

CONNATURALITY

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The highest degree of knowledge is mystical experience involving "knowledge by connaturality," says Jacques Maritain.¹ "We are made connatural to God through charity... [that] lays hold on God as He is really present within us, as a Gift, a Friend, an eternal life companion.... it wins to God immediately as God, in His very deity in the very... life with which He will beatify us. Charity loves Him in Himself and by Himself."² God is this charity that makes us share in his life and happiness; he himself must *give* it to us, as a grace; he comes to be within us, hidden in faith, but so that love can touch and taste and judge divine things far more surely than we ever could otherwise; the love that God gives us makes us know in some part *what* God is, and know it in the way that God knows it,³ though never fully in this life;⁴ it is what we shall know and see that will bless us. Thus, citing with favor some words of John of the Cross, Maritain says that "As love [God] transforms us into Himself.... In beatitude we shall be deified by intellection.... contemplation is itself a knowledge of love, a 'loving attention to God.'"⁵

¹ Jacques Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite, or The Degrees of Knowledge* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), pp. 259-60; cf. 239-40, 253, 287, 293, 338. Other works of Maritain cited here are *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, Bollingen Series 35.1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), and "Love and Friendship," in *Notebooks* (Albany, New York: Magi Books, 1984). These three works will be cited hereafter as *DU*, *CI*, and *LF*. I thank Elizabeth Anscombe and Bernard Doering for helpful conversations directing my attention to this topic and to Maritain's discussions of it.

² Jacques Maritain, *DU* 260.

³ Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 7 v., eds. Howard and Edna Hong, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1967-1978), 2:1405: "God himself is [to anyone] this: how one involves himself with Him... In respect to God, the *how* is *what*"; and 6:6784: "Everything Depends on 'How.'"

⁴ Jacques Maritain, *DU* 261-63.

⁵ Jacques Maritain, *DU* 324.

Maritain takes the phrase "connaturality" from Thomas Aquinas, though, as we shall see, the concept itself has a much older history. As Maritain explains, Thomas uses it to contrast two ways in which we know religious and moral realities. We can judge matters of chastity, for example, with the speculative knowledge of our unaided intellect, or by a certain *connaturality* that comes from loving it and practicing it and embodying it within ourselves. It is an *affinity* and *kinship*, a *congeniality* and *sympathy*, an *assimilation* and *inclination*; it arises from the experience of active charity that is both action and affect, so that we fulfill God's will and taste his joy. It is this way, too, says Thomas, with our affective and experimental knowledge of the things of God himself: we learn them by *suffering*, which joins us to him and *makes us one spirit with him*, so that we judge with wisdom that is the *gift* of the Spirit of God.⁶ It is not the fullness of His wisdom, but a share in it that

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter cited as *ST*), II-II, q. 45, a. 2, ad 2: "Wisdom implies a certain rightness in judging according to divine norms... through the perfect use of reason or through a certain connaturality [sc. affinity, kinship, congeniality]... Thus in matters of chastity, one who is versed in moral science will come to a right judgment through rational investigation, [while] another who possesses the virtue of chastity will be right through a kind of connaturality. So it is with divine things. A correct judgment made through rational investigation belongs to the wisdom which is an intellectual virtue. But to judge aright through a certain fellowship with them belongs to that wisdom which is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Dionysius says that Hierotheus is perfected in divine things for he *not only learns about them but suffers*. Now this sympathy [*compassio*], or connaturality with divine things, results from charity which unites us to God: *he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him*. So then wisdom which is the gift does have its cause in the will, namely charity, but essentially it lies in the intellect, of which the act is to judge rightly."

