painting is a visual sign of what is experienced in the depths of its mystery. Precisely insofar as Catholicism is a propositional faith, and God is believed to have become incarnate in Christ and suffered until undergoing death on the Cross, there is no question of Rouault's paintings of Christ lacking any truth about God. But insofar as there is a mystical experience of God—if we assume that Rouault possessed something of Infused-Poetic Contemplation, but which we cannot tell from Maritain's writings—that is the *source* of all mystical art, and that the Trinity itself cannot be captured in thought, it is not unreasonable to conclude that even in Rouault there would be a prior, non-representational experience of mystical union,

¹¹³ Maritain, 'Introduction', in Bloy, *Pilgrim of the Absolute*, p. 9.

¹¹⁴ *WHBF*, p. 105.

¹¹⁵ See Part I, Chapter 3.

even as the Cross is the *locus mysticus* in his artworks. For this reason, Maritain says, St. John of the Cross calls the articles of faith ‘silvered surfaces’, *containing within themselves* ‘that same substance which we now believe, clothed and covered with the silver of faith, we shall behold and enjoy in the life to come, fully revealed and . . . stripped of this veil of silver, and in color as gold.’¹¹⁶

On the basis of reflecting on Maritain’s own reflections on the nature of mystical experience (seen in what he says about Bloy’s vocation of poet-mystic, the mystical verses of St. John of the Cross wherein mystical union is described as a ‘breathing’, and the sleeping of the Shulamite in the *Song of Songs* as ‘contemplative rest’), as well as reflecting on what those most influential on Maritain had to say about mystical experience, we have determined two facts. The first is that Maritain privileges pre-metaphysical conceptions or suggestions of mystical union, and the second is that the pre-metaphysical mystical union is one which there is both a presencing and concealment of Being, taken to be the Triune God in the highest kinds of mystical union in the spiritual marriage and the beatific vision. This, it might be said, is illustrated best precisely by the ‘breathing’ between the human soul and the three divine Persons. When the dark night of the soul has come to its fulfilment, when the soul is dissolved such that the soul’s desire, *cupio dissolvi et esse tecum*, is felt and palpable, there an ‘the invasion of peace’¹¹⁷ into the soul as it responds to the divine initiative and acts through the will of the divine itself. Despite this, the dynamic, mystical communion of ‘coinherence’ at play in the divine and in mystical union withdraws from the soul’s understanding. For this reason, we recall, Maritain says that God ‘is actually known—while remaining unknown and inscrutable.’¹¹⁸ We have therefore finally arrived at a religious alethiology of mystical experience in Maritain, replete with a phenomenological description.

¹¹⁶ St. John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, quoted in *DK*, p. 345.

¹¹⁷ *DK*, p. 388.

¹¹⁸ *MAG*, p. 36.

2. The Completion of Maritain's Mystical Theology

(i) From the Meaning of Being to Mysticism

Before concluding, I want to ask: what is it that underlies this privileging of the pre-metaphysical in mystical experience in Maritain? What underlies the deeply buried beliefs which have required so much spade work to retrieve? 'Every great mystic, as every genius', writes William Johnston, 'is like a huge iceberg with only a fraction of its vast bulk protruding from the waters. Below the surface lies the great mass of tradition upon which the whole thing rests.'¹¹⁹ In the introduction I described the change of direction in this study, from existential phenomenology to mystical experience as the most profound dimension of human existence, not as a break but a continuum, as following the *movement* one finds in Maritain's life and work. Having now a full picture of Maritain's mystical theology and knowing his privileging of mystical knowledge over metaphysical knowledge, we are now in a far better position to understand this immanent movement and determine how it stands in relation to the contemporary debate on the nature of mystical experience.

I have said that the intuition of Being—what Maritain will call *esse*—is evidently Maritain's master concept, and as we know, this intuition of Being is Maritain's radical reformulation of Bergson's own intuition of the *élan vital*. But I have suggested that there is a more primordial, mystical experience that determines his life and philosophy, the 'unthought' which underlies Maritain's life as a man and a philosopher but which, precisely as *unthought*, remains unarticulated—never, as Pattison says, 'in the power of the thinker himself.'¹²⁰ In Heideggerian terms, 'What we are really pursuing, then, is not him, not this thinker, not his articulated thought, but what he didn't think, what, in withdrawing from him, called upon him to think.'¹²¹

Just what unthought mystical experience of Maritain is this? To answer

¹¹⁹ Johnston, *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*, p. 9.

