

Metaphysics and Mysticism

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I

THE GROWING and unflagging interest shown these recent decades in Plotinus and Neo-platonism, as well as the development in the west of studies devoted to the rich heritage of Indian thought, once more brings to the forefront the question of the relation between philosophy—above all metaphysics—and mysticism. As for Plotinus, we have a better insight into the force of his genius and the originality of a mental effort that was completely magnetized by a transcognitive experience, so to speak, of contact with the One.

What does such an experience signify, especially as regards the metaphysical quest? The answer presupposes that we first address a certain number of preliminary problems. To start with, we must arrive at a common understanding of the very nature of metaphysics and mysticism. Though the definitions of both give rise to debates where a great deal is at stake, space does not permit us to enter into these debates at this point. The definitions I shall propose, without explicitly justifying them, will, I hope, allow us to proceed with our reflection. They require the examination of a series of questions that we cannot do otherwise but ask.

Should metaphysics be propaedeutic to mysticism and serve as a kind of preliminary exercise to mysticism, understood as experience of the object? Or, on the contrary, should such an experience not be at the root of metaphysics, thereby making it a kind of conceptual thematization? Is there not continuity, an unbroken progression, and hence homogeneity, linking metaphysics with mysticism, with the result that mysticism marks the natural, normal crowning of metaphysics? And, supposing such to be the case, must we conclude that there is a need for

the mystical experience imbedded in the very nature of metaphysics? We shall weigh these questions.

This quandary is of the utmost interest to metaphysics, but our consideration must begin with anthropology. And, in anthropology, two types of questions must be asked. The first type concerns the nature and structures of human knowledge. The second, to which we shall return later, is of the existential and historical order. These questions concern the concrete conditions of the exercise of knowing and more directly of the exercise of the metaphysical quest in mankind's historical situation.

The status of man's metaphysical knowledge relates to the fact that man knows by drawing his concepts from sense data through a process of abstraction. This is what we mean when we say that the connatural object of human knowledge is the essence of bodily things. In virtue of our nature composed of a body and spiritual soul, these are the objects with which our mind feels at home, so to speak. But this connatural object of our mind is not its adequate object. Because it is a spiritual faculty, the human intellect, according to the highest and most purified degree of abstraction that it is capable of, attains the transcendentals: the true, the good, the one, and, above all, being, in all their universal fullness. However, it first attains this being in the analogues that are connatural to it by ridding them of all materiality. The intellect attains it secondly by way of analogy as realized in purely spiritual creatures and, still further, in the supreme analogue, God, . . . *ipsum esse subsistens* . . . and "cause of being," as St. Thomas puts it.

Thus we grasp the paradoxical status of metaphysics in man. The intellect is capable of grasping being in all its analogical fullness. Therein lies its extraordinary power and greatness. But it attains the highest analogues by beginning with the essences of lower analogues, which are bodily beings composed of form and matter. Therein lies the root of its limits and inferiority. A sign of this inferiority is that at the terminus of the process of the concept's abstract elaboration there is the need for a *conversio ad phantasmata*, a condition for our intellectual knowledge of singular concrete beings.¹

None of the foregoing owes anything to Kant. But it is not beside the point to note here that Kant, who lacked the metaphysical perception of being as such and its analogy, set limits that characterize our imperfect mode of knowing the highest realities, the building blocks of human reason that determine the very content of its object. But it is one thing to know a higher reality imperfectly if yet in truth, and another to assert that,

¹ Cf. Saint Thomas, *ST*, I, 84, 7.

by restricting it, this imperfection determines the field of knowable things. Nor is it beside the point to observe that it is on this point that Hegel expressed his anti-Kantian reaction most vigorously. For Hegel, there is no true knowledge unless it is perfect knowledge, either as regards the object known—the Absolute—or as regards the mode of attaining this object. There comes into play here the Hegelian consideration of the limit. The limit, or finiteness, is always a provisional “moment” such that the dialectical process that is immanent in the Absolute itself and in its self-knowledge is a process of transgressing the limit.

