

PHILIP MERLAN

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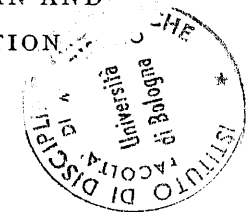
PHILIP MERLAN

MONOPSYCHISM MYSTICISM  
META CONSCIOUSNESS

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META CONSCIOUSNESS

PROBLEMS OF THE SOUL  
IN THE NEOARISTOTELIAN AND  
NEOPLATONIC TRADITION

SECOND EDITION



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## PREFACE

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## I INTRODUCTION

This is primarily a contribution to the search for the sources of the philosophy of Plotinus and, in connection with it, an investigation of some aspects of the survival (or revival) of the problems indicated in the title of the book viz. monopsychism, mysticism, and meta-consciousness, as they come to light on the occasion of such a search.

The term 'monopsychism' needs no explanation. However, as used in the title of this book, it is meant to cover not only what can legitimately be so called, i.e. the doctrine that all *souls* are ultimately one, but also what could be called mononoism or solmentalism or *unitas intellectus*, i.e. the doctrine teaching that there is only one νοῦς (the translation of this term will be discussed in the text of the book) common to all men. Though these two doctrines are obviously closely related, they are not identical as plurality of souls and unicity of νοῦς are not mutually exclusive.

The term 'mysticism' is admittedly a term on the precise sense of which not everybody agrees. By definition we take it to mean a doctrine teaching that the highest moments of man's existence are those of his absorption into whatever he takes the divine to be, and that this absorption, usually called ecstasy, is an experience *sui generis*, distinct from the ordinary human experiences. This definition leaves on purpose undetermined some questions which almost immediately force themselves on us. What is the nature of the divine into which man feels absorbed in ecstasy? What makes such an absorption ontically possible, i.e. what is the relation between man and the divine? What is the way leading to such ecstasy? Specifically, which aspects of man's life, both in its somatic and mental components, are significantly engaged in the quest for and achievement of ecstasy? Is ecstasy primarily an intellectual experience or an emotional one?

What is precisely the role of consciousness in ecstasy? To what extent can the condition of ecstasy be described? To what extent is it ineffable?

All these questions are treated here only incidentally. But another, belonging to the same context, is of major importance for the present investigation. It is the question: to what extent is ecstasy a continuation of the intellectual or, as it is usually called, rational activity of man's mind, and to what extent and in what sense is it a breaking away from this rational activity and thus, as it is usually expressed, an irrational condition? Or, from a slightly different point of view: to what extent is ecstasy a natural condition of man, to what extent is it supernatural? To many, ecstasy is considered both strictly irrational and supernatural in character. Therefore I should like to say at the outset that as used here the term ecstasy often designates a condition of man's mind which could be called supremely rational rather than irrational and to which the term supernatural can be applied only in a very special sense – to indicate its elevating character and rarity rather than anything else. Therefore mysticism as used here is meant to represent a very special type of mysticism which we tentatively will call mysticism of reason or simply rationalistic mysticism. If this to some may sound like a *contradictio in adjecto*, we hope that they will in the end admit the legitimacy of the term. And after all, it can always be said that quantity may turn into quality and thus the supremely rational condition would be a new, non-rational quality rather than the supreme degree of reason.

Another term occurring in the title is 'metaconsciousness'. Perhaps it would have been simpler to speak of the unconscious, but probably most readers would take this term to mean that part of man's mind which is the repository of repressed or suppressed *desires*. But as will be seen in the proper place, this is not the sense in which the term 'unconscious' is here used; therefore, it seemed preferable to use the term 'metaconsciousness'. As shall also be seen, there is, on the other hand, in spite of the difference, also essential similarity between what it designates and what the term 'unconscious' as it is mostly used today does. Therefore, the two terms will be used interchangeably.

One word on the method: often it is the orthodox historical one. We ascertain what problem has been posed by whom and how he and others solved it. In other words, we proceed empirically. But time and again we shall proceed in a different manner. After having found what was empirically said and by whom, we shall try to isolate the problem

from the solutions which it actually found and establish something like a typology of solutions. The types thus found will be ideal types, and our interest in attributing them to philosophers who actually professed them will only be secondary. We shall quote these authors merely as examples. Such a procedure has the advantage of all procedures aiming at a typology and later working with ideal types thus established for penetrating empirical reality. In all likelihood we shall find no representative entirely true to the type of solution which we have established. But we shall be able to see with greater clarity what the issues actually are. What is empirically vague is therefore closer to reality – but it is also more obscure. What is non-empirically precise is more comprehensible for the very reason of its remoteness from the empirical. In other words, in addition to our endeavor to find out who actually thought what on a specific problem, we shall time and again try to ascertain what possible solutions existed, regardless of actualities.

In conclusion, I should like to apologize for my references to Arabic and Hebrew sources, which essentially are accessible to me only in translation, my knowledge of the two languages being entirely rudimentary. These references are exclusively for the sake of perspective and are simply to remind the reader that the problems here treated are common to Jew, Moslem, and Christian, particularly to those of the Middle Ages, when they all belonged to the world of the three rings, to use Fr. Heer's favorite phrase. They also are to remind the reader that we can have no adequate picture of the continuity of the history of Western philosophy, if we omit the world of Islam. *Mutatis mutandis*, the historian of philosophy will be inclined to sympathize with Goethe's *Herrlich ist der Orient | Übers Mittelmeer gedrungen | Nur wer Hafis liebt und kennt | Weisz was Calderon gesungen*, though he on the other hand will always remain conscious of the extraordinary indebtedness of Moslem philosophers to the Greek ones – including many of the second or third order.