

PART II

Maritain and Bergson: A Friendship Regained

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Towards the end of his life, when he attempted to distinguish between philosophers and ideosophers, Jacques Maritain wrote: "And then there was Bergson, who contrary to the others—[the idealists]—really was a philosopher."¹ And indeed this was not the only time he had praise for his old teacher, whom some fifty years before he had severely criticized. Once taken to be one of Bergson's most promising disciples, Maritain, a convert both to Catholicism and Thomism, broke completely with Bergsonism, or seemed to; his attack on Bergson endures and still receives attention, as in Leszek Kolakowski's recent study of Bergson, a study that corroborates many of Maritain's points.² I say it has endured because many similar examinations of Bergson's philosophy from the same period have disappeared.³

Maritain was not only a student of Bergson, a disciple for a time, but he enjoyed his friendship as well.⁴ His wife Raïssa who is a

¹Jacques Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 101.

²Leszek Kolakowski, *Bergson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

³See Reginald Garrigou-Lagrangé's "*Chronique de métaphysique: autour du blondelisme et du bergsonisme*" in *Revue Thomiste* 21 (1913), 373–75. For a later study of this type, see Régis Jolivet, *Essai sur le bergsonisme* (Lyon: Librairie Catholique Emmanuel Vitte, 1931).

⁴Jacques Maritain, *Carnet de notes* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965), 88. Maritain speaks of a visit to Bergson. In an earlier passage, dated 1906, Maritain speaks of human duration "which knows two states which differ in nature: the state of peace and the state of war," 35. Not only is Bergsonian language used, but also the Bergsonian technique of antinomies.

more important source for understanding the relationship between the Maritains and Bergson does not describe her personal relationship with Bergson as a friendship. For her, he was a teacher—she has a good deal to say about his course on Plotinus—and he was her counsellor. Nowhere does she speak of him as a friend, although the lengthy discussion of Bergson in her biographical work, *Les Grandes amitiés* (*Great Friendships*)⁵ might well lead the reader to include Bergson in that number.

The issue concerns the relationship between philosophical agreement and personal friendship. There was no dramatic break between Bergson and Maritain, the way some friendships end. There was no personal incident as when Rousseau turned on David Hume. But the absence of philosophical agreement led to an estrangement, at least, that was to last for about thirty years from about 1907 until 1937. For this I depend on Raïssa's statements. It was a matter of two philosophers operating in different milieux where encounters were unlikely. But after that long hiatus, the two came together at the end of Bergson's life and the relationship was firmly planted on new ground, on faith rather than on philosophy.

What I shall attempt to do is present in summary form the criticisms that Jacques Maritain made of Bergson's philosophy with special attention to the notion of God in that philosophy; to show that Maritain became more understanding of Bergson's philosophy as time went on, although he still remained critical of it; finally, to sketch the common ground that led to a renewal of a friendship long in abeyance.

Now, had we to depend on Bergson's writings for information about his relationship with Maritain, we would have little to go on. This is largely due to Bergson's sense of privacy and discretion, and also to his decision not to allow writings yet unpublished to be published after his death.⁶ If Bergson expressed displeasure about the way in which he had been treated in Maritain's *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, we only know about it through his conversations with confidants like

⁵Raïssa Maritain, *Les Grandes amitiés* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1949), chap. 4, 77–92. In English, see *We Have Been Friends Together. Memoirs* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1942), 79–98.

⁶Rose-Marie Mossé-Bastide, *Bergson éducateur* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955), 352.

Jacques Chevalier and Father Sertillanges.⁷ And in those talks he utters perhaps the oldest complaint that one philosopher has made of another: he didn't understand me.

Three Approaches

Let us mention three ways in which a philosopher's thought might be approached. The first is the approach of the historian who is primarily concerned with understanding and elucidating the text by bringing out relevant factors about its genesis, showing connections between different works, and in general helping us to penetrate the meaning of a work that may not easily reveal its message to the uninitiated. In this genre, there are the writings of Henri Gouhier, particularly when he interprets Bergson's thought as essentially a philosophy of nature,⁸ and also his presentation in *Bergson et le Christ des Evangiles*.⁹ I would also mention those commentaries that have explored Plotinian aspects of Bergson's philosophy, notably by Rose-Marie Mossé-Bastide in *Bergson et Plotin*¹⁰ and Claude Tresmontant's inquiry into the influence of Plotinus on Bergson's conception of matter.¹¹ It would seem accidental to the historian's task to criticize, though it might be part of his endeavour to point out inconsistencies or significant contrasts between the way a philosopher viewed his own work and how others have seen it.¹²

The second approach may be called confrontational. One philosophy is examined from the point of view of another philosophy or

⁷Jacques Chevalier, *Entretiens avec Bergson* (Paris: Plon, 1959), 27–28, and A. D. Sertillanges, *Avec Bergson* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941), 26.