ST II-II, q. 97, a. 2, ad 2: "There are two kinds of knowledge about God's goodness and will. One of these is theoretic, and as to this is it is not lawful to doubt or to test whether God is good or lovely. The other is affective and experimental knowledge of divine goodness and loving-kindness, whereby a person experiences within himself the taste of God's sweetness and the delight in his loving. Dionysius says that *Hierotheus learnt divine things by sympathy*. It is in this way that we are told to prove God's will and taste his sweetness."

we must acquire from Him without our being able to do anything to earn it; God himself must prompt or quicken the love that desires it and that moves the actions that make us like him, and our whole and only action is to consent to what he does in and through us.⁷

Maritain also cites Paul Claudel for the link between connaturality and co-nascence ("connaissance"), and the notion that to know God we must be "born with" Him,⁸ which seems to mean that we must be born into God and his life of charity, that we are born for this, and with this. Let us note explicitly here that "nature" means what we are born with, and that "connaissance" means acquaintance and familiarity, and (like Plato's *aisthesis* in the *Theaetetus*) an experience and presence and contact that does *not* always involve full recognition and identification, although it often is preferable to these without experience.⁹

The idea of practical knowledge moved by love that involves transformation and assimilation, so that like is known only by like, is an old one. Plato develops a theory that true and false thought generally are combining things as they are or otherwise, so that true thought mirrors being; but he is more interested in living religious and moral

ST I, q. 64, a 1: "Truth is known in two ways, through grace and through nature. And the knowledge through grace is itself twofold: a purely cognitional knowledge, as when a man is shown divine secrets; and a knowledge quickened by desire and issuing in a love of God. This last, and this only, belongs to the Gift of Wisdom." Cf. ST I, q.1, a. 6, ad. 3. Thomas is quoting Dionysius, *The Names of God* 2; cf. *1 Corinthians* 6:17; *Psalms* 34:8; and *Isaiah* 11.2: "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding."

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, ST I-II, q. 68, a. 1: such *gifts* of the Spirit are so-called "not only because they are infused by God, but also because by them man is disposed to become amenable to the divine inspiration, according to *Isaiah* 50:5: 'The Lord... hath opened my ear, and I do not resist;'" ST I-II, q. 55, a. 4, ad. 6: they perfect our actions, so that "God causes them in us, yet not without action on our part, for He works in every will and in every nature."

⁸ Jacques Maritain, *DU* 260.

⁹ Thus Plato on *aisthesis* (sensation) in *Theaetetus* 151e, 163a-c, 186; *mantike* (intimation, presentiment, divination) in *Charmides* 158e, 169b and *Republic* 6.505e; cf. *Phaedo* 84d-85b.

knowledge and argues that only the pure may know the pure.¹⁰ Similarly Aristotle, while criticizing the idea that like is known by like, speaks of the mind as becoming everything that it knows; yet in his account of moral knowledge he emphasizes that this is practical or productive rather than merely theoretical.¹¹ It is *empirical* knowledge, of truth that can properly be known only by experience in which we fulfill it and make it known in ourselves and our actions and relationships.¹² If we love and desire the nobility of the wise and good and imitate their example, then what we do is rewarded and clarified by insight. For experience teaches us to see straight; a wise person is a *measure* of what is right and good: as things appear to him to be, so they

¹⁰ Plato, *Sophist* 261c-263d, *Timaeus* 35-37c, with Aristotle's comment in *Psychology* 1.3 406b28-31 that Plato's divine artist compounded the soul substance out of the elements and divided it according to the harmonic numbers "so that it may have a connate sensibility for harmony [*hopos aisthesin te sumphuton harmonias echei*], and that the whole may move in movements well attuned." Cf. *Phaedo* 67b, *Phaedrus* 250c, *Theaetetus* 177a, *Republic* 6.484b-d and 501d, and *Letters* 7.343d-344a. See, further, note 16 below.

¹¹ Aristotle, *Psychology* 1.2 404b8-26, 1.5 409b26-410b9; 3.4 429a14-29, b5-9, b30-430a9; 3.5 430a14, 20; 3.7 430b26; 3.8 431b20-30; *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter cited as *NE*) 6.3 1139a9-10: "knowledge presupposes a certain likeness and kinship of subject and object"; 1.2 1094a27-b12; 1.3 1095a: "the end of this kind of study is not knowledge but action"; 2.2 1103b26-28: "we are not studying [merely] to know what goodness is, but to become good, or else there would be no good in studying it"; *Eudemian Ethics* 1.5 and 2.11, and *Metaphysics* 6.1 and 11.7.

