

DECREATION:
THE UNITY OF ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION
IN SIMONE WEIL

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN PHILOSOPHY

ADVISOR: ROBERT SWEETMAN
INTERNAL EXAMINER: RONALD KUIPERS
EXTERNAL EXAMINER: AMY HOLLYWOOD

JULIA HENDERSON
INSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIAN STUDIES
TORONTO, ON

2023

Decreation: The Unity of Action and Contemplation in Simone Weil

by Julia Henderson

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
PREFACE Reading Weil	4
INTRODUCTION 	9
Landscape	9
The Religion of the Slaves	12
Argument	16
PART ONE “A Passage of God’s Love”: The Contemplative End of Decreation	19
Decreation	20
Desire for the Void	21
Beauty	25
Necessity	27
The Order of the World	30
Mediation	34
Detachment and Reading Necessity	38
The Natural Part of the Soul	42
The Supernatural Part of the Soul	45
PART TWO “The Passing of a Morsel of Bread”: The Active End of Decreation	49
Beguines	51
Annihilation and Decreation	53
Dualism or Non-Dualism?	57
Reading the Mirror	59
Perception and Knowledge	63
Timelessness	65
The Moment	69
Acting as/in Christ	70
Mister Eckhart	74
Contradiction and Unity	78
CONCLUSION	84
BIBLIOGRAPHY	85

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you firstly to my advisor, Bob, for your encouragement, patience, and wisdom. It is a rare privilege to have a mentor who trusts your intuitions and believes in your work. Without you this project would never have begun. My admiration for you knows no end. You have been a true teacher; there is no higher honor than to have been your student.

Thank you to my committee members, Ron Kuipers and Amy Hollywood, for your time and attention. It is an honor to be read by you, questioned by you, and held to your standards.

Thank you to the Institute for Christian Studies, a miracle itself, for being a home to so many of us who have otherwise felt out of place. Especially thank you to Andrew, who brought me here, and to Elizabet, Hector, Gideon, and Traver.

Thank you to my mother who read Simone Weil alongside me, asked questions, and took genuine interest in the subjects that I adore. Projects of this kind can be lonesome work, but to be able to share it with you has been an immeasurable delight.

Thank you to my father who has always pushed in me my academic pursuits. From a young age you taught me the value of doing what you love, a gift I will never be able to repay.

Thank you to my dear friends for giving me the space and freedom to explore ideas with you, for your insights, and our discussions. In times of self-doubt and fear you have held me up.

Thank you to my cat, Duck, for reminding me to take breaks and teaching me the value of a good nap.

And lastly, thank you to Simone Weil. A woman whose words first set a fire in my chest. Everything that follows was written for you. You are the true judge of its honesty.

PREFACE | Reading Weil

In the February 1st 1963 issue of *The New York Review*, Susan Sontag describes Simone Weil's life as "absurd in its exaggerations and degree of self-mutilation."¹ She praises her as one of "the culture-heroes of our liberal bourgeois civilization," along with the likes of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, whose "obsessive," "impolite" and highly personal tone carry a conviction more appealing than "any standard of an objective truth to which a writer's words correspond." Sontag argues that thinkers such as Weil possess an "intellectual extremity" which is able to "bear witness to the fearful polite time" of her era in ways the responsible and "sane" could not. This, she argues, is exactly what makes them so appealing. In her view, Weil, and her kind – those she describes as of the "morbid," "hysterical," and "unhealthy" variety – offer the world something important, something like a "widening of the imagination" or a "deepening of the sense of reality." In this respect, Sontag approaches Weil's oeuvre less for its significance as a body of thought - that is, for the ideas - than for the unique tenacity of her convictions. For, as she says, "we read writers of such scathing originality for their personal authority, for the example of their seriousness, for their manifest willingness to sacrifice themselves for their truths, and – only piecemeal – for their 'views.'"

The short piece is undoubtedly a celebration of Weil, but interestingly Sontag insists, repeatedly, that what Weil offers is not truth and that she is no exemplar to be followed. Instead, Weil – and radicals like her – are described as a cultural force who are to be regarded "from a distance with a mixture of revulsion, pity, and reverence." What exactly is "absurd" about Weil is made very clear; it is her "asceticism," her "elaborate self-denials," her "theology of divine absence," and her "ideals of body denial" that inspire and delight, but which are *not* to be taken

¹ Susan Sontag, "Simone Weil | Susan Sontag," accessed June 2, 2023, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1963/02/01/simone-weil/>.

as legitimate demands on us, nor are we encouraged to treat them as serious intellectual concepts. In her view, this lack of truth is precisely where we find value. As she states: “an idea which is a distortion may have a greater intellectual thrust than the truth.” In some sense, Sontag seems to be suggesting that Weil and similar figures speak truth not through the logic of their ideas, but by the rhetorical hyperbole of their extravagant personalities and corresponding convictions. Sontag is not suggesting that such thinkers do not really mean what they say, but that their readers may not need to believe *precisely* what they say to find something truthful within it.

There is undoubtedly something valuable in Sontag’s depiction. Certainly, we need not all become Weilian disciples to make use of her thought, nor need we understand the rigor of her philosophy to be thrilled by the saintliness of her life. At the same time, however, Sontag’s depiction is not without its dangers. While I maintain that the degree of Weil’s intensity, her impossible to match level of self-denial and dispossession, and her fierce convictions can leave readers somewhat overwhelmed, I take issue with Sontag’s ready assumption of the impossibility of her convictions. As scholars, to assume Sontag’s position is to limit the depth to which we can engage seriously with her philosophy. It risks positioning her as a symbolic individual whose lived experiences we may marvel at, even learn from, but whose ideas – which ground and inspire her actions – we ought to leave at arm’s length, or reinterpret into more realistic terms. I read Sontag’s celebration as equally patronizing. For it too easily allows us to skirt the edges of her work, to drop her into our scholarship as a novelty, a peculiarity, a radical we might mine for inspiration but need not engage with earnestly. Moreover, it implies that her ideas are too extreme to be worldly applicable.