⁸Henri Gouhier, "Le Bergsonisme dans l'histoire de la philosophie française," *Revue des travaux de l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques*, 4th Series, 1959, First semester, 183–200.

⁹Henri Gouhier, *Bergson et le Christ des Evangiles* (Paris: Fayard, 1961).

¹⁰Rose-Marie Mosse-Bastide, *Bergson et Plotin* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959).

¹¹Claude Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought* (New York: Desclée Company, 1960), Appendix 1 "The Neo-Platonism of Bergson." *Le problème de l'athéisme* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), 235–42.

¹²Henri Gouhier, *Les Grandes avenues de la pensée philosophique en France depuis Descartes* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1966), 40–41. Gouhier shows that Bergson's philosophy, in spite of Bergson's assertion that the philosopher only says one thing, is something more than a sonata with variations on a unique theme.

from a theological point of view. For instance, Emil Fackenheim wrote a very interesting book entitled *Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy: A Preface to Future Jewish Thought*.¹³ In the case of philosophy confronting philosophy, if one of them is considered to be true or correct, the confrontation of philosophies or systems involves the measuring of one system against the standard of another. To what extent is it similar or congruent: to what extent is it in contradiction. It has been argued, for instance, that an exercise “in which a certain doctrine, posited as true, is used as a criterion to determine automatically the truth or falsity of all others” is a procedure appropriate to theology, not to philosophy.¹⁴

Now what is Maritain trying to do in his first study of Bergsonism? The English title brings out in a way the original French title does not that we are dealing with a comparative study of sorts. But it seems to be more than a comparison for there is a project of criticism and refutation. Bergsonism is to be examined from the viewpoint of Christian philosophy or Thomism.¹⁵ However, we are not presented with a definition of Christian philosophy at this early stage. Is it philosophy? Is it theology? Or is it somehow in between the two? In fact, we now know that Maritain was to accept the third alternative as the solution he offered in the 1930s in *An Essay on Christian Philosophy and Science and Wisdom*.¹⁶ However, here the status of Christian philosophy is still uncertain. For if we look closely at its pages we find frequent references to the New Testament, discussions of angelic knowledge, and allusions to faith, redemption, and dogma. It is true that certain portions of the book—I think particularly of the chapters on human nature and freedom—involve a purely philosophical confrontation. Yet the overall impression is that Bergson’s philosophy is being subjected to a theological perusal and, in that light, found wanting. The point is that behind this book there is an extra-philosophical intention, verified by Maritain’s own remarks in

¹³Emil Fackenheim, *Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy: A Preface to Future Jewish Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

¹⁴Étienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1955), xi.

¹⁵Jacques Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), 146.

¹⁶Jacques Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), and *Science and Wisdom* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1954).

the preface to the second edition, and that is to attack the philosophical foundations of modernism, a doctrine condemned by the Church.¹⁷ Thus it is not only and primarily an account of Bergsonian philosophy, and of course it is that, but through an examination of that philosophy from the viewpoint of Christian philosophy to attack modernism and one of its leading exponents, Edouard Le Roy. If I am correct in this characterization of *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, some of the curious expressions used in the book become clearer. As one instance, take “That is why a philosophy which blasphemes intelligence will never be Catholic . . .”¹⁸ Is Bergson then a blasphemer?

The conclusion of this long study is “that modern philosophy is incapable of answering Bergsonism and that Thomistic philosophy [Christian philosophy] alone has the means of refuting it.”¹⁹ Nor can it be reconciled with Christian philosophy.²⁰ Or, as he says of Bergson’s theses towards the end of the original edition, “It would be impossible to make them coincide with Thomism without completely recasting them.”²¹ In the preface to the second edition, Maritain referring to the study believes that “at each moment the discrimination is perfectly clear between the purely philosophical consideration and the philosophico-theological one.”²² And further, “this sort of philosophico-theological consideration had moreover become indispensable as a result of the modernist crisis and also because of the application of Bergsonism by certain people (and in what mode!) to religious and dogmatic matters.”²³ This confirms the extra-philosophical intention indicated earlier.