¹² Aristotle, *NE* 4.7 1127a24, and b2: a good man "is truthful in his life and in his speech... simply because it is in his character to be that kind of man... a man who loves truth and is truthful when nothing [wrong or right] is at stake will be even more truthful when something is at stake"; 6.2 1139a29: for practical thinking, the goal is "truth in harmony with correct desire." The poet Yeats says that "Man can embody truth, but he cannot know it," sc. we cannot fully know it otherwise, so that with religious and moral truth our best knowledge is embodiment, not theory, life not words. See "Letter to Lady Elizabeth Pelham, 4th January 1939," in *Letters*, ed. Allan Wade (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 922.

are.¹³ Thus, Aristotle remarks that "we ought to pay as much attention to the sayings and opinions, though they are given without proof, of wise and experienced older men, as we do to truths of which we have proof. For experience has given such men an eye with which they can see correctly."¹⁴

Thomas follows Aristotle just here when he contrasts the intellectual virtue of wisdom that we acquire by our own efforts with the theological virtue of wisdom that comes down from heaven as the gift of the Spirit to perfect our faith: "Faith assents to divine truth for itself; the gift of wisdom judges things according to divine truth. Hence the gift of wisdom presupposes faith, since [quoting Aristotle] *a man judges well what he already knows*."¹⁵ We may take this good judgment referred to by Aristotle as connatural knowledge, because he remarks that "beginning students can reel off the words they have heard, but they do not yet know the subject. It must grow to be part of them [*sumphunai*, become their nature, as it has with the wise old men] and that takes time."¹⁶

¹³ Aristotle, *NE* 9.9 1170a15; 2.1 1103a24-25; 2.6 1106b36; 3.4 1113a29-34; 9.12 1172a10-13; 10.5 1176a16: "in all matters of this sort we consider that to be real and true which appears so to a good man."

¹⁴ Aristotle, *NE* 6.11 1143b10-13. In *LF* 219-220, Maritain (now 91) quotes this in his own behalf (!), and goes on to say, "I hope that some of the privileges of the wisdom of great age will be granted to the thoughts expressed here": see *Untrammelled Approaches*, trans. Bernard Doering (Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), note on pp. 219-20.

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *ST* II-II, q. 45, a. 1, ad. 2. Aristotle, *NE* 1.3 1094b28. *Isaiah* 11.2.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *NE* 7.3 1147a21-23; cf. Plato, *Letter* 7.341c, 343e-344b. Plato writes that this assimilation should begin in childhood, with a music or cultural education of the emotions and character that makes us feel and love the beauty of right, and feel and hate the ugliness of wrong, so that when reason comes we will know it by our love of, and resemblance to, our harmony (*xumphonian*) and familiarity with it (*Republic* 3.401b-402a). Goodness thus knows itself and evil connaturally, while evil knows *neither* itself nor goodness, neither the evil of evil nor the good of good, and learns only to do evil, not to know it as it is (409de, cf. 395bd). In this sense, we have

There is a similar remark in the third century neo-Platonist Porphyry, the friend and editor of Plotinus: "The knowledge [*theoria*] that makes us happy does not consist in piling up reasonings.... Knowledge will do us no good unless it becomes life and nature within us and grows with us.... We mean to return to our true self, and the assimilation [*sumphusis*, connaturality] is to our true self, the intellect [*nous*]; and we aim to live in accord with intellect.... If we could achieve happiness by writing down words, we could do it without thinking about what to eat or what to do. But since we mean to change our life and purify ourselves in our actions as well as our words, we must consider what words and deeds will accomplish this." Both Porphyry and Aristotle think of philosophy as a way of discourse that is part of a way of life, as Pierre Hadot has argued.¹⁷ Words of truth about the ideals we love must *activate* us and *transform* us; unless we fulfill them in existence, they lack full meaning and truth for us, and we betray them. This coming alive in us and becoming our nature and growing with us is connaturality.