Undoubtedly, part of the issue at play when we begin to take Weil's supposed absurdities seriously is that her demands threaten the critical distance out of which critique is made possible. For comparison, Amy Hollywood notes that readers of Marguerite Porete's mystical-theological text *The Mirror of Simple Souls* [*Le Mirouer des simples âmes anienties et qui seulement demeurent en vouloir et désir d'amour*] are confronted with a similar problem. The text, predominately a dialogue between the soul and love, describes the movement of the soul towards its own annihilation. More than description, however, it also calls for the readers participation. As such, Hollywood considers how readers ought to engage with a work which encourages them to "follow the soul depicted within it in her transformation"² – a transformation which gives up reason, a transformation which is destructive of the faculty we, particularly as scholars, hold most dear. As Hollywood notes, this demand can result in "her interlocutor's refusal to engage with her," or worse, their "pulling decontextualized sentences out of her books" and thereby so destroying "its movement as to render it unrecognizable."³ In response she asks: "what would it mean for me to read in the way Marguerite's text demands, to annihilate myself before the power of divine love?"⁴ These questions, although unique to Porete's text, hint at something more broadly true: that engaging with texts such as these can pose a real risk, insofar as they reveal and thereby challenge our most foundational assumptions and convictions; that they, if we permit them, can make us vulnerable; that they can beckon to us not merely as interested minds but as desiring souls.

In contrast, the risk of Sontag's position is that it assures its readers from the outset that they need not, and indeed ought not, take Weil at her literal word. In this respect, it encourages a

² Amy M. Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays: Mysticism, History, and the Study of Religion*, Gender, Theory, and Religion (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 144.

³ Hollywood, 144.

⁴ Hollywood, 144.

level of critical reservation, a certain closed-heartedness. She suggests that Weil's deepest convictions are much too unattainable, too unrealistic to genuinely be considered viable. In doing so, she keeps Weil firmly on the peripheral edge, useful as a disruptive agent when our horizon needs to be momentarily widened. To read Weil against Sontag's view is to actively fight the urge to fetishize her strangeness, against the urge to pluck out the most palatable pieces of her thought and abandon the others offhandedly as the unrealistic strivings of another bizarre, albeit saintly, woman. As Hollywood suggests, to read a thinker's project in such a way risks extracting what is easiest and most digestible either to us personally or to our scholarly landscape more broadly, thereby de-contextualizing, distorting - even rendering unusable - those pieces of a text we do find valuable. As such, I ask: what would it mean to read a scholar like Simone Weil in the fullness of her convictions? What more can be gained if I, against Sontag's suggestion, refuse to approach her from a distance produced in and through the tempering effects of reverence, revulsion or, worst of all, pity? Is it possible to maintain a sense of her otherworldly saintliness without keeping her and the world a safe distance apart, without considering her boldest ideas too lofty to be taken seriously, too supernatural to be possible? Such an attitude does not merely require that we pay due attention to those aspects of her work Sontag considers "absurd," but that we remain open to being moved by them, that we accept it as a real possibility that she speaks the *truth*, not a distorted one.

The goal of doing so, however, is not to unquestioningly accept as fact all that Weil proposes; we ought not abandon critical reasoning and skepticism. But as Hollywood writes: "I can't begin to argue for the value of my own commitments without at least attempting to hear and understand those of my interlocutor - without assuming that she might have good grounds

for her view, even if it contradicts my own.”⁵ As such, the task called for is something of a paradoxical balancing act: it is to consider as true that which we may not be able to accept – in Hollywood’s terms: “to try to hear what I cannot assimilate”⁶; it is to hesitate somewhere in-between acceptance and dismissal. I do not think Hollywood is suggesting that we annihilate ourselves before divine love, nor am I suggesting that we join Weil in her project of self-denial. What I am suggesting, however, is that we *not assume* that it is impossible to do so, that we *not assume* that the unreasonable and absurd is a non-option. In other words, we must be prepared to engage with the text on its own terms. By this I mean, we must cultivate a flexibility of both mind and heart, wherein we consent to playing with truth, holding multiple truths at once, and being – paradoxically – fully committed, affected, and overcome *as well as* reserved, tentative, and critical. Such is the attitude in which I attempt to approach this study, and I encourage my readers to join me.

⁵ Amy M. Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays: Mysticism, History, and the Study of Religion, Gender, Theory, and Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 145.

⁶ Hollywood, 145.

INTRODUCTION

Landscape

As described above, any introduction to Simone Weil that foregrounds the events of her extraordinary life at the expense of her ideas is, in my view, insufficient. That is not to say, however, that her personal experiences ought to be ignored. In fact, it would be unwise to attempt to divide her personhood from her philosophical and mystical ideas. According to Marie-Magdeleine Davy, Weil is “essentially paradoxical, even contradictory” but she “nevertheless presented in herself a perfect unity.”⁷ This unity is not merely true in the sense that apparent contradictions in philosophy can be reconciled, but also in that the apparent political and mystical division of her life and commitments are bound together. In Davy’s description, “from whatever angle you look at her, from the intellectual, the religious or social, she is entirely a whole.”⁸ Despite this, scholarship on Weil often approaches her from one of two directions: either the socio-political *or* the mystical and religious. Seminal texts like *A Truer Liberty: Simone Weil and Marxism*⁹ partition her thought into categories like “Liberty,” “Oppression,” and “Power,” and minimally engage with her mystical theology. This kind of categorization is not without its uses; for one, it allows scholars to engage with individual concepts in depth while leaving behind the aspects of her thought more peripheral to their concerns, but partitioning the mystical and political into distinct categories can too easily allow scholars to disregard their interconnectivity.

⁷ Marie-Magdeleine Davy, *The Mysticism of Simone Weil*, trans. Cynthia Rowland (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1951), 16.

⁸ Davy, 16.

⁹ Lawrence A. Blum and Victor J. Seidler, *A Truer Liberty: Simone Weil and Marxism*, Critical Social Thought (New York: Routledge, 1989).