Maritain might have been asking too much of the reader in assuming that this person would easily keep in mind the two considerations (philosophical, on one hand, philosophico-theological, on the other),

¹⁷Jacques Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, 18–19. Catholic modernism “attempts a reconciliation of the Catholic faith with modern science and biblical criticism, through a pragmatic, voluntaristic, or activistic interpretation of religious truths.” Ralph Barton Perry, *Philosophy of the Recent Past* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1926), 183. See also Jean Guilton, *Un siècle, une vie* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1988), 142–46.

¹⁸Ibid., 179.

¹⁹Ibid., 102.

²⁰Ibid., 146.

²¹Ibid., 289.

²²Ibid., 16.

²³Ibid.

and I am not sure that he kept the two considerations distinct himself when he goes off on an excursion into angelic cognition in a section on human knowledge.²⁴ It would not have been unreasonable for that reader to judge that what the book entailed for the most part was a concerted theological attack on Bergsonian philosophy.

Intellectual Intuition

I mentioned that there were three approaches. The third approach utilizes a method proposed by Bergson himself in an essay on philosophical intuition.²⁵ As Maritain states it,

for it is true as Bergson expressed it, perhaps exaggerating a little, that each of the great philosophers has spent his whole life in developing, in every direction, a single intuition, in reality the intuition in question has been an *intellectual intuition*, a living intellectual perception expressible in ideas and concepts.²⁶

And Maritain will maintain that while there is truth in the intuition, its conceptualization may well lead into error. The main difference between Bergson and Maritain in this respect is that Maritain emphasizes that the intuition is an intellectual one, and Bergson does not.

Now what is significant is that the third approach is precisely the one adopted by Maritain in one of his later writings on Bergson's metaphysics, first presented in 1936.²⁷ Not only was this a different way of dealing with Bergsonian philosophy, but it set forth the method for dealing with other philosophies from the standpoint of perennial philosophy, whose motto is assimilation without eclecticism.²⁸ This third approach seems to me the properly philosophical way of encountering another philosophy, the proper way in which one philosopher views another from a critical yet sympathetic point of view.

So the conclusion is that Maritain uses two approaches to Bergson's philosophy: first the method of confrontation, evident throughout

²⁴Ibid., 152.

²⁵Henri Bergson, "Philosophical Intuition," *The Creative Mind* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946), 126–52.

²⁶Jacques Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, 158.

²⁷Jacques Maritain, "The Metaphysics of Bergson," *Ransoming the Time* (New York: Gordian Press, 1972), 52–83. The text is also found in *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, 303–24.

²⁸Jacques Maritain, *Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), 16–19.

Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism, and later, in a more moderate way, in the essay, "The Bergsonian Philosophy of Morality and Religion."²⁹ And secondly, the approach he used in the essay on Bergsonian metaphysics.

I turn then to *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism* with particular attention to the way in which Bergson's conception of God is treated. Maritain had already criticized the Bergsonian notion of intuition, Bergson's anti-intellectualism, his mobilism—being reduced to becoming—his discussion of the notions of nothingness and possibility, and his rejection of the first principles of reason, before he turns to Bergson's conception of God. Having undermined the validity of first principles (identity, causality, finality, etc.), Bergsonian philosophy could provide no foundation for a philosophical demonstration of God's existence. Nevertheless, out of his philosophical biology, *Creative Evolution*, had emerged the notion of a divinity. Even before the formal treatment of the notion of God in Bergson's philosophy, Maritain's main criticism of it was anticipated. Since Bergson fails to distinguish between God's being and "the being common to all things,"³⁰ the conception of God in *Creative Evolution* is pantheistic. When he goes on to say that "one is then obliged to choose between Spinozism and Bergsonism,"³¹ the result is the choice between God defined as unique substance and God defined as "a centre of gushing."³²

In the more systematic account, Bergson's anti-intellectualism is considered to undermine "our sole natural means of knowing God."³³ More specifically, Bergson's theory undermines the principle of identity and the principle of causality, in refusing to make a distinction between the necessary and the contingent. There is movement, but it has no need of a cause. "As a result (of these negations) it appears that for such a philosophy there is no possibility of showing by reason, with the help of creatures, the existence of God . . ."³⁴

²⁹Jacques Maritain, *Ransoming the Time*, 84–114. The text is also found in *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, 325–45.