Aristotle and Porphyry speak only of growth and return, but the notion of birth is implied insofar as our nature is what we are born with; virtues can become part of our nature. We should also remember Plato's words that love aims at birth in beauty, which seems to be both the birth of *noble excellence* in us through our actions and relationships, and of *ourselves* in noble excellence. Also, speaking of human love, Plato says that love transforms both lover and beloved into the likeness of the god that both follow, so that they learn thereby his way and manner of life.¹⁸

connatural knowledge of good, but not of evil. In maturity, the philosopher seeks this transformative knowledge with passionate love of true being that draws near to and joins with it to reproduce it, or more exactly to let it reproduce itself, in living intelligence and truth: *Republic* 6.490ab; cf. *Republic* 10.603b, and *Symposium* 206b-e, and 212a.

¹⁷ Porphyry, *Abstinence from Animal Food* 1.29. Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 155-59 and 87-90.

¹⁸ See note 16 above, last sentence; cf. *Phaedo* 72a, with Heraclitus DK B 62; *Phaedrus* 252e-253c.

Kierkegaard is another philosopher who speaks of knowledge by assimilation moved by love. Where ethical and religious truth is concerned, he writes, "like is known only by like," by a surrender to the truth *transforming* us into, or into the likeness of, what we know thereby. Truth reveals itself only to those who reveal themselves to it in their love for it:

Christ says: I will manifest myself to him who loves me. But it is generally true that something manifests itself to the one who loves it; truth manifests itself to the one who loves truth, etc. We usually think that the recipient is inactive and that the object manifesting itself communicates itself to the recipient, but the relationship is this: the recipient is the lover, and then the beloved becomes manifest to him, for he himself is transformed in the likeness of the beloved; the only fundamental basis for understanding is that one himself becomes what he understands and one understands only in proportion to becoming himself that which he understands.

Furthermore, we see here that to love and to know are essentially synonymous, and just as to love signifies that the other becomes manifest [to him], so it naturally means that one becomes manifest oneself. The relationship is so inward (a "to be" or "not to be") that all [mere] protestations and the like about love and loving are neither here nor there.¹⁹

That is to say, we know justice and charity by *practicing* them, and that is the only way we can know Christ who embodies and fulfills them, and who as God is Charity itself. By practicing them, we become like him, and he knows us as his own, and lets us know him and the Father and their life as our own. Thus the truth about love is known only by love, like only by like.²⁰

¹⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 2.2299; *John* 14.21, 23.

²⁰ In *Works of Love*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 16, Kierkegaard argues that like is known only by like in the sense that it is only by loving that one knows the reality of love and its presence in other human beings, and only by loving is its presence in oneself made known.

Kierkegaard reflects Thomas's idea that our highest and fullest religious wisdom comes down from heaven as the gift of the Spirit to perfect our faith and the love that seeks it. To need God is a human being's highest perfection, he says, and all that we ourselves can do is to *understand* that we are nothing before him and do nothing to deserve his gift; or rather and more precisely, all that we can do is to be *willing* to understand it.²¹ I am citing Kierkegaard here not because he follows Thomas or because Maritain follows him, but because Simone Weil does, and on this crucial point in particular, as we shall see.

Connatural knowledge thus presupposes and is moved by love; in a way it *is* love. Bernard and Augustine said that we will know and enjoy God because we *love* him, while Thomas argues that we will love him because we *know* and enjoy him; William St. Thierry says that love itself is our best knowledge.²² Dante, who means to follow Thomas, clarifies this somewhat, by saying that we know God according to the purity and fullness of our *desire* or consent, our attention and faith; but that we love and enjoy God according to our *knowledge*.²³ The more we love and want to see God and what he sees, the more we can see (this is the connaturality); and the more we see, the more we love and *enjoy*, and go on wanting to see. God responds to our desire: he wants us to *ask* for what he freely gives and has already freely given in prompting our desire; all of our so-called "merit" is grace, and we have only to consent and seek and accept from him, as *his*, what he gives. William would say

²¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990); p. 309, cf. 46, 156, 273, 360.