In collected secondary texts, such as *The Relevance of the Radical*,¹⁰ which span numerous subjects and authors, similar categorizations are present, though more often in the form of individual essay subjects.¹¹ One gets the sense, however, that despite the apparent breadth of the collection any singular essay is *either* on the subject of ethics and morals *or* the philosophical *or* the mystical and religious.¹² Even those essays that do seek to unite seemingly disparate aspects of her thought often do so reservedly. A good example of this is Eric O. Springstead’s “Mystery and Philosophy”¹³ from the same text which inquires into the potential value of admitting the broadly ‘mysterious’ into philosophical discourse. In it he argues that “for most analytic philosophers, whatever was mysterious was due either to a lack of knowledge or to unclear thinking,”¹⁴ while Weil, in contrast, “did not set philosophical clarity and theological mystery against each other.”¹⁵ As such, he works to show how Weil calls for and embodies the incorporation of the two as a kind of “well-developed intellectual pluralism” which, unlike a Hegelian dialectic, does not seek to synthesize “diverse roads of thought” but instead appreciate and sustain irreconcilable contradictions when we come upon them.¹⁶ He likens this impulse in Weil to a Wittgensteinian critique of the “sickness” and “obsession” inherent to result based philosophy when it seeks tidy systematic ends. He further builds this association by aligning Weil with a Wittgensteinian kind of intellectual passivity, the impulse to ‘let be’ or remain silent

¹⁰ A. Rebecca Rozelle-Stone and Lucian Stone, eds., *The Relevance of the Radical: Simone Weil 100 Years Later* (London ; New York: Continuum, 2010).

¹¹ In *The Relevance of the Radical*, for example, subjects range from totalitarianism and war to mystical and the supernatural.

¹² This is not always true. For example, Marie Cabaud Meaney’s essay “The Supernatural as Remedy to Totalitarian Regimes: Simone Weil on Sanctity and the Eucharist” from *The Relevance of the Radical* does very well to oscillate between the mystical and political. None the less, this kind of Weil scholarship is less common.

¹³ Eric O. Springsted, “Mystery and Philosophy,” in *The Relevance of the Radical: Simone Weil 100 Years Later* (London ; New York: Continuum, 2010), 91–104.

¹⁴ Springsted, 92.

¹⁵ Springsted, 93.

¹⁶ Springsted, 97.

on those “habits of the heart” that are not accessible through ratiocination.¹⁷ He goes on to locate the value of the mysterious, then, as an alignment or orientation of one’s being, in particular, as the cultivation of an openness and flexibility, evidently displayed by Weil. He argues that this openness gives dimension and texture to our lives and ends his analysis by suggesting that our lives have more depth, are fuller and more extraordinary, when we are attentive and welcoming to its mysteriousness.

I agree with Springstead’s desire to integrate Weil’s understanding of the value of mystery – which he says is most obvious in her treatment of “theological mysteries” – with philosophical methodology, but it is worth noting that the socio-political is entirely absent. It is also worth noting that while Springstead acknowledges the need for integration between the “mysterious” and the philosophical he does not name the broadly referenced mystical-theological concepts in question, nor does he explicitly practice their integration in his own examination. It is in this sense that I refer to Springstead’s unification of the interdisciplinary aspects of Weil’s thought as reserved.

It is against this background that this thesis seeks to unite the mystical-philosophical – which I refer to as the *contemplative* aspects of Weil’s thought, with the socio-political – which I refer to as the *active* aspects of Weil’s thought. I do so not merely to stay true to her interdisciplinary nature, as Springstead encourages, but because in doing so forthcoming scholarship may be better equipped to take her contributions in challenging new directions. As A. Rebecca Rozella-Stone notes, “like her own disposition to the world and to any difficult, unfamiliar positions that she encountered, our scholarship on Weil’s thought must also be open,

¹⁷ Springsted, 101.

nimble, and avoid becoming calcified in usual, endorsed paths.”¹⁸ For Rozella-Stone, one such calcification occurs in scholarship which refuses to move beyond the circle of its author. As she explains, “scholarship, we must remember, need not adhere to its subject’s own truths, styles and influences.”¹⁹ She thus encourages Weil scholars to “spring out of [her] ideas into uncharted territories.”²⁰ While I agree with Rozella-Stone, it is necessary to acknowledge that exporting a decontextualized concept can leave it at risk of becoming diminished, sanitized, and possibly misrepresented. This is all the more likely if certain aspects of a thinker’s context are unfamiliar to a given era or milieu. For Weil, those elements of her thought which speak most to *our* time – political activism, responsibility, and freedom – are only growing in popularity. On the other hand, her more antiquated interests – self-annihilation, obedience, asceticism – are often underrepresented. In this light, I seek to unite the *contemplative* and *active* concerns of her work in order to show that the *full* value of Weil’s political contributions can not be apparent to us without merging them with their contemplative counterparts, and vice versa. It is only after this work is done that new scholarship can confidently break ground.

The Religion of Slaves

Before continuing, it is worth examining the roots of the political and mystical as they developed in Weil’s thought. According to Yoon Sook Cha, Simone Weil “has come to be identified with her sudden mystical turn to God in her late twenties.”²¹ As such, it is common to attribute to Weil a spiritual transformation that constitutes a divide between her early and later

¹⁸ A. Rebecca Rozelle-Stone, ed., *Simone Weil and Continental Philosophy*, Reframing Continental Philosophy of Religion (London ; Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, 2017), 3.

¹⁹ Rozelle-Stone, 3.

²⁰ Rozelle-Stone, 3.

²¹ Yoon Sook Cha, *Decreation and the Ethical Bind: Simone Weil and the Claim of the Other* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 103.

thinking. That said, in a letter to her friend and confidant Father Perrin which she titled her “Spiritual Autobiography,” Weil insists that she “never at any moment [...] sought for God.”²² In her view, the “problem of God” was unsolvable because the data one needed to solve the problem “could not be obtained here below.”²³ In her adolescence, she was firmly of the opinion that, “being in this world, our business was to adopt the best attitude with regard to the problems of *this* world.”²⁴ The problem of God was therefore not merely impossible but “useless” and unimportant insofar as it was not a problem directly affecting the world we are called to engage with every day.²⁵ Weil’s desire to solve “the problems of this world” were evident as early as six when she refused to eat sugar in solidarity with French troops fighting in the First World War; it is reflected in her early writings on factory work and social obligations;²⁶ and it continued after her education at the *École Normale Supérieure* when, despite her considerable talent as a philosopher, Weil took a twelve month leave of absence from her teaching position in Le Puy to work as a laborer in a factory.²⁷ Even up until the end of her life in London where her fragile health prevented her from active participation in the war effort, Weil’s final complete work was *The Need for Roots (L'enracinement)*, originally written as a report for the Free French Resistance movement regarding the social climate of France and the potential for post-war cultural rejuvenation. As such, despite the apparent “mystical turn” attributed to Weil, it is clear that the inclusion of mysticism in her thought never turned her away from “the problems of this world.”

²² Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd, First Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition (New York [New York]: HarperPerennial ModernClassics, 2009), 22.