³⁰Jacques Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, 87.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., 130 and 201. The French phrase is "un centre de jaillissement." *La philosophie bergsonienne* (Paris: P. Téqui, 1948), 98.

³³Ibid., 186.

³⁴Ibid., 188.

Starting with the intuition of duration, Bergson reasons to “a Principle of creation,” which is a “centre of shooting out.”³⁵ That is, he explores the implications of an integral experience of duration and durations. It is in this context that Bergson affirms the existence of God.

Inconvenient Consequences

Maritain’s typical criticism in this chapter is to argue that because of certain negations and affirmations in his theory, Bergson could not avoid certain consequences, namely, monism and pantheism, this “by the very fact that it tries to do without being, is logically incapable of establishing an *absolute and total, real and essential* distinction between God and things.”³⁶ Thus, the internal logic of the system has to be the basis for judgment, regardless of its author’s intentions. And here we find a startling contrast, for Bergson’s often cited letters to Father de Tonquédec maintains a position in diametrical opposition to Maritain’s interpretation:

I speak of God as the *source* from which the “currents” or “impetuses,” each of which will form a world, are derived. Therefore he remains distinct from them. Finally the argument by which I reestablish the impossibility of nothingness is directed in no way against the existence of a transcendent cause of the world. On the contrary, I have explained that it is aimed at the Spinozist conception of being. It ends up simply showing that something has always existed.

And later on, Bergson continues

the arguments used in *Creative Evolution* present creation as a fact, and from all that is said there the idea of a God, creative and free, the generator of both matter and life, clearly stands out, and God’s creative effort is continued in the realm of life by the evolution of species and by the constitution of human personalities. From all these, therefore, there clearly stands out a refutation of monism and pantheism in general.³⁷

³⁵Ibid., 199. The French phrase is the same as in note 32. The translation is inconsistent.

³⁶Ibid., 196.

³⁷Henri Bergson, *Mélanges*, ed. Andre Robinet, with a forward by Henri Gouhier (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971). The first passage is in a letter dated 11 May 1908, 766. The second passage is in a letter dated 20 February 1912, 964.

Whether these arguments are in response to Maritain's interpretation (and there are reasons to think that they are), they do attempt to respond to a chorus of Thomist critics who came to similar conclusions. It is noteworthy that Kolakowski, who cannot be accused of any benevolence towards Maritain, believes that the allegation of pantheism is well-founded, and Jankélévitch, who cannot be accused of any antipathy to Bergson, seems to concur.³⁸

In addition, Bergson, according to Maritain, conceives of the world in a manner reminiscent of Plotinus as "an *emanation* from God."³⁹ As to the attempts by the Bergsonians to rebut his interpretation, Maritain says:

The Bergsonians imagine that all that is necessary to silence criticism and avoid pantheism is to call *creation* what everybody else calls becoming or movement (and free what everyone else calls spontaneous).⁴⁰

Maritain concludes that "the doctrine is stronger than the philosopher."⁴¹ In order to avoid pantheistic consequences, one would have to say that "the world is absolutely distinct from God *by essence*."⁴² And this is not done. Thus "Bergson's metaphysics, in spite of itself, falls a prey to pantheism . . ." ⁴³ And "far from being infinitely transcendent to the world, the God of Bergsonian metaphysics cannot be conceived without the world . . . its life consists in being a *centre of*

³⁸Leszek Kolakowski, *op. cit.*, 96. The author has harsh words for Maritain about the following passage from *La philosophie bergsonienne*: "A poor peasant who believes that God created Heaven and Earth and who believes in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar knows more about truth, Being, and substance, than Plotinus, Spinoza and the whole of Bergsonism," *ibid.*, 97. It is noteworthy that this passage does not appear in the English translation. Vladimir Jankélévitch discusses the issue in *Henri Bergson* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), 255–56.

³⁹Jacques Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, 199.