This position has a direct bearing on the question of mysticism, for Hegel attributes to speculative *Logic*, which in fact is metaphysics, the ability to know the Absolute itself through identification with the process of this Absolute’s self-positioning. With this, Hegel, while transposing it into the key of dialectics, harkens back to the ambition of Spinoza. For both thinkers mysticism is useless since its object—a kind of identification with the Absolute—is the same as that of philosophy. The outlook is one of monism.

For our purposes, the consequences of Kantianism are just as negative, for with Kant we begin to see the rise of philosophies of feeling. Since reason is incapable of gaining access, albeit imperfectly, to being in all its fullness right up to the Absolute, man will ask another faculty, *Gemüt* or *Gefühl*, to grant him access thereto. This opens the door to the emotional and with it, and all too soon, the irrational. Mysticism, without any ties to reason and truth, thus becomes a kind of substitute for outlawed metaphysics.

It is therefore by an ascending path and in an imperfect manner of knowing that the human intellect reaches the highest realities. Because these realities are the highest, knowledge of them finalizes and crowns the cognitive undertaking of the metaphysician; to know God is the end toward which every created intellect tends with an impetus that belongs to its very nature. Here we can gauge the considerable scope of St. Thomas’s assertion: Knowledge of God, however imperfect, has more worth than the perfect knowledge of lower beings. This assertion sheds a decisive light on the meaning of the intellectual quest as well as on what should give predominant inspiration to any culture. It puts the primacy of truth at the foundation.

In this process, the intellect reflects upon itself and becomes aware of its own imperfect manner of knowing. The critique of the metaphysical knowledge of God rests upon the distinction between what is signified and the manner of signifying (*quid significatur, modus significandi*). Our intellect knows that it is unable to grasp the essence of God in itself. This

is what the Thomistic formula expresses: Of God we do not know what He is (*quid est*) but that He is (*quia est*). Of course, to say of God (as of anything, for that matter) that He is, we must know something, even in an imperfect way, of what He is. Such an understanding, which enjoys a keen sense of transcendence, allows for no traces of agnosticism.

Imperfect knowledge on an ascending path involves the apophatic way of thinking. Metaphysics requires it, especially in its higher part, natural theology.

The notion of pure perfections, such as the good, the beautiful, the just, does not carry with it any intrinsic limitation, and we grasp the pure perfections first of all in their lower analogues that are connatural to us. Since they do not possess in their intelligible content any imperfection, we legitimately attribute them to God by way of causality. A perfection found in the effect is found *a fortiori* and necessarily in the cause. Such an affirmation, then, constitutes the first step in the undertaking.

But immediately our mind perceives through analogy that the manner in which this perfection exists in God is infinitely higher than the way it exists in creatures. Such is the *via negationis* or *via remotionis*. It has to do with divesting the perfection, encountered first in creatures, of all the limitations with which it is clad, for these limitations could in no way be applied to God. The divine mode in which these perfections are actual wholly escapes us, so that in the end we know God as unknown. To know God, St. Thomas will also say, is to know that we do not know what He is in Himself.² An “unknowing that knows,” an unknowing that is not the negation of knowing but the height of knowing, since by it knowing is surpassed. Actually, the *via negationis* is not its own end, since it cannot be disassociated from the *via eminentiae*, which is like the intellect’s silent adoration before the mystery of the divine transcendence. It is as if wonder, which is the starting point of philosophical questioning, were here the end-result, as it were, of knowing. The intellect’s natural attitude of adoration of the mystery tends of itself to result in a religious attitude. But what it expresses is the awe-struck sense of the infinite distance that separates every creature, that separates every created intellect and its means of knowing from the divine essence. Still, such a religious attitude fails to reach the mystical dimension, since mysticism signifies an experience of the Absolute.

At this point, then, we must stress on the distinction between metaphysics and mysticism. We must never lose sight of this distinction, even if we have not yet said all there is to say.

² *In Div. Nom.*, c. VII, lect. 4.

II

The foregoing relates to human knowledge insofar as it is specifically human. This knowledge depends upon the substantial union of the spiritual soul with the body and upon the role of the images required for the actualization, by means of abstraction and conceptualization, of the potential intelligibility contained in sensible objects. But this consideration remains to be completed.