²³ Weil, 22.

²⁴ Weil, 22. Emphasis mine.

²⁵ Weil, 22.

²⁶ Simone Weil, *Formative Writings* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987).

²⁷ For more on Simone Weil’s life, see: Simone Pétrement, *Simone Weil: A Life*, 1st American ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976).

At the same time, it is somewhat inaccurate to refer of Weil's "mystical turn" as "sudden." In the same *Spiritual Autobiography* to father Perrin, Weil admits that she had always held certain "Christian attitudes"²⁸ which manifest under different names prior to her explicit turn to religion; the idea of love for one's neighbor she found through her understanding of justice; "the duty of acceptance in all that concerns the will of God" first drew her attention in the writings of Marcus Aurelius "under the form of the *amor fati* of the Stoics;" and the idea of purity, "with all that this word can imply for a Christian," she says came to her while "contemplating a mountain landscape."²⁹ She describes to Father Perrin a period of "inward darkness" during her youth – a time during which she felt particularly inferior to her brother André, a mathematical prodigy – when she grieved not her lack of "successes" but her exclusion "from that transcendent kingdom to which only the truly great have access and wherein truth abides."³⁰ At some point during this period she recalls that she "suddenly had the everlasting conviction that any human being [...] can penetrate to the kingdom of truth reserved for genius, if he only longs for truth and perpetually concentrates all his attention on its attainment."³¹ This conviction inevitably lasted into adulthood, as Gustave Thibon recounts that during her stay with him in her late twenties "there was scarcely anyone whom she did not consider able to receive the highest teaching," even going so far as to lecture "a young working class Lorraine girl" on the Upanishads.³² Later Weil would come to equate the love of truth for the love of Christ, because "before being Christ, he is truth," and henceforth acknowledged her that her youthful wrestling with truth was no different than wrestling with God.³³

²⁸ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 22.

²⁹ Weil, 24.

³⁰ Weil, 23.

³¹ Weil, 23.

³² Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 1st complete English language ed (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002). (Introduction X)

³³ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 27.

As such, the “sudden mystical turn” commonly attributed to Weil did not, as Cha notes, “fundamentally change anything in her thinking or the way she lived her life.”³⁴ We can see this most clearly in Weil’s description of the first time Christianity appeared to her as “a religion of slaves,” when, after her year in the factory while visiting a “little village” in Portugal with her parents, she observed a procession of fisherman’s wives singing “very ancient hymns of a heart-rending sadness” and realized that “Christianity is pre-eminently the religion of slaves, that slaves cannot help belonging to it, and I among others.”³⁵ This recognition came as a direct result of her year in the factory where – due to the extreme fatigue and mistreatment she suffered and would later refer to as her first contact with affliction – she describes herself as having “received forever the mark of a slave.”³⁶ Evidently, this first moment in Portugal, which she herself takes to mark the beginning of her turn towards Christianity, was important not because it expressed something *new* but because it introduced Weil to a spiritual landscape which mirrored the convictions and concerns she already held. As such, the mystical and the political held a simultaneous presence across the span of her life.

The continuity across her life in this respect does not, however, come without some perplexing contradictions. While Weil does not state it outright, we can speculate that whatever mystical concepts attracted Weil’s attention, it was necessary that they direct one towards the world, not away from it. However, in a tradition like mysticism which is often described as seeking to ascend *from* the material world *into* the transcendent realm of the divine, an orientation such as Weil’s which is directed towards the “problems of this world” is not always a given. Descriptions of mystical experiences tend to highlight the soul’s movement *away* from the

³⁴ Cha, *Decreation and the Ethical Bind*, 103.

³⁵ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 26.

³⁶ Weil, 25.

world, in particular its movement upwards *into* the transcendent. At first glance, the mystical and political appear to be irreconcilable opposites. Despite this common characterization, it is worth noting that during her recitation of George Herbert's poem "Love" – the event often cited as Weil's first mystical encounter – she describes her divine unification as: "Christ himself came down and took possession of me."³⁷ The brief description is notable insofar as Weil's soul does not *leave* or *return* from this world, nor is there any mention of ascension into another realm. Rather, it is Christ who moves downwards into *her*. I make note of this to draw attention to the fact that even Weil's most mystical moments remain *of the world*; nowhere does Weil describe a spiritual journey that moves up and out.

Nonetheless, mystical union and "the problems of this world" continue to carry an antithetical implication. The second contradiction worth mentioning appears in Weil's *Spiritual Autobiography*. She states that from a young age "the most beautiful life possible [had] always seemed to [her] to be one where everything is determined [. . .] where there is never any room for choice."³⁸ Given the passionate nature of her political activism, readers may be surprised to hear that Weil desired that her life be dictated by a sense of obligation so intense that it annihilates the possibility of free-will. Thus, while Weil's mysticism is tethered to the world, her active-worldly engagement is tinged with a counter-intuitive desire for passivity, rife with talk of annihilating the very will that makes action possible. These contradictions, however, are only apparent. Weil found a way to reconcile them and ensure that neither pole of the contradictory pair – transcendental truth *and* "problems of this world," action *and* determinism – need to be abandoned. In and through the act of decreation a simultaneity between action and passivity, between immanence and transcendence, between obligation and free-will becomes possible. As

³⁷ Weil, 27.

³⁸ Weil, 23.

such, the division between contemplation and action is transformed into a unity which harmonizes Weil's mystical and political concerns.

Argument

It has been mentioned twice already that Simone Weil deals in contradictions.³⁹ One such contradiction can be seen in the tension between Weil's understanding of *decreation* – an ontology of self-abnegation – and, as described above, her insistence on *active* participation in the world. Weil's *decreation* encourages a stripping away or deconstruction of the self, in particular the will. At the same time, Weil stresses the importance of worldly obligation; hers is a world-view that constantly re-directs her reader to the needs of the other and our responsibility to respond to their suffering. As such, my thesis asks: how is it possible to have an other-oriented ethics that prioritizes worldly participation within the context of a *decreated* ontology? In other words, how is it possible to act in the world if the self has been annihilated? These two notions, both fundamental to her thought, appear glaringly contradictory. At its root, this thesis seeks to find a unity between them.