¹²⁰ *TLH*, p. 118.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

this question, I return to the story of the Maritains' salvation from suicide to their conversion to Catholicism and probe the dynamic, or what I called the movement, that I believe was at work. Precisely insofar as that which is to be retrieved is the 'unthought' in a thinker, and can, as with Caputo's recourse to the more famous reported mystical experience of Aquinas, have recourse to sources other than what the thinkers themselves write, I would like to return to two quotes from Raïssa Maritain from the time of their 'metaphysical anguish' which led the Maritains to make a suicide pact in 1902. The Maritains vowed to end their lives if they could not find meaning—or if meaning would not find them—within a year.

Thus we decided for some time longer to have confidence in the unknown; we would extend credit to existence, look upon it as an experiment to be made, in the hope that to our ardent plea, the meaning of life would reveal itself, that new values would stand forth so clearly that they would enlist our total allegiance, and deliver us from the nightmare of a sinister and useless world.¹²²

From instinct we fought against a relativism that led nowhere, against a relationship to nothingness, for no absolute was admitted. Despite all that might have turned us from it, we persisted in *seeking the truth—what truth?*—in continuing to bear within ourselves the hope of the possibility of a full adherence to a fullness of being.¹²³

Maritain's conception of mystical experience differs markedly from Heidegger's *Denken* in virtue of the fact that the former refers to a communion of love that is made possible through an infusion of grace and a bestowal of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the human soul undergoing the dark nights of the stripping of its will and its knowledge for the sake of its love for God. Nevertheless, what we see in Maritain's earliest days, judging from the above two quotes, is nothing less than a modulation of Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* as Jacques and Raïssa Maritain *wait upon* Being to disclose itself.

But we can also see that precisely insofar as Jacques and Raïssa

¹²² Ibid., p. 77.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 80.

Maritain sought out *communion* with ultimately reality—what they will come to call God—that they sought in the structure of ultimate reality ‘values’ which would demand ‘total allegiance’ and would ‘deliver’ them from an overwhelming feeling of meaninglessness, the Maritains had to go beyond both Henri Bergson’s *élan vital* and Heidegger’s *Denken*. Bergson’s conception of ultimate reality was an impersonal force that, in the end, did not satiate their existential yearning for communion with that which is most transcendent and most meaning-giving. Heidegger’s Being is not a God and *Denken* is not a seeking of intimate communion with God.

This existential yearning for communion with ultimate reality, which is the ‘unthought’ in Maritain, led both the Maritains to those who would serve to reveal what became for them the character or qualities of ultimate reality, or Being. As far as Maritain’s life is concerned, rather than the doctrines contained within his writings, the first and most important ‘revealer of Being’—that is, the concurrent meaning and infinite mystery of Being, which became known to them as Christianity—was Léon Bloy. The function of Bloy’s vocation of [P]oet-mystic with regard to Maritain was the revelation of Christian truth and the call to sainthood through love of God and suffering for God in what is nothing less than an apophatic stripping down of knowledge on the part of the human soul. Ascetic suffering is one way for the soul to participate in the redemptive work of the Cross of Christ.

Throughout Maritain’s life, from the sense of meaninglessness and the suicide pact that led to his conversion to Catholicism, to the very end of his life, we see the same love and suffering in the communion between his own human soul and the Christian God, reflected in his mystical theology. ‘Christianity’, Maritain writes, ‘is a terrible mystery of suffering’¹²⁴ of both God and human soul. But it is a mystical relationship of suffering not for its own sake, but for the *re*-union between God and a humanity and a world whose existences are all too tainted by tragedy. And this suffering, says Maritain, can co-exist with peace.¹²⁵ When the meaning of Being is love and we have journeyed to

¹²⁴ Jacques Maritain, quoted in Bernard E. Doering, *Jacques Maritain and the French Catholic Intellectuals* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 239.