⁴⁰*Ibid.* Though Jacques Chevalier's study of Bergson's philosophy *Henri Bergson* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1928), is often cited, it is not a particularly acute commentary on Bergson's philosophy, particularly when compared with the work of Vladimir Jankélévitch. Chevalier almost always presents Bergson's philosophy in a positive light, seldom is critical of it. Since he wants to show that Bergson's position on most issues is compatible with Thomism, he rather blithely assumes that there is no difference between Bergsonian intuition and Thomistic *intellectus*, and he simply denies that there are any grounds for raising questions about pantheism in Bergson's thought. Chevalier wrote a review of *The Two Sources* in *Revue des Deux Mondes* 15 May 1932, 384–95.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³*Ibid.*, 200.

gushing."⁴⁴ The immanent God of *Creative Evolution* is incompatible then with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jankélévitch also examines the problem of pantheism in *Creative Evolution*, but in the light of Judaism.⁴⁵

In Maritain's second examination of Bergson, he considers "The Metaphysics of Bergson," but this time using the philosophic method based on Bergson's own method in the essay "Philosophical Intuition," with some modifications.⁴⁶ In my opinion it is the only time that he approached Bergson from a purely philosophical viewpoint. He later turns once more to a theological perspective in his analysis of the *Two Sources* for different reasons, however, from those underlying *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*. Maritain distinguishes between a basic intuition or intellectual insight and the way in which that intuition or insight has been conceptualized. So, now we have a philosophical critic utilizing a method adapted from Bergson himself and who, albeit comparing Bergsonism and Thomism at certain points, does not adopt an extra-philosophical stance.

While Maritain offers a useful elaboration of Bergson's radical or integral empiricism in this essay, and discusses the relation between experience and metaphysics, for obvious reasons my remarks shall be confined (1) to his reflections on the Bergsonian conception of God, and (2) to the question whether there is another method for approaching God, if the approach through demonstration is not feasible. The critique of the idea of nothingness and that of possibility and contingency provides an explanation why "a rational demonstration of the existence of God in the Bergsonian system is not possible."⁴⁷ Again, a contrast is made between Bergson's intentions and the internal logic of his concepts:

The *intentions* of Bergsonism are fundamentally opposed to every form whatever of pantheism; yet one cannot see how a certain pantheism is not in line with the internal logic of those concepts through which in fact the Bergsonian system finds expression.⁴⁸

⁴⁴Ibid., 201.

⁴⁵Vladimir Jankélévitch, op. cit., an appendix entitled "*Bergson et le Judaïsme*," 255–85.

⁴⁶Jacques Maritain, *Ransoming the Time*, 56–60.

⁴⁷Ibid., 92.

⁴⁸Ibid., 77.

Let us note that it is always in regard to the doctrine of *Creative Evolution* that the question of pantheism arises. This is no longer an issue when Maritain examines *The Two Sources*. For there, Bergson too will speak of divine things.

If proofs for the existence of God are precluded by Bergson's metaphysics, as Maritain thinks they are, let us note that Bergson never really followed the demonstrative way to God. Rather we find the reliance on experience, experience and reasoning. In Jacques Chevalier's words, the essence of Bergson's method "is the use of facts as given by experience as a point of departure and making a clean sweep of all preconceived ideas."⁴⁹ Maritain too, as I noted earlier, makes much of Bergson's radical or integral empiricism. But however refined or intelligent it may be, says Maritain, it still remains empiricism.⁵⁰ Well, if in seeking for the truth of the self and duration, there is a reliance on the immediate data of consciousness, what are the experiences that would provide an experiential starting point leading us to a knowledge of the divine? We shall see that it is in the religious experience of great spiritual figures, and particularly in the experience of the mystics. So it is not purely personal experience in this instance, but that of the great religious heroes. The next step is to consult the results of Bergson's research in *The Two Sources*.

The Two Sources

There are two places in which Maritain discusses Bergson's *The Two Sources*. The first is in an essay first presented in 1936, four years after *The Two Sources* appeared; the second constitutes a section of *Moral Philosophy*.⁵¹ Maritain observes that Bergson had been interested in the mystics for a long time, as long ago as 1906.

He read the mystics as one consults witnesses, eager himself for any traces of the spiritual he might find in this sad world, and perfectly prepared to allow any evidence of it, no matter how cumbersome and unsettling it might be, to exert on him its full weight.⁵²

⁴⁹Chevalier, *Henri Bergson*, 322.

⁵⁰Jacques Maritain, *Ransoming the Time*, 52.

⁵¹Jacques Maritain, *Moral Philosophy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 418–47.