In Part One I outline what *decreation* is for Weil, and what it is in response to. This requires an understanding of her use of the word *Imagination* – primarily to show that Weil's *decreation* first requires that we recognize which parts of the self are perceived as real but are, in actuality, unreal or imaginary. It is also important to recognize that, for Weil, *decreation* is ultimately an imitation of God's own self-sacrifice during creation. For her, in the act of creation

³⁹ The apparent presence of contradictions was mentioned explicitly by Davy: Davy, *The Mysticism of Simone Weil*, 16. The implicit presence of contradiction was implied by the association made by Springstead's between Weil and Wittgenstein, specifically that she ought not to be thought of as encouraging any kind of Hegelian synthesis, but a philosophical attitude which maintains the tension between contradictory elements: Springsted, "The Relevance of the Radical," 97.

God became less than everything such that we could be something. I investigate these remarks to clearly outline what the process of decreation entails and works towards. In doing so, I conclude that the “end” of the decreative process is to become a mediation between God and God, via what she calls the Supernatural Part of the Soul. I refer to this as the “contemplative end” of decreation, as it represents the culmination of an internal transformation unto nothingness, allowing one to become a clear lens through which God’s love passes.

Second, I recontextualize Weil’s decreation by comparing it to contemporary scholarship on annihilation in the mystical-theological writings of the late medieval period, namely, those of Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart whose works, like Weil, express a similar dual impulse towards both the contemplative and the active life. I examine the presence of annihilation in these texts and, borrowing from contemporary scholars on the subject, explore to what extent annihilation is analogous to decreation. To my knowledge, there is currently no scholarship which makes an extensive study of the similarity between these late medieval thinkers and Simone Weil.⁴⁰ It is my hope that this comparative work will deepen and complexify how Weil’s decreation is understood. Moreover, it is via this comparison that the “active end” of Weil’s decreation is established and unified with the contemplative. The internal transformation described in Part One is revealed to have a simultaneous active component, which I compare with Amy Hollywood’s description of the *virgin wife* – who is nothing herself (virgin) but in her nothingness is also the site through which God works in the world (wife). In turn, the apparent contradiction between *contemplative* and *active* impulses can be reconciled, and the political and mystical duality of Weil’s life is harmonized.

⁴⁰ Anne Carson does make reference to both Weil and Porete in her lyrical essay “Decreation,” but this is not an expansive study. See: Anne Carson, *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera*, Vintage Canada ed (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2006).

PART ONE | “A Passage of God’s Love”: The Contemplative End of Decreation

The goal of this chapter is to reach an understanding of *decreation* and its purpose within Simone Weil’s thought. That said, much of Weil’s project is not linear. She regularly makes apparently simple claims that depend on a network of interlocking presuppositions. Hers is *not* a philosophical project that is built by stacking blocks towards some ultimate conclusion, but by organizing a puzzle wherein each piece is both an *aspect* of the whole and an *expression* of the whole itself. Thus, I would like to make two general statements regarding Weil’s worldview with which I structure this chapter: (1) for Weil, all things in the world can function as mediations between God and creation; (2) in order for those things to function as mediations *for us*, we need to cultivate the right attitude or orientation towards them. Much of the current scholarship on Weil seeks to illuminate the various complexities in her terminology without taking this grounding impulse into account. In my opinion, a full understanding of Weil’s terminology is not possible without contextualizing it within this frame.

The thesis of Part One is a direct result of these structuring claims. I propose that decreation is the way in which the individual becomes a mediation between God and God. To prove this statement, I examine in detail Weil’s understanding of *Desire for the Void*, *Beauty*, *Necessity*, the *Order of the World*, *Mediation*, and the *Natural and Supernatural Parts of the Soul*, to arrive at an understanding of decreation as the necessary pre-condition for the indwelling of God in what Weil calls the “uncreated” or “supernatural” part of the soul. Doing so not only clarifies the way in which decreation transforms our perception of reality, but how it becomes an avenue through which the decreated soul can function as a mediation between God and the part of God’s-self that is separated from him in creation. This mediative role represents the

culmination of the contemplative end of the decreative process, the other of which is the possibility of just action taken up in Part Two.

Decreation

Weil uses the term decreation to describe a process. Broadly speaking, it is the attempt not to want any particular object and not to will any particular outcome. It results in the destruction of the “I” insofar as the “I” is the subject who has preferences over certain objects and certain outcomes. As such, decreation is the practice of detaching oneself from individual desires. Aside from this, it is not possible to give a summative account of this process here, but it is worth making a few structuring claims to guide the following examination. Decreation, in my reading, has two primary components, the first being an internal transformation of one’s perception of reality, the second a transformation of one’s relationship and use of their willing faculty. In the first case, the practice of decreation is a way of learning to recognize *as real* that which *is real* and recognize *as illusory* that which we often delude ourselves into *believing is real*. This would not be an altogether difficult task if it were not for the fact that most of what we ordinarily consider real is, in Weil’s view, a delusion because nothing is real except God. As such, decreation is, for Weil, a practice of reorganizing our perception of reality. The confusion between what Weil refers to as illusory (or imaginary) and reality is derived from a misapprehension of where the Good⁴¹ resides – for the Good does not reside in anything in the world; it is ultimately transcendent and therefore inaccessible.⁴² As such, “the good represents

⁴¹ The Good and God are here used somewhat interchangeably.

⁴² In this respect, Weil is very much in line with Plato. As she writes in her notebooks: “Nothing is so important as to be able to define *reality*. Reality is transcendent, this is Plato’s fundamental idea.” Simone Weil, *The Notebooks*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1956), 480.

for us a nothingness.”⁴³ In the second instance, decreation is more than merely transforming how one perceives reality, it is also a practice of attending toward the necessity of the world: the way things *must* be, rather than the way we *want* them to be. This second aspect of decreation necessarily follows from the first perceptive transformation, as it is only in and through a transformation of perception that we can learn to love necessity as the Order of the World, a manifestation of Christ. Lastly, decreation has a specific purpose: “we must not desire to die in order that we may see God face to face, but to live while ceasing to exist in order that in a self which is no longer one’s own self God and his creation may find themselves face to face.”⁴⁴ In short, for Weil the ultimate goal of decreation is to become a mediation, and it is only possible to do so after the decreative transformation takes place.