¹²⁵ *DK*, p. 390.

highest peak of mystical union in this life, 'The light of God-given contemplation is the ardor of love gleaming in the dark.'¹²⁶

(ii) Maritain and the Core/Contextualist Debate

What does Maritain's immanent mystical tendency toward communion with ultimate reality, with what he came to call God, say about the contemporary debate between 'core' and 'contextualist' theorists on the nature of mystical experience? I suggested in the introduction that Maritain's mysticism is many-layered and resistant to essentialization. If 'core' theorists posit an essentially ineffable common core that mystical experiences of mystics from all religious faiths share, Maritain's conception of mystical union both does and does not fall into the 'core' category. Before his conversion to Catholicism, the divine reality that Maritain seeks is unknown and ineffable, to be sure ('we persisted in *seeking the truth—what truth?*'), but the relationship that characterizes what can now be regarded as a *mystical* seeking on the part of Maritain is one of communion, and not, say, of an undifferentiated experience of cosmic consciousness.

As Maritain converts to Catholicism and the mystical communion with ultimate reality comes to be regarded at its highest modulation as the spiritual marriage between the human soul and the Persons of the Holy Trinity, the picture becomes even more complex. For we have seen that Maritain privileges poetic-mystical language over metaphysical language to refer to this mystical union in virtue of its absolute ineffability—which suggests that he might lean toward the 'core' theory, even if as a Catholic he regards the Trinity as that indefinable reality at the core of all mystical experience. But he also says that the mystical experience of the Trinity is what essentially differentiates supernatural mystical experience from all other kinds of mystical experience, even if a mystic (for example, of another religion or an allegedly 'atheist' person of good moral character) has an implicit faith in God, writing that 'no matter how high a mystical experience springing from a merely implicit supernatural

¹²⁶ MAG, p. 35.

faith may rise outside the visible membership in the Church of the Incarnate Word, it never rises to this point.¹²⁷

As I have consistently argued, Maritain, like Aquinas, is a *Catholic* most fundamentally, and I suggest that for Maritain there is no conflict between ineffable mystical experiences and affirmative propositions about the nature of the Christian God. This is intelligible only if we place Maritain in his philosophical and religious context as a Catholic and a Thomist philosopher. He stands in a long line of apophatic thinkers and mystics, as is evident from his references to St. John of the Cross and Pseudo-Dionysius. When Yves Simon says that Maritain is acquainted with Aquinas and St. John of the Cross equally well, it is important to remember that both stand firmly in the Dionysian tradition. William Johnston, a translator of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, whose anonymous author also draws upon Pseudo-Dionysius, is a helpful guide when it comes to situating Maritain's complex mystical theology within the wider Western mystical tradition.

Johnston posits that for the Catholic tradition there are three kinds of wisdom, corresponding to three types of contemplation. First, there is 'metaphysical' wisdom, which encompasses natural theology and analogical knowledge of God, and which corresponds to the metaphysical contemplation of Being—to the one 'One of the philosophers', as Maritain says. Second, there is the 'wisdom of faith', which, 'being built on Divine Revelation, rises above natural knowledge',¹²⁸ and which penetrates the mysteries of revelation, such as the Passion and Resurrection of Christ. The wisdom of faith corresponds to contemplation of the mysteries of faith, such as those mentioned. Maritain calls this 'acquired contemplation' or 'meditation'. Finally, there is 'mystical' wisdom, which is 'experimental knowledge of God as He is in Himself',¹²⁹ which, as we have seen in Maritain (and with whom Johnston is in complete agreement), is the highest kind of wisdom. It corresponds to infused contemplation, whose nature I need not rehearse.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ *DK*, pp. 405–406.

¹²⁸ Johnston, *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*, p. 27.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 27–28. While Johnston here uses the word 'experimental', we can also take him to mean 'experiential'.

Now, the fact that these types of wisdom and contemplation form a hierarchy does not mean they are in isolation from or even opposed to one another. ‘The point to be stressed here, however,’ says Johnston, ‘is that in the Catholic tradition all three kinds of knowledge or wisdom are valid and their object is precisely the same; so far from contradicting, they complement one another.’¹³¹ One can see it that if it were otherwise, for example, that in order for the Catholic mystic to be a ‘genuine’ mystic they would, in William James’ terms, have to ‘to ignore the institutional branch entirely’,¹³² they would have to reject the first two kinds of wisdom and their corresponding kinds of contemplation—and in so doing, cease to be a *Catholic*. ‘The traditional position’, continues Johnston, ‘was that there is only one truth, known imperfectly by reason, more clearly by faith, more clearly still by mystical experience, and perfectly in the beatific vision. Faith does not contradict reason or revelation but builds on them. Far from being a rejection of dogma, it is a supraconceptual penetration of those mysteries that are formulated conceptually (and, for that reason, imperfectly) in dogma.’ There is, then, a unity of truth even its diversification—whether mystical, poetic, theological, dogmatic, or metaphysical. This is, indeed, Maritain’s point when he sets out the ‘degrees’ of knowledge, beginning with metaphysical wisdom before proceeding to mystical wisdom. It is worth pointing out that in the preface of that colossal work of the same name Maritain writes in this connection: “No one,” says Tauler, understands true distinction better than they who have entered into unity.” So, too, no one truly knows unity who does not also know distinction.’¹³³