²² William St. Thierry, *Exposition on the Song of Songs* 1.24, 64, 76; *The Golden Letter* 1.13.173, 2.3.196, 2.14.249. Similarly, Gregory the Great, *Homilies on the Gospel* 27. Plotinus 5.6.5: "Knowledge [*noein*] is a movement toward the Good in its desire of that good, for desire generates knowledge... and desire [*epheis*] to see is seeing," 6.7.35.

²³ Dante Alighieri, *Paradise* 28.109-14: "Hence one may see that the most blest condition is based on the act of seeing, not of love, love being the act that follows recognition. They see as they are worthy. They are made to their degrees by grace and their own good will. And so their ranks proceed from grade to grade" (John Ciardi translation).

that Thomas' view and Dante's really imply his, since desire purified by what it seeks and transformed into its likeness is not only connatural knowledge of God, it really is our *best* knowledge of him.²⁴

Maritain agrees with William insofar as he says that mystical knowledge by connaturality is the highest degree of knowledge here; but, like Thomas, he will contrast our best knowledge here with the beatific vision hereafter, where what is hidden in faith will be openly revealed; and perhaps William will say this, too.²⁵ What is partial here will be complete hereafter, as we are more fully transformed by love and become to ourselves nothing but what we love and know. But, even here, so Maritain explains, we already know God in some part and *what* he is and knows, and in the way that he knows it: by love.²⁶

Simone Weil, for her part, would agree with much of what Maritain is saying about knowledge by connaturality, although she would express it in her own way and sharpen many details. She is writing about a decade after *Distinguer pour unir* was first published in 1932, and while I have no evidence that she read it, there are many details of her work that suggest this. She does not use the word "connatural" in any of its inflections so far as I know, but she has the notion and uses it, as we shall now see.

First, she would say with William that love itself is knowledge. "The organ in us through which we see God is love," she writes;²⁷ "love is the

²⁴ *Philippians* 1.9-10: "I pray that your *love* [for one another] may increase more and more and never stop improving your *knowledge* and deepening your insight, so that you can always discern what is best"; *Ephesians* 3.17: "and then planted in and built on *love*, you may *know* how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ that is beyond all knowledge [but *his*], and be filled with the fullness of God"; emphases and bracketed phrases added.

²⁵ Jacques Maritain, *DU* 262, 323; William St. Thierry, *Golden Letter* 2.17.266-67 and 2.19.275.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 262-63.

²⁷ Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, trans. Arthur Wills (London: Routledge, 1956), p. 240. Other works of Simone Weil cited here are *First and Last Notebooks*, trans. Richard Rees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); *Intimations of Christianity among the Ancient Greeks*, trans. Elisabeth Geissbuhler

soul's looking." It is attention to God, desire, or more precisely consent.²⁸

Maritain uses John of the Cross's phrase "loving attentiveness to God" to characterize the union of the soul with God. Weil speaks this way too, but she will underline that it is God's attention to us before it is our attention to him: God who is love always acts first, and descends to us, and (she repeats, following Kierkegaard) our role is simply to accept and ask for what he offers.²⁹ Thus, when Maritain says that "We are made connatural to God through charity... [that] loves Him in himself and by Himself," Weil will write that it is the love of God given to us that makes us like him, the same love that constitutes the Trinity of God. He is a love that loves nothing but love and creates nothing else.³⁰