The human being is a showcase of the laws and requirements of every created being. In a series of chapters in Book Three of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, where he treats of the good and of God as the final cause of all things and, consequently, of beatitude for spiritual creatures, St. Thomas enumerates a weighty principle: All beings tend to become like God, each according to the possibilities of its own nature (Chapter 19). In other words, all beings, starting with the lowliest and most elementary viz. inanimate beings, each in its own way tends toward God. Thus a powerful aspiration toward the supreme source of being lifts up created being. To designate it, Thomas uses the ontological sense of love and desire. Each being fulfills this desire by attaining, as far as it can, its own perfection, since every created perfection is a likeness to the supreme and infinite perfection of God.

But this love and this desire take a new form in the spiritual creature endowed with intellect and will. Here the tendency toward assimilation with the Source takes that higher form, which is by way of knowledge and love (as an act elicited by the will). Those activities that are intrinsically independent of matter, viz. knowing and loving, find their eminent realization in a spiritual union with God. From this a twofold question arises: Is such a union possible, and what is the nature and mode of this union which enables it to fulfill the potentiality of the desire?

Such questions move us beyond the consideration of properly human knowledge and place the focus on the capacity that flows from spirituality as such, that goes beyond the specific and which, in Maritain's felicitous expression, is "transnatural." The human spirit is capable of participating in what belongs to every spirit insofar as it is spirit. An examination of the human spirit's possibilities in relation to the metaphysical order would therefore be incomplete if it did not take this dimension into account.

Prior to putting morality into practice, which presupposes rational deliberation, man has in him, as in every created being, a natural love of the Creator. Such love, of an ontological order, is inextricably love of self and love of God. And since the relationship of the creature to God can be likened to the relationship of a part to the whole, and since the part, by virtue of its being a part, tends first of all toward the good of

the whole, this natural love is a love of God above everything. To think of the good of a part as separated from the good of the whole of which it is a part is to think in contradictory terms. By loving itself, the creature spontaneously and with the same impulse loves God as supreme good.³ The will, which is the subject's *appetitus*, takes on this love and this desire spontaneously in its first movement and before any deliberation or reflection.⁴ The consideration of ontological love touches on an altogether fundamental point. Other transnatural aspirations flow directly from the spiritual nature of the soul and its intellectual powers.

Our will, the subject's appetite, naturally tends toward happiness understood as the saturating possession of the fullness of the good. This good, such as our intelligence conceives it, is not known in itself, in its essence. Our will therefore tends toward it as toward a "*bonum in communi*." Can it be reached in itself? Certainly not on this earth. But even if the soul could escape from the limits of space and time, it could not arrive at it by its own powers; it would have to love Him who is the sovereign Good within the limits of the indirect knowledge from afar that is connatural to it. It would achieve a kind of happiness; its felicity would be real, to be sure, but relative.

But that he is called to participate in the very life of God, who is subsisting Beatitude, man could not even guess, much less demand. Nevertheless, the absolute gratuity of the gift of the life of grace comes to fulfill beyond all measure an aspiration of nature that nature, by itself, cannot satisfy and whose object it cannot even conceive of in all its depth. This is because the spiritual element in spiritual creatures is a participation, albeit imperfect, in Him who is Spirit, and everything that participates tends to become assimilated to its principle. Thus the will's aspiration goes beyond its own possibilities of achievement. For as soon as the created spirit starts to think on itself, it becomes aware of the natural limitations of its capacity to act.

This is where we broach the notion of the natural desire to see God. It is a desire of the mind as a particular faculty, while the desire for beatitude, the desire of the will, concerns the totality of the subject. Our

³ Cf. Saint Thomas, *ST* I, q. 60, a. 5; I-II, q. 109, a. 3; II-II, q. 26, a. 3.