⁵²Jacques Maritain, *Ransoming the Time*, 86. Marie Cariou in *Bergson et le fait mystique* (Paris: Aubier Montagne, 1976), emphasizes the influence of the following mystical writers on

So one may profit from their experience of divine things, even when one does not have the same kind of personal experience. Bergson “considers himself justified in saying that Christian mysticism alone has reached real achievement.”⁵³ Because they “have journeyed into the, realm of things divine, and . . . have returned from it,” “we must believe the mystics about God.”⁵⁴ Despite his high regard for the testimony of the Prophets, Bergson was later to see Catholicism as a “complete fulfilment of Judaism.”⁵⁵

The process described in *The Two Sources* means moving from speculation about God in *Creative Evolution* to the acceptance of God’s existence. It would also appear that he has moved from the immanent God of *Creative Evolution* to the transcendent God of authentic and complete mysticism. “He henceforth knows with certainty that God exists and that He is personal, and that He is freely creative.”⁵⁶ God is love, and shows it for all human beings.

It seems to me that there are two issues worthy of attention in Maritain’s account of *The Two Sources* from the perspective of my subject. First of all, it was clearly Bergson’s intention to leave aside faith, theology, and the institutional church. This is in keeping with his reliance on experience and reasoning alone. Now Maritain concedes that outside of theology “it is impossible to discuss the mystical experience with more depth and with a more intense, farsighted sympathy than does the author of *Two Sources*.”⁵⁷ High praise indeed, but qualified by Maritain’s evident feeling that the treatment is inadequate. And why so? Because Maritain once more wishes to view the Bergsonian study from a higher standpoint and to insist that only an adequate or adequately considered moral philosophy, that is, one subordinate to theology, will suffice for the guidance of human actions. Thus high praise for Bergson’s philosophical efforts are offset by a concern with a higher knowledge. The effect may well be to belittle the philosophical endeavor itself, because it is all too human. This

Bergson: John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, Madame Guyon, and Heinrich Von Berg Suso.

⁵³Ibid., 88.

⁵⁴Ibid., 109.

⁵⁵Ibid., 101n.

⁵⁶Ibid., 106.

⁵⁷Ibid., 108.

instead of just congratulating Bergson on doing very well in what he set out to do.

The second point that Maritain makes is that although Bergson developed the idea of two moralities, that of pressure and that of aspiration, “the most captivating thing about Bergsonian ethics is precisely that morality, in the strictest sense of the word, has been eliminated from it.”⁵⁸ In short, while there is an infra-rational ethics and there is a supra-rational ethics, there is no rational ethics. Thus Maritain says it preserves “all of morals except morality itself.”⁵⁹ This point is well taken and has been reiterated by other commentators. And so Bergson, having no rational ethics, provides no account of “authentic moral obligation.”⁶⁰

In this regard, I have argued elsewhere that at least in one important respect, Maritain’s moral philosophy should be seen as a continuation of Bergson’s, as Bergson continues Durkheim, who initiates the sequence. For Durkheim, there seems to be only one source of morality; for Bergson there are two, and, for Maritain there are three: society, nature, and God. Maritain expends considerable energy in *Moral Philosophy* explaining the pressure that is characteristic of authentic moral obligation.⁶¹

Friendship Regained

In the last section of Maritain’s essay on *The Two Sources*, there is a kind of epilogue to the essay in which he speaks of his renewed contact with Bergson.

This master who freed in me my metaphysical desire, and whose doctrine I had in turn criticized—through love of the truth, as he well knew—this master was generous enough not to hold these criticisms against me although they touched what is most dear to a philosopher, his ideas.⁶²

They had corresponded about Thomism, and Bergson was positive about the writings with which he was acquainted. “It thus happened

⁵⁸Ibid., 93.

⁵⁹Ibid., 95.

⁶⁰Jacques Maritain, *Moral Philosophy*, 429.

⁶¹Ibid., 434.

⁶²Jacques Maritain, *Ransoming the Time*, 113.

that at last we met each other as it were halfway, each having journeyed unwittingly in such a manner as to approach the other . . . ”⁶³ Their personal encounters resumed in 1936 or 1937.⁶⁴ In a preface to a new edition of *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, written in 1947, Maritain says further

But I do not wish to allow it to leave the press without invoking here, with veneration, the memory of my first teacher, and without manifesting my gratitude for the tokens of friendship, which in spite of the criticisms I formulated against his ideas, he was kind enough to forgive me in the years before his death. There is no sweetness equal to that of a friendship regained.⁶⁵