For Maritain, through charity God himself comes to be within us "hidden in faith" (in the words of John of St Thomas); for Weil, God is "implicitly" and secretly present in us as the real lover in all our love of our neighbor and friends, the beauty of the world and the sacraments; and He is only explicitly present in us when He has come to us in person, in mystical experience, revealing himself as the true object of our love, as well as its true subject and as love itself; usually he is not someone *whom* or something *that* we see so much as the light by which we see everything and everyone; his presence within us is and should be hidden, she says, even and especially from ourselves, from our worldly, materialistic ego who is the prince of this world.³¹

(London: Routledge, 1957); *Science, Necessity, and the Love of God*, trans. Richard Rees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968); *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Putnam, 1951, repr. Harper, 1973); and *Writings*, ed. Eric O. Springsted (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1998). These titles will be cited hereafter respectively as *N*, *F*, *IC*, *SN*, *WG*, and *W*.

²⁸ Simone Weil, *WG* 212; *N* 527.

²⁹ Jacques Maritain *DU* 324. Simone Weil, *F* 121; cf. *Psalms* 17.1, 66.19, *Isaiah* 30.18. Simone Weil, *WG* 194-97; cf. *1 John* 3.10, 19. Simone Weil, *WG* 110-11, 129, 133, 220-22.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 260. Simone Weil, *IC* 166-67; *WG* 123; *N* 401.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 262. Simone Weil, *N* 173; *WG* 137-38, 209-15, 97-98, 150-51, 199, 50; *F* 271.

Our best knowledge of him and what he knows and does, she thinks, is a contact unforeseen by intelligence, an adherence that is love rather than belief; it is experimental rather than merely intellectual, coming from and leading to our fulfillment and embodiment of what we understand, so that we are (or are more fully) opened to grace and undergo a transformation that lights and clarifies us.³²

We learn especially through suffering, she emphasizes perhaps more than Maritain does; and what we learn is humility and obedience as creatures to our Creator, as servants of the Lord of truth; our only freedom as servants and creatures is to choose to obey his word of love.³³ Thomas quotes Dionysius on learning through suffering, and Maritain cites John of the Cross on hiding oneself so as to enter the hidden place of God; similarly Weil quotes in Spanish the passage in the *Spiritual Canticle* where John says that

Suffering is... the way... into the thicket of the delicious wisdom of God... and consequently to the purest and highest joy.... the soul which really longs for the divine wisdom longs first of all for the sufferings of the Cross, that it may enter in.... [It] says, "Let us enter into the heart of the thicket, even the anguish of death, that I may see God."

She refers often to these lines in arguing that it is our loving contemplation of Christ, and our imitation of his unconditional love for God despite and because of and through affliction, that opens us to the

³² Simone Weil, *N* 242, 238, 245; *WG* 88, 107, 209; *SN* 93, 133; *WG* 75-77, 98-99, 198-99; *SN* 105; *N* 325, 428—"Knowledge through suffering [is] knowledge through transformation"—431. Cf. Jacques Maritain, *DU* 293: "This would be the moment to recall that the wisdom of the saints, which judges things divine by the inclination of love or connaturality,... in virtue of the very union with God, not only presupposes faith but charity as well; that it is *experimental*; that it is not only speculative but also *practical*, proceeding from union with God, guiding our activity toward such a union, regulating human life in accordance with divine rules; and, finally, that it can use discourse and fashion arguments;" emphasis added.

³³ Simone Weil, *F* 344; *IC* 56-59, 186-87, 193-96. *Hebrews* 4.8, *Philippians* 2.8. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 177.

secret of divine wisdom and joy.³⁴ Then we are united to it, so that we let it be our motive and our life: we know it connaturally, as Thomas and Maritain say; as she would put it, we *mediate* it or make it known, showing it to others and drawing them into it.³⁵