Desire for the Void

Understanding the function of decreation depends on a proper understanding of how Weil conceives of creation. In her view, during the act of creation “God empties himself of his divinity, abases himself, takes the form of a slave.”⁴⁵ For her, creation is a withdrawal of God’s being everything such that we could be something. As such, creation is entirely ‘other’ than God.⁴⁶ Everything in creation is, therefore, only conditionally related to God – by which I mean: creation depends on God’s withdrawal for its existence, but this withdrawal imposes an infinite distance between God and His creation, between God and all that is not-God. It is against this background that Weil repeatedly claims that existence is not only a gift, but a borrowed gift that

⁴³ Weil, 2:491.

⁴⁴ Weil, 2:464.

⁴⁵ Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 70.

⁴⁶ There are two implications from this statement: (1) that God has no activity in the world, and (2) that the creation is composed of some non-God substance. Both of these implications will be taken up later in this chapter under the section titled “The Order of the World.”

ought to be given back: “God has given me my being in order that I may give it back to him.”⁴⁷ When the self is given back in this way, “God and creation would then be in contact via [the self]”⁴⁸ Weil likens this function of the decremented self to light passing through a window: when the self is present the window is clouded, when the self is absent the window is clear.

This withdrawal sets an infinite distance between creation and God. Nonetheless, it leaves behind a certain kind of remnant in the form of *desire*. As Cha describes it, it “leaves creaturely life in a wanting relationship.”⁴⁹ Because what we desire is God and God does not ‘exist’ in the world, we end up with a kind of love that, in Cha’s terminology, “can only be had under conditions of destitution.”⁵⁰ Put another way, what we desire does not properly exist because as it is transcendent; we are thus left with an excess of love and no love-object. Therein lies the problem that gives rise to what Weil calls *The Imagination*. For Weil, this excess of love must be maintained despite the lack of a love-object. Doing so cultivates what Weil calls the *Void*, a space set aside for God alone. Given that God is transcendent, this space is necessarily *empty*.⁵¹ However, when this space is filled by things which are not-God, as we are wont to do when that which we desire is painfully absent, there is no space for God to contact creation. These God-substitutes or idols are works of the imagination.

However, what causes the imagination to fill the void is less a result of our lack of determination or desire but a misunderstanding between what is necessary and ‘the transcendent Good’. In other words, imagination fills the void as a result of our confused *relationship* to things in the world such that they become for us ‘the Good’ when, in actuality, they are mere

⁴⁷ Weil, *The Notebooks*, 1956, 2:484.

⁴⁸ Weil, 2:483.

⁴⁹ Cha, *Decreation and the Ethical Bind*, 104.

⁵⁰ Cha, 105.

⁵¹ This space, if appropriately left open, can come to be filled by God under the right conditions.

necessities (here Weil also uses the phrase ‘limited good’ to designate that which is necessary but distinct from ‘the transcendent Good’). In her notebooks Weil writes: “the difficulty is that the limited forms of the Good – ways of living, satisfaction of material needs, one’s family, friends, etc. – all this is necessary to us, we draw vital energy from it.”⁵² In her view, there is nothing wrong with recognizing that as creatures we have certain needs, the most overt of which is food. For example, she writes: “what we really want in an object is not the whole of it, but the good in it. Take the case of bread: we don’t want it as something which has weight. Which can serve for fuel, etc., but as something which is nourishing.”⁵³ In this respect the amount of good which we receive from bread as nourishment is exhaustible: limited. When we are hungry and eat our fill “what is left over no longer contains any good for [us].”⁵⁴ These kinds of necessities are limited goods insofar as they are exhaustible in this way. Where such limited goods become dangerous is when they are misperceived as an absolute good, for example as in the case of gold:

We don’t really want gold as such, but only in so far as it is Good. But this is just where we go wrong, for want of a proper understanding of and ability to apply the notion of relationship, of relativity. We believe we want gold as such, and as a result of this belief gold as such becomes for us not something good, but something necessary. And we are confirmed in this belief because we confuse the necessary with the good. Being under the impression that we [...] cannot go on living if a burglar steals this gold from us, we end up by regarding it as absolute good in itself. (490)

Freeing ourselves from misperceptions (or, in Weil’s terms, delusions) of this kind – in other words, recognizing as limited that which *is* limited – is one of the works of decreative process. As Weil puts it, “it is as a limited being that one must renounce the self, and for this purpose all that is necessary is to recognize all limited things as being limited. If I were to think of everything which is limited as limited, there would no longer be anything in my thoughts which

⁵² Weil, *The Notebooks*, 1956, 2:492.

⁵³ Weil, 2:491.

⁵⁴ Weil, 2:491.

emanated from the 'I'.⁵⁵ As things in the world sensible objects are real, but as manifestations of 'the transcendent Good' they are unreal. Recognizing things in the world as limited goods allows our desire for God – the true transcendent Good – to remain unabated. In her words, we must “want the good solely and unconditionally, whatever it may be, that is to say, no particular object of any kind.”⁵⁶ Because that which we want is not an object for us, we must want “over and beyond any particular object”; we must “want the void” because “this good which we can neither visualise nor define represents for us a void.”⁵⁷ In short, we must not satiate our hunger for God by replacing him with false idols, but because God is above and beyond any particular object, what we hunger for, what we desire, must be nothingness itself.

Weil calls this maintained desire for the void “supernatural.”⁵⁸ She writes, “like a gas, the soul tends to fill the entire space which is given it. A gas which contracted leaving a vacuum – this would be contrary to the law of entropy.”⁵⁹ In other words, maintaining the void works against the equivalency of nature, the equivalency being that we receive an equivalent in exchange for what we give. To maintain the void is to do so without the guarantee, nor even the hope, that God will fill the space. Hope would be counter to the project, for such a desire would be a desire of the self towards its own salvation. For this reason, Weil refers to the acceptance of the void as “the dark night” wherein one either “receives the supernatural bread or fails,” and as a “terrible risk, but one that must be run – even in the instant when hope fails.”⁶⁰

It is important to clarify here that, for Weil, the cultivation of the void through the practice of desire for nothingness (which Weil also describes as attention or attending to the

⁵⁵ Weil, 2:483.

⁵⁶ Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 491.

⁵⁷ Weil, *The Notebooks*, 1956, 2:491.

⁵⁸ Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 10.

⁵⁹ Weil, 10.

⁶⁰ Weil, 11.

empty space where God is/is not) does not in and of itself facilitate a union between God and creatures. It is Grace which “fills empty spaces” when they are available to receive it.⁶¹ In Robert Chenavier’s words “attention prepares the soul to receive the light that descends from above”⁶² but the event of mystical union is not something achieved through attention or desire alone; it requires God’s participation. It is also, as Chenavier notes, “not the only thing that is capable of contributing to this preparation.”⁶³ Another is beauty.