But how are we to reconcile positive belief in a Trinitarian God with the radical apophaticism that Maritain claims is necessary for mystical union? Johnston explains that ‘Almost all the greatest mystics describe the peak-point of their experience as some kind of fruition of that mystery expressed in the central Christian dogma: the Blessed Trinity . . . Dionysius himself begins his *Mystica theologica* with a Trinitarian invocation, and this Trinitarian line is

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹³² *VRE*, p. 49.

¹³³ *DK*, p. ix.

followed by Eckhart, Ruysbroeck, and the other apophatic mystics.’¹³⁴ In complete congruence with what Maritain and St. John of the Cross teach, it is only after a prolonged period of ascetic practice and meditation on the mysteries of Christ, says Johnston, that the mystic would be ‘permitted to abandon discursive meditation and allow one’s mind and heart to be filled with the dark prayer of silence’¹³⁵—what Maritain, as we saw, calls the ‘prayer of the heart’.

There is, then, no conflict between the types of contemplation and wisdom for Maritain and, moreover, no conflict between the cataphatic and the apophatic. And it is by affirming that experience of the life of the Holy Trinity is the peak and distinguishing mark of truly supernatural mystical experience that Maritain affirms a hierarchy of religious truth and mystical experience, such that he does not fall into the category of a ‘core’ theorist. We have also seen throughout this study that Maritain makes the distinction between supernatural mystical experience *per se* on the one hand, and natural mysticism and multitudinous natural analogies of supernatural union (for example, ‘metaphysical’ experiences, experiences of moral goodness, and experiences of the beautiful), on the other hand, giving us all the more reason to reject any claiming of Maritain by the ‘core’ theorist camp.

Does Maritain, then, fall into the category of the ‘contextualist’, according to whom the apparent diversity in manner and content of mystical experiences reveals their context-dependency, perhaps with the implication that mystical experiences are necessarily determined and relative to the religious, cultural and linguistic context in which they occur?

I would like to suggest that here things are equally complicated with Maritain. For Maritain’s immanent mystical tendency is clearly religious, consisting most basically in an existential yearning for communion with the divine which does indeed lend itself to Christian conceptions of mystical experience, precisely as *union* and not, say, cosmic consciousness. But we have seen that this very yearning toward communion with ultimate reality did

¹³⁴ Johnston, *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*, p. 28.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

not arise from any Christian or a Catholic context, such as Maritain's upbringing or his education (in fact, we recall that Maritain's conversion to Catholicism had scandalized his anti-religious mother). Moreover, the mystical tendency toward communion with ultimate reality did not first manifest itself in Christian belief, but a period of discipleship of Henri Bergson. It was only later—through Léon Bloy—that Maritain became a Catholic, and so in this regard Bloy, as what I call a 'revealer of Being' and in the wider context of the sacramental life of the Catholic Church, only shapes Maritain's conception of mystical union at a later point—which, as we have seen, is consistent with this more primordial existential, mystical yearning.

What, then, gave rise to such a mystical yearning of communion with ultimate reality in Maritain? Now we are in a position to discount the role of what would be the most obvious determining sources and influential people on Maritain, must we now grant the possibility of God Himself providing the spiritual impetus to Maritain, leading him to an ever-greater deepening of his mystical aspirations? Or is the question of the source of Maritain's mystical aspirations the wrong question? For what leads individuals of any religious tradition or spiritual path to a particular mystical way may encompass everything from a chance encounter with a mystic or mystical text to personal temperament, which would require a different, and psychological, kind of analysis. And such an analysis may not, in the end, be successful in ascertaining the determining factors in mystical vocations. There are many different religions and spiritual paths which cannot be reduced to a common core and explained away. Analogously, at least, there are many kinds of flowers in a meadow, and they neither ask nor answer questions of why they are what they are. Perhaps in such a manner there are also many kinds of mystics, whose mystical callings deserve, like precious works of art, to be loved by simply letting them be.

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