As for the beatific vision, perfecting our knowledge in the life to come, Maritain would say that this is mostly hidden from us because God's infinity escapes our finitude, and yet faith is the proof of things unseen; in the same spirit, Weil prefers not to speculate at all: we must consent with *all* our soul to everything that God sends, even to the destruction of everything *egoistic* in us, the annihilation of everything that we call "I"; but if there a difference between disappearance into the presence of God and disappearance into the absence of God, we cannot now coherently conceive it. Everything is hidden from us, from the worldly selfish part of us. Only God in us knows. What matters is to love him and desire to obey, that is all.³⁶

Thus, as we grow in selfless love and obedience, Weil would say,³⁷ we know less and less what God does in and through us—we know it less with our materialistic ego, we don't let ourselves take pride in it as if it were our own work worthy of some reward—and in this sense we don't explicitly know our own humility and justice, even as our intention; in another sense, this is just the way that we know humility and justice, by fulfilling them so that they become our nature and life and grow with us. This unselfconsciousness accords with what was said about

³⁴ See note 6 above, and Jacques Maritain, *DU* 262. Simone Weil, *N*, 215; John of The Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, 2nd redaction, 36.12-13. Simone Weil, *N* 439, 232, 261; *IC* 58-59, 195-96. See also Jacques Maritain, *DU* 366-67.

³⁵ Simone Weil, *N* 126, 358, 363.

³⁶ Simone Weil, *WG* 219-20, 225-26; *N* 467-69; *F* 142, 339: "But in these matters everything is impenetrable and unthinkable; it is better to have no opinion at all;" *WG* 90-91.

³⁷ See note 34, and Simone Weil, *N* 174, 417-18, 434; *F* 213: "the thought that I am giving something freely, simply for love, is false as soon as I think it, sc. with worldly egoism," and 271: "it is perhaps better that the supernatural virtues, faith, charity, should be implicit rather than explicit... The devil has no hold over things that are kept completely secret from oneself."

"connaissance" as acquaintance and contact that does *not* always bring full recognition.

In closing, I will say a few words about Maritain's discussion of connaturality in two other contexts. First, in "Love and Friendship," he writes of the "suitability" and "affinity" of chastity with specifically Christian contemplation,³⁸ and he goes on to mention a certain simplicity and freedom and intimacy with God that are "connatural" with the chastity of the body;³⁹ he clearly means that these characterize people who can most truly be said to *know* God in open "mad, boundless love."⁴⁰

He uses the idea without mentioning it when he characterizes the contemplation of the divine passion as "that knowledge of God which is more experience than knowledge and yet supreme knowledge, and which comes about through love and the union of love, and which is miles from the *theoria* of the Greeks and from philosophical speculation or contemplation."⁴¹ Again, this is something Weil could have said.

He uses the idea again when he describes the best conjugal love as genuinely human, spiritual, and personal, in which "each one really

³⁸ Jacques Maritain, *LF* 252.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 238 n. Maritain speaks freely of "mad, boundless love" throughout this piece, which first appeared in 1936: see especially *LF* 223-39, 245-51. It is interesting that Weil also brings forward "the madness of love" in her great essay *Are We Struggling for Justice?* (*W* 120-31), published in French in *Preuves* 28 (Juin 1953), then in *Ecrits de Londres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957). She cites Aeschylus' *Prometheus* 385—"Nothing is better than to love to the point of madness"—and says that "The madness of love, once it has seized a human being, completely transforms the modalities of action and thought. It is akin to the madness of God... in needing man's free consent.... The spirit of justice is... the supreme and perfect flower of the madness of love. It compels one to abandon everything for compassion and, as St Paul says of Christ, to empty oneself... there must sometimes be moments when, from the point of view of earthly reason, only the madness of love is reasonable... when, as today, mankind has become mad from want of love" (*W* 123, 129-30).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 239-40.

participates, by virtue of love, in that personal life of the other which is, by nature, the other's incommunicable possession."⁴²