⁴ In no way does original sin harm or diminish nature's *positive reality*: "As a result, everything that belongs to nature in a positive way remains 'intact,' metaphysically considered (...) all that is ontological love, natural appetite, even the elicited natural appetite of the *voluntas ut natura*, remains intact. This love, moreover, focuses on the last end *in communi*; only implicitly is it a love of God." On the other hand, the wound of original sin shows up at the level of free elicited love. At this level, love of God above all things is not possible for man except as a vague desire. See the Note of Fr. Michel Labourdette in Louis Gardet and Olivier Lacombe, *L'expérience de Soi. Etude de Mystique comparée* (Paris: Desclée, 1981), 183.

intellect has a mediate and indirect knowledge of God. It knows Him not in Himself but indirectly in the looking glass of things. But of itself, by its metaphysical nature, the intellect as intellect is not fully satisfied unless it knows perfectly the essence of the reality known first only imperfectly. To know perfectly is to see intellectually, to have a direct grasp of the essence. Thus the desire to see the first cause presupposes the effort of reason to trace back from the effect to the cause. The mediation of some reasoning, as a kind of precondition, is therefore required. But to see the first cause in itself is beyond the capabilities of any created intellect. By itself, our intellect cannot reach that far.

Hence, when the intellect is called to the beatific vision by virtue of a gratuitous elevation to the supernatural life, the desire of nature finds fulfillment beyond all expectation. Still, because of the limitations of every created nature, such a desire can in no way be considered a command. The satisfaction of this desire is impossible from the resources of created nature, yet this desire is not vain; it is not a contradiction, which would mean the destruction of reason. As in the case of the desire for beatitude, its presence bears witness to the created spirit's participation in Him who is Spirit, and to the tendency of that which participates in a perfection to be assimilated to its principle.

Thus we find ourselves faced with the paradoxical conjunction of two affirmations: On the one hand, our intellect is only satisfied when it knows its object perfectly, for which reason it aspires to a perfect knowledge of God, the First Cause; on the other hand, this knowledge of God as First Cause is only granted in the beatifying vision, which our mind is not capable of attaining through its own powers. This incapability holds for the nature of every created intellect.

The paradox disappears as soon as we consider the factors at work in the process of intellectual knowledge. As an illuminative power, the agent intellect abstracts essences from things as they are perceived first by the senses; it is an active power whose capability is proportionate to the knowledge of a spirit that is the form of a body. Its capability is therefore limited. But it is in the possible intellect that knowledge, properly so named, takes place when this intellect becomes intentionally the thing known. As to its spiritual nature, the possible intellect is a participated spiritual nature, to be sure, yet one common to all spirits. As such, then, the possible intellect is capable of receiving in itself every intelligible object, including the highest, God seen with clarity, when it is enlightened by the *lumen gloriae*. In relation to the reception of knowledge so sublime, knowledge that is literally divine, the possible intellect is in obediential potency. In other words, the receptive potency of the possible intellect goes beyond

the natural capabilities of the agent intellect (*lumen naturale*). It is open to receiving every intelligible object and since it is fully actuated only when it knows its object perfectly, a natural desire points it toward perfect knowledge of the first cause as soon as it gets an inkling of it.

It should be noted that by naturally desiring an exhaustive knowledge of the First Cause, our intellect does not thereby formally desire the beatific vision of the Godhead or of the Trinitarian mystery. Because of the limited power of the agent intellect, our mind is incapable of responding to this desire by itself. This is what we mean in speaking of a transnatural desire.

Thus we can formulate a second conclusion: To speak of a perfect knowledge of God, First Cause, is to evoke an experience, that is, a direct and fruitful knowledge of the Absolute, is it not? We should say, then, that although our metaphysical knowledge, which is a conceptual knowledge, is not mystical knowledge, a mystical surge nonetheless animates every great philosophy.⁵

III

We are now in a position to address mystical knowledge itself. Even in the philosophy of religion there is today an inflated use of the word “experience.” And it should be noted that this short reflection does not concern religious experience or its manifold modalities as such, but mystical experience in the strict sense. Moreover, the word “mystical” itself is not exempt from abusive distensions. I borrow my definition from an author who is an authority on the subject, the philosopher and Islamicist Louis Gardet. By mysticism is understood “the fruitful experience of an absolute”: “experience,” and therefore knowledge through connaturality; “fruitful,” which has its completeness in itself. Further, the word “mysticism” connotes “the inwardly experienced grasping of a total and fulfilling reality.”⁶ That absolute is written with a minuscule will become clear shortly.

⁵ On this subject see the remarks of J. Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, chap. IV, “Metaphysical Knowledge,” trans. G. B. Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1959).

⁶ Louis Gardet, *La mystique* (Paris: PUF, 1982), 6. The quotation itself is borrowed from Jacques Maritain in a study on *L’expérience mystique et le vide* that makes up Chapter III of *Quatre essais sur l’esprit dans sa condition charnelle* (1939), cf. VII, 159–95. See Louis Gardet and Olivier Lacombe, *L’expérience du Soi, Etude de mystique comparée*, 382. We are further indebted to these two authors, one an Islamicist, the other a Hindologist, for articles and works that likewise deal with the subject. Let us cite Louis Gardet’s *Expériences mystiques en terre non chrétienne* (Alsatia, 1953); *Mystique musulmane—aspects et tendances, expériences et techniques* (Paris: Vrin, 1961), in collaboration with Georges C. Anawati; *Etudes de philosophie et de*

Let us begin by recalling the significance of mysticism in the Christian life. It is nothing other than the blossoming of the life of grace. In essence, then, it is supernatural. All extraordinary manifestations must be excluded from its definition. These latter, even when their authenticity is duly proven, do not make up the essence of mysticism, even if they are closely tied to it.

The most perfect, immediate, and unveiled union is given in the face to face of the beatific vision, which by its very perfection gives rise to charity's unfailling love. The soul that sees God is perfectly happy. Thus the beatific vision constitutes the terminus of Christian existence, the repose in an end everlastingly possessed, the object of a fulfilling fruition beyond all desire. But as long as we are *viatores*, pilgrims and wayfarers, our knowledge is imperfect: "We see now dimly through a mirror; but then face to face. Now I know in part; but then I shall know even as I am known" (1 Cor 13:12). It is by faith that we know the divine mysteries, we do not see them; our intellect accepts them because He who is in the bosom of the Father has made them known to us (cf. Jn 1:18). In order to communicate these mysteries to us, the Incarnate Word speaks to us in our human language in such wise that the knowledge from faith that bears directly on the divine reality is a very imperfect knowledge as regards its mode, which is a human one. There is no intermediary between knowledge from faith and vision.

At this point mystical knowledge finds its place. For, while with knowledge the object is received in the knowing subject according to the mode of the knower, love is directed to the object in itself in such a way that here below love goes further than knowledge. It is from this "further" that mystical knowledge is born. The union of love, which attains the beloved as he is in himself, is the source of a connaturality, of an affinity, that makes the soul feel as if by instinct what belongs to the beloved. Thus the gifts of the Holy Spirit operating in the soul start with the connaturality of love. As regards the object known, this knowledge is none other than knowledge from faith; what it introduces is a new mode of knowing, which goes beyond the ordinary, human mode. This knowledge is without concepts because it is supra-conceptual; that is why we designate it as a fulfilling silence, a blessed night. A medieval manuscript uses the beautiful expression, "The Cloud of Unknowing." On several occasions St. Thomas adopts the expression of Pseudo-Dionysius, *pati divina*, to suffer divine things, to

mystique comparées (Paris: Vrin, 1972). Olivier Lacombe's *L'Absolu selon le Védānta* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuther, 1937); *Indianité* (Paris: 1979). Here we have no doubt the most remarkable effort of speculative philosophy on the subject, based on firsthand information.

undergo them experientially. In this unknowing (which we should not confuse with the *via negativa*), the soul experiences the deepness of faith's mysteries, their beauty and their beatifying power. Such in sum is the nature of Christian mysticism: experience of God's depths through the connaturality of love.⁷

With her fraternal communion, with the bread of the word of God, and with her sacramental and Eucharistic life the Church constitutes the normal environment for the mystical union through love. At this point we may consider two essentially theological questions that are of interest to the philosopher who is investigating the ties between mysticism and metaphysics.