Beauty

In her essay “Forms of the Implicit Love of God,” Weil describes decreation as a decentering transformation of our perception which allows us to parse and so distinguish unreality from reality, truth from dreams.

We live in a world of unreality and dreams. To give up our imaginary position as the center, to renounce it, that means to awaken to what is real and eternal, to see the true light and hear the true silence. [...] It is a transformation analogous to that which takes place in the dusk of evening on a road, where we suddenly discern as a tree what we had first seen as a stooping man; or where we suddenly recognize as a rustling of leaves what we thought at first was whispering voices. We see the same colors; we hear the same sounds, but not in the same way.⁶⁴

The perception of beauty is an aspect of our experience that implicitly facilitates this decentering of our “imaginary position” without our explicit effort. For Weil, because beauty is the joy of an experience which does not serve as a means to an end, it already empties us of “false divinity” without our effort.⁶⁵ She describes the souls “natural inclination” to the beautiful as “the trap God most frequently uses in order to win [the soul] and open it to the breath from on high.”⁶⁶

⁶¹ Weil, 12.

⁶² Robert Chenavier, *Simone Weil, Attention to the Real* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 67.

⁶³ Chenavier, 67.

⁶⁴ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 100.

⁶⁵ Weil, 100.

⁶⁶ Weil, 103.

Beauty achieves this function because it is the “only finality here below.”⁶⁷ In other words, while everything else in the world can serve as a means to an end – such as the way bread is a means to nourishment – they are always at risk of becoming ends in themselves; they risk becoming for us *more than* a limited good in the way gold does to the miser, but beauty, on the other hand, “involves no good except itself, in its totality, as it appears to us.”⁶⁸ It is “not the means to anything else.”⁶⁹ In this way it is not at risk of being mistaken for ‘the transcendent Good.’ We cannot use it or consume it. It has no purpose except in its merely being there: “we want to get behind beauty, but it is only surface. It is like a mirror that sends us back our own desire for Goodness.”⁷⁰ Thus, beauty becomes for us an example of the kind of relationship Weil would like us to have with all the things of the world, such that they become for us not ends but means and means only. Elsewhere she writes, “only he who loves God with a supernatural love can look upon means simply as means.”⁷¹ When things become ends, they satiate our desire; they fill in the void created by desire and take the place of God. Only beauty continually fails to become an idol for us in this way because it is impossible to desire, possess or consume it; it can only embolden our desire.

Importantly, Weil also refers to the “beauty of the world” as the “order of the world”: beauty is “the order of the world that is loved” she says.⁷² This is important because it disrupts our ability to conclude that beauty is a quality pertaining to some things and not others. By describing beauty as “the order of the world that is loved,” everything in the world insofar as it is

⁶⁷ Weil, 105.

⁶⁸ Weil, 105.

⁶⁹ Weil, 106.

⁷⁰ Weil, 105.

⁷¹ Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 146.

⁷² Weil, *Waiting for God*, 108.

ordered⁷³ can become for us something beautiful (by being loved). To love the Order of the World, however, is no easy task. It requires that we change the kind of relationship we have to what Weil calls “necessity” which is the expression of that order.

Necessity

Like much of her terminology, Weil’s use of the word *necessity* is not straightforward. Broadly speaking, necessity can be thought of as governing structures such as cause and effect, gravity, laws of motion, geometric shape, and laws of mathematics, but this definition is inevitably insufficient. For one, Weil is not always consistent in how she uses the term. In her essay “The Love of God and Affliction,” Weil refers to two separate versions of necessity. The first is “mechanical necessity,” the second is “a new necessity” which is “added to [mechanical necessity].”⁷⁴ This second necessity is also referred to as “obedience.”⁷⁵ At times Weil seems to suggest that the first necessity is transformed into the second by some act of attention; at other times, they seem simultaneously present. Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springstead suggest that this confusion is hermeneutical in the sense that the direction of our perspective determines which necessity Weil is referring to. In their words, “we can either regard necessity according to the perspective of the self or not; similarly, we can regard it from the earth or from the heavens.”⁷⁶ The following passage from Weil’s essay “The Love of God and Affliction” makes this quite explicit and is worth quoting in full:

The mechanism of necessity can be transposed to any level while still remaining true to itself. It is the same in the world of pure matter, in the animal world, among nations, and in souls. Seen from our present standpoint, and in human perspective, it is quite blind. If, however, we transport our hearts beyond ourselves, beyond the universe, beyond space

⁷³ For clarification on what Weil means when she calls the world “ordered” see the section below titled “The Order of the World.”

⁷⁴ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 76.

⁷⁵ Weil, 76.

⁷⁶ Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springsted, “Divine Necessity: Weilian and Platonic Conceptions,” in *Spirit, Nature, and Community: Issues in the Thought of Simone Weil*, SUNY Series, Simone Weil Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 33.

and time to where our father dwells, and if from there we behold this mechanism, it appears quite different. What seemed to be necessity becomes obedience.⁷⁷

Thus, the “mechanism of necessity” always remains the same; it is the same in “pure matter” as it is in “souls;” what necessity *is* does not change but remains “true to itself” regardless of the “level” it is approached from. As such, necessity (1): “mechanical necessity” as not different in kind from necessity (2): “obedience.” We either perceive it from the “blind” human perspective or the “quite different” divine perspective. That said, Weil later adds that...

Men can never escape from obedience to God. A creature cannot but obey. The only choice given to men, as intelligent and free creatures, is to desire obedience or not to desire it. If a man does not desire it, he obeys nevertheless, perpetually, inasmuch as he is a thing subject to mechanical necessity. If he desires it, he is still subject to mechanical necessity, but a new necessity is added to it, a necessity constituted by laws belonging to supernatural things.⁷⁸

Here Weil complicates a reading of necessity and obedience that determines their apparent difference solely on perspective. In the first quote Weil seems to suggest that “the human perspective” is *always* bound to the first mere (1) mechanical necessity and suggests that it is not without some “beyond” human perspective that we are able to see necessity *as* (2) obedience. In this second passage, however, the factor which determines whether (1) mechanical necessity is perceived *as* (2) obedience is desire.⁷⁹

To reiterate, in both cases what changes is not necessity itself; one is always subject to the same laws regardless. In both cases, what does change is whether that necessity is *perceived* as (1) mechanical necessity or (2) obedience. Thinking of this shift solely as a change in “perspective” is limiting insofar as it could suggest that the human is always bound to (1) mechanical necessity. For while that is true in the sense that the human is “perpetually [...]