This third case throws light on Maritain's puzzling remarks in *Creative Intuition* about poetic experience as "knowledge by connaturality," where he emphasizes union and suffering, and a non-verbal feeling and experience that gives us the world.⁴³ He intends, I think, the loving sympathy by which I unite myself to other beings and things. In sympathy, I open to you, I forget myself and identify and *feel* your needs as my own, so that I do for you what I do for myself. More exactly, my sympathy makes you and I into a *we*, and your needs and my resources become *ours*; and thus I *take part* in your life. When the empathy is mutual, we take part in one another's; we are *in* each other; for each is in the *us* that is in each of us as our new identity. Sympathy so understood is not just a feeling, but an *active* attitude of responsibility and doing what needs to be done; it *transforms* us by uniting us in a larger selfhood or nature; it *reveals* to us that we are not separate, but connected, potentially with everyone and everything; we learn truth that is *not* propositions so much as our nature as members of a community, our experienced fellowship together, the truth of *fidelity* and justice due to fellow creatures; we learn to connect, and that we are social creatures, born for one another. Sympathy gives us the world, the real one that we can experience together.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 244.

⁴³ Jacques Maritain, *CI* 115-25, 184-85; but see already *DU* 280-82. The poet's "creative intuition is an obscure grasping of his own Self and of things in a knowledge through union or through connaturality which is born in the spiritual unconscious, and which fructifies only in the work" (*CI* 115); "The soul 'suffers things more than it learns them'" (*CI* 121-22); "[Poetic knowledge is] an obscure knowledge through inclination—born in the preconscious of the spirit—in which the world is known in and through the subjectivity, grasped... [by] an emotion become intentional and intuitive. Such a knowledge is utterly different from what we ordinarily call knowledge, it is more experience than knowledge. It is neither conceptual nor conceptualizable, expressible in signs and images and, finally, only in a work made. But precisely because it is not abstractive nor rational, it has no intelligible boundaries and expands, as it were, to the infinite" (*CI* 184-85).

This is sympathy in practical situations like compassion and married love. In poetic experience, however, there is no question of responding to another's need as our own, but simply of seeing and feeling our community as our own true nature, and enacting it by showing it in a work of art. The Zen writer R. H. Blyth gives a good explanation of this in what he says about the imagination as it was exercised by the poet Wordsworth: it is "the power by which we become so united—or better, by which we realize our original unity with persons, things, [and] situations, so completely—that we perceive them by simple self-consciousness." By this power, Blyth writes, it is "as if the object used [our] eyes to perceive itself," and our voice to name itself. He mentions here the poet's remark that the object of poetry is "truth carried alive into the heart by passion: truth which is its own testimony."⁴⁴ This uniting power and truth are compassion (or sympathy) and community. This is our original element, in which we can at last live originally, in our highest ideal.

What I have been calling sympathy is love, or charity; so I can sum up this discussion by saying that connatural knowledge is *love's* knowledge, arising in surrender and transformation and embodiment, and perfected in these. Maritain would emphasize that the *natural* sympathy or connaturality of ethics and poetics give us an analogy of the supernatural connaturality of mystical experience, but that it is only a remote analogy, because, in this highest degree of knowledge, *God himself* changes us into his likeness, giving us religious wisdom as the gift of his own Spirit. Simone Weil, for her part, would say that when the love of God becomes explicit in the soul we will feel and know the passion and *kenosis* of God even in these; but that is to say, when these become for us *supernatural* and mystical.⁴⁵

Love's connatural knowledge, of the world and ourselves, of one another and God, then, is *living* knowledge: we have to live it, and we can live by it. I want to add, we don't need a reason to practice it and

⁴⁴ R. H. Blyth, *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1942), pp. 420-21, 415, 426, 461; Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, Preface, paragraph 18.

⁴⁵ Jacques Maritain, *DU* 278-79, 280-281. Simone Weil, *WG* 137-38, 209, 213-15.

seek it. Reason isn't everything; we have love, too, which is better than reasons. Or, rather, love is the best reason of all, a living reason, and we don't need any other. God doesn't either, for, if Maritain and Weil are right, then it is his love that makes him God, transforming us into his likeness and uniting us to him.