The first question deals with whether mystical experiences, those falling under the heading of mystical union in charity, are possible outside the visible boundaries of the Church. The answer has to be affirmative. Christ's grace is offered to all; we would not be able to exclude such an experience a priori. Still, such a union presupposes that the soul in question has faith, albeit an implicit faith, and lives an upright life. But since it is partially deprived of the word of God and of the sacramental life, this experience will most often take an atypical form and will show up sporadically. Only an in-depth examination of each case can allow us to recognize it. In Islam, al-Hallaj, whom Louis Massignon has studied, represents a particularly moving example of a mystic who experiences profound things of God.⁸

Is the supernatural mystical experience of God's depths the unique form that, albeit masked, is to be found wherever there is mysticism?⁹ Or should we acknowledge another form of mysticism, which would be distinct in essence? The testimonies of India first of all, but also of Sufism in the land of Islam, witness to the existence of this other form. Let us try to draw a quick sketch of it.

Because of its union with the body, our soul does not have direct knowledge of itself. To know what its essence is we must go by way of analysis and reasoning. When we perform acts of thinking and willing, these acts are accompanied by an imperfect and confused awareness of our

⁷ A fulfilling experience anticipating eternal bliss: We have no need here to deal with the meaning of the phases of desolation and fulfillment that mark the mystic's life.

⁸ Cf. in Louis Gardet and Olivier Lacombe, *L'expérience du Soi*, Part II, chap. II (Louis Gardet), 209–48.

⁹ I took up this question in a contribution to the symposium organized by the *Revue Thomiste*, at Toulouse (26 and 27 May 2000), "Surnaturel," *Une controverse au cœur du thomisme au Xxe siècle*, forthcoming as *Sur la mystique naturelle*.

existence as spiritual subjects. Moreover, our being, like every being, is animated by an ontological love of self, which was spoken of earlier. Thus the human soul does not see its own essence but it knows, by the activity of its powers, that it exists. How could it not seek to get back to the sources it has so vaguely perceived in order to know them through a saturating experience? Such a seeking, which requires the use of refined techniques and a sometimes heroic asceticism, requires all its spiritual energy. Therefore, the experience in question has for its object the pure substantial *to be* of the *self*. Unlike the ordinary course of mental activity, which brings us first to the knowledge of things and, from there, indirectly to the knowledge of ourselves, this process of returning to the source obliges the soul to empty itself of every particular operation and of all multiplicity. Through this very abolition of every ideating act, it can thus “attain and know, in the night and beyond every concept, the metaphysical wonder, the absolute, the perfection of every act and of every perfection, which is *to be*—its own substantial *to be*.” This abolition of every act of thinking is itself an intensely vital act of the soul. In this supra-conceptual experience of the finite absolute, which is the pure *to be* of the human self, the Cause of being is attained mediately without the intervention of any rational reference. If this is so, it is because this negative experience attains existence, which is transcendent and limited only by the essence that receives it, of which precisely at this point nothing is known. When this negative experience attains the soul’s own proper existence, it attains at the same time *be-ing*, in the whole of its metaphysical scope, and the sources of *being* insofar as a creating influx, from which it receives everything, courses through the soul’s existence. Of course, we do not experience an influx of this kind in itself but in the effect it produces. “This is why the experience in question responds to the desire of everything to get back to its sources and the principle of its being, although only in a certain fashion and in so far as that is possible on a natural level.”¹⁰

It is essential that the metaphysician pay attention to this kind of experience. For we have here a quest for an experience that the human spirit attempts to acquire by its own strength and which is of an intellectual nature; at the end of the emptiness that the intellect creates in itself, there comes this “touching,” about which Plotinus speaks and which crowns a trajectory of unknowing. Metaphysics, which supposes the abstractive intuition of being as *actus essendi*, is a conceptual and rational knowledge. Its limitations are those of human reason, which the metaphysician must

¹⁰ Cf. J. Maritain, *On the Church of Christ: The Person of the Church and Her Personnel*, chap. X, “Invisible Presence in/of the Visible Church,” trans. Joseph W. Evans (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973).

know how to accept. He may have a great temptation to free himself from the natural limits of our knowing in order to gain possession of its proper object experientially.