⁷⁷ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 76.

⁷⁸ Weil, 76.

⁷⁹ It is worth remembering here that for Weil desire and attention are the same.

subject to mechanical necessity,” thinking of this as wholly dependent on one’s *given* position (i.e., a human perceives it from a human perspective) undervalues the degree to which one’s *relationship* to necessity facilitates a potential shift from mechanical necessity to obedience. As Chenavier describes it “we have the choice between two forms of obedience to necessity, obedience without consent or obedience with consent.”⁸⁰ Chenavier is right to suggest that we are always subject to the same necessity regardless, but some adjustment of his terminology is required: “obedience without consent” is impossible, what Chenavier is referring to by this is mechanical necessity; in addition, “obedience with consent” is also impossible, as necessity transformed into obedience is by definition achieved through the act of consent.

None the less, this “choice” in Chenavier’s terms, or “relationship” in mine, is picked up by Allen and Springstead when they note that necessity “involves several sorts of relations between the created world and God”⁸¹ because necessity’s ability to function as a relation between the created world and God depends on which “choice” or “relationship” one has to necessity. In other words, that which determines which perspective we view necessity from is not simply our given position but our chosen relational attitude, i.e., whether one desires to be subject to necessity or does not desire to be subject to necessity. It is also worth noting that this is a possibility uniquely open to humanity “as intelligent and free creatures,” for this opens up the possibility of remaining on the level of the human *while* perceiving necessity from a “supernatural” or divine level. While it is important to recognize that there *are* two perspectives present, stopping there fails to take into account the degree to which Weil is interested in mediations.

⁸⁰ Chenavier, *Simone Weil, Attention to the Real*, 64.

⁸¹ Allen and Springsted, “Divine Necessity: Weilian and Platonic Conceptions,” 34.

It is the *kind of relationship* (desire/not-desire) one has towards necessity that determines whether necessity is regarded as “mechanical” and “blind” or as “supernatural,” “beyond the universe,” and “beyond space and time.” Later Weil writes, “for us, this obedience of things in relation to God is what the transparency of a window pane is in relation to light. As soon as we feel this obedience with our whole being, we see God.”⁸² In other words, necessity can function as a mediation between ourselves and God if we cultivate *the right kind of relationship* to it; when we view necessity as obedience, we see God in it; when we view necessity as mechanical, we can not see God. There is no substantial change to necessity in either form; we are equally subject to it regardless. What changes is whether or not necessity can function as a mediation.

The Order of the World

That said, aside from Weil’s saying so it is not yet clear *why* or *how* necessity when seen as obedience allows us to “see God.” To answer that question, it is worth returning to Allen and Springstead’s reading of Weil’s use of Plato. According to Weil, “all Greek civilization is a search for bridges to relate human misery and divine perfection. Their art, which is incomparable, their poetry, their philosophy, the sciences [...] are nothing but bridges. They invented [...] the idea of mediation.”⁸³ This ‘idea of mediation’ is what Weil views as the core of “Greek Spirituality,”⁸⁴ a tradition she found exemplified in Plato. In this sense, Plato is not a unique figure for Weil, or, as Michel Narcy explains, “there is no break for Weil between the authors [...] grouped under the label “pre-Socratic” and Plato. [...] for her Plato is not original.”⁸⁵

⁸² Weil, *Waiting for God*, 77.

⁸³ Simone Weil, “God in Plato,” in *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1998), 75.

⁸⁴ Weil, 75.

⁸⁵ Michel Narcy, “The Limits and Significance of Simone Weil’s Platonism,” in *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 33.

Thus, according to Weil, Plato's ideas merely express "a tradition of mysticism wherein all of Greece was bathed,"⁸⁶ a tradition which also includes the fragments of Heraclitus, Pythagoras, and Homer. Thus, in looking to understand 'the idea of mediation' it is worth looking closely at Weil's essay "Divine Love in Creation" where she gives sustained attention to Plato's *Timaeus* as "a theory of artistic creation"⁸⁷ comparable to God's creation of the world. For Weil, the value of Plato is not in his philosophical dialectics, but the role his allegories, myths, and likely stories play as pre-Christian intuitions about the role of the human as it relates to the divine. As such, the "intuitions" which attract her attention here are likely to run parallel to her own project. Allen and Springstead recognize this when they attribute a number of Weil's claims regarding necessity as issuing directly from her reading of the *Timaeus*.

To begin, Allen and Springstead remind us that Weil characterizes creation as a "withdrawal" of God's being, not an extension.⁸⁸ In their words, "Weil sees creation not as an act of power or as an expansion of God's being, but one of the renunciation of power."⁸⁹ As described above, Weil sees this renunciation as an "abandonment,"⁹⁰ and as God having "emptied himself."⁹¹ This self-negating action implies two things that were not touched on above: first, since creation was a "withdrawal" there must be some non-God substance which constitutes the "stuff" or primordial material that the world is built from; second, God, aside from this first act of abnegation, is totally absent and inactive in the world. And yet, while Weil does admit that "in creating what is other than Himself, God necessarily abandoned it,"⁹² she

⁸⁶ Weil, "God in Plato," 74.

⁸⁷ Simone Weil, "Divine Love in Creation," in *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1998), 89.

⁸⁸ Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 102.

⁸⁹ Allen and Springstead, "Divine Necessity: Weilian and Platonic Conceptions," 42.

⁹⁰ Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 103.

⁹¹ Weil, 120.

⁹² Weil, 103.

quickly conditions this statement by adding that “He only keeps under his care the part of Creation which is Himself – the uncreated part of every creature. That is the life, the Light, the Word: it is the presence here below of God’s only Son.”⁹³ This suggests that God does have presence in the world in the form of his incarnated Son. In Weil’s view, the first renunciation of God in the form of a withdrawal – which allows for the existence of creation – was not God’s only renunciation. Nor does Weil suggest that God, in Allen and Springsteads terms, “withdraws to an inaccessible corner of the universe, allowing chaos to reign in his place.”⁹⁴ Rather, for Weil the incarnation represents a *second* withdrawal by God whereby “the son is separated from the Father and incarnated in the