From Jacques Chevalier we have valuable information concerning Bergson’s attitude towards Judaism and his move towards Christianity. In a conversation that took place in April 1938, Bergson says that nothing now separates him from Catholicism.⁶⁶ “In my childhood,” Bergson said, “I received a rather limited Jewish education, with special instruction in the Bible, in preparation for the Judaic initiation which resembles, *mutatis mutandis*, the Catholic first communion. But all that hardly had any hold over me, and for a long time I remained indifferent to these questions.”⁶⁷ Gradually he came to understand the importance of the religious question. “History made me see that the Gospel had effected a break in humanity. The mystics gave me the meaning of the break.”⁶⁸ However, Bergson, while adhering to Christianity, had problems about “transforming an act of adherence into an act of obedience,” that is, accepting the authority of the Church.⁶⁹ His subsequent concern was with the “tremendous wave of anti-Semitism which will strike my co-religionists.”⁷⁰ He would not want his conversion to be used by the persecutors of his race. He hesitated, then, to make a public declaration of any kind

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴“In 1936 or 1937 Raïssa and Jacques Maritain renewed their relationship with Bergson.” Henry Bars, *Maritain en notre temps* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1959), 383.

⁶⁵J. Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, 60.

⁶⁶Chevalier, *Entretiens avec Bergson*, 282.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid., 282–83.

⁶⁹Ibid., 282.

⁷⁰Ibid.

about his agreements with Catholicism, as a gesture of solidarity with the persecuted.

Catholicism and Jewish Solidarity

After his death, in an article that appeared in *Commonweal*,⁷¹ Raïssa Maritain wrote that Bergson had been baptized, but Madeleine Barthelemy-Madaule has denied this assertion. Bergson's widow, in a letter to Emmanuel Mounier stated that "while declaring his 'moral adherence' to Catholicism, my husband resolved at the same time not to take the decisive step of being baptized."⁷² In Bergson's will, dated February 8, 1937, he said: "My reflections have led me closer and closer to Catholicism, in which I see the complete fulfillment of Judaism. I would have become a convert, had I not seen in preparation for years the formidable wave of anti-Semitism which is to break upon the world. I wanted to remain among those who tomorrow will be persecuted."⁷³

And when that wave had swept over France and the anti-Semitic regulations were in place, the Germans, in their inimitable way, had proposed to make Bergson an "honorary Aryan." Julien Green writes "Bergson refused this suspicious honor. He was very ill. He rose from his bed, wrapped himself in a cover, walked out in his slippers, leaning on the arm of a servant, and in this manner paid a visit to the Prefecture where he had himself inscribed as a Jew."⁷⁴

In a country dominated by a monstrous regime, the poignant last days of the philosopher had been preceded by a decline in the influence of his philosophy. If there were those like Henri Gouhier to remind us of his stature in French philosophy, it could not be said that he any longer had a follower, a disciple to carry on the work. And there are those who would argue that his approach to philosophy was too personal to found a school. In the heyday of existential philosophy, however, his influence was present in Gabriel Marcel, Vladimir Jankélévitch, and Jean Guitton.

⁷¹Raïssa Maritain in *The Commonweal*, 17 January 1941, 319.

⁷²Madeleine Barthelemy-Madaule, *Bergson* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), 19.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Julien Green, *Journal 1928–1949* (Paris: Plon, 1961), 489. The text is not in the English translation, *Diary 1928–1957* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1964).

Maritain remained a critic of Bergsonian philosophy to the end, though there was surely a difference between the way he approached Bergson's thought in 1913 and the way he approached it later. If Maritain wanted to distinguish between a Bergsonism of intention and a Bergsonism of fact in order to indicate unexplored possibilities for metaphysical development, and if his own moral philosophy was greatly influenced by the way Bergson had posed the ethical antinomy, there always remained a great gulf between the two philosophical positions.

There were two factors that led to a renewed friendship between the two philosophers. Surely the most significant must have been Bergson's own spiritual development leading to a shared religious belief. But I think another basis for a rapprochement was the study of the mystics. The same year that *The Two Sources* appeared, Maritain's *Degrees of Knowledge* was published and two very long chapters of that major work (VI and VIII) were concerned with mystical knowledge. As Bergson discovered the experience of the mystics as access to the divine, Maritain was intent to situate mystical knowledge in the degrees of knowledge.

Great minds often fail to meet and there is something sad about such failures. Yet there is also a joy in seeing the reunion of old friends, determined not to let their differences stand in the way of basic human affinities.