Moreover, a mystical impulse of this kind generally demands, by its very strength, the elaboration and architecture of metaphysics itself in him who surrenders himself to it. And it is no coincidence if this kind of metaphysics undergoes the allurements of monism. In Hindu thought, which is ignorant of creation in the proper sense, the *Self* (*atman*) is basically the same in man as in God. We can understand how the pressure exerted on the conception of the world and of man by the quest for a union obtained beyond every distinction shapes the vision of the word in the image of the soul's journey toward the One. Hence, in order to judge a particular philosophy along with the meaning of its statements, we should look for the intention that is at its origin. Is this intention the building up of a knowledge based on the highest causes; in other words, is metaphysical wisdom the goal? Or is it the quest for a supra-conceptual experience that bends the use of conceptual knowledge and the real gifts of the metaphysician to its own ends?

It is not easy to answer these questions. Each case must be examined on its own. This is especially the case if we keep in mind that with metaphysics on one hand and the search for the experience of its own sources by way of unknowing on the other, we are faced with attitudes that proceed from the root of the spirit and which may coexist in the same subject in their inceptive and atypical state; the possibility of passing from one attitude to the other cannot be excluded. To this must be added the possible conjunction with the poetic experience, an experience of the world and the self caught in its creativity.¹¹ I have described pure types. In the state of touches, it is not rare that the experience of the self intervenes within the framework of a search that remains essentially metaphysical. From the consideration of the mysticism of the experience of the self, we can draw a third conclusion. More often, no doubt, than we would suspect, the presence of mystical touches of the self is discernible in more than one thinker who remains above all a metaphysician. This presence is not without repercussions in the metaphysical undertaking itself.¹²

A final remark concerns the problems bound up with what is called Christian philosophy, that is, a philosophy whose work of reasoning

¹¹ Cf. L. Gardet and O. Lacombe, *L'expérience du Soi*, Part II (Louis Gardet), chap. III, "Poésie et expérience du Soi," 249–317.

¹² Louis Gardet interprets the thought of Heidegger in this sense, cf. L. Gardet and O. Lacombe, *L'expérience du Soi*, Part II, chap. IV, "Expérience du Soi et discours philosophique," 319–69.

unfolds under the influence of the faith while, strictly speaking, remaining genuine philosophy. The philosopher who intends to reflect upon the mysticism of the profound things of God will not hesitate to borrow from a higher science, theology, the light needed to deal with an object that surpasses his own knowledge. Moreover, if from a subjective standpoint this philosopher has some experience of the things of God in faith, even if only in an attenuated and sporadic manner, metaphysical reasoning in him will by that very fact be enlivened and invigorated.

As regards the mysticism of the self a somewhat different question arises. The ontological love of self and of God as cause of being is in itself a good thing, so *basically* the experience of the Self is a positive experience. But it is here that we must take into account man's historical condition: Because of original sin, the natural love of God above all things is not efficacious when we reach the level of the elicited and free act of the will. Grace is needed to rectify the will. Speaking ethically, then, nothing prevents the experience of the self from being rectified in the soul in the state of grace. It should be noted, however, that grace does not transform our experience, which of itself is on a natural level, into an intrinsically supernatural experience. Grace enters here as a conditioning and as *gratia sanans*. We should add that since the experience of the self is attained at the end of a hard and often heroic effort, there is a strong temptation for the soul to make itself the center of everything, which, let us stress, would be the negation as it were of the ontological love that is at the root of the whole undertaking. But in itself, the experience of the self, even if it is still perilous, does not in principle raise any objection.¹³ N-V

¹³ Cf. Heinz-R. Schmitz, *Sur le rôle de la volonté dans l'expérience mystique du Soi*, in *Revue Thomiste* 79 (1979): 409–23. This author points out that *the mystical experience of the Self* does not always have the strongly religious bent that it has in the traditions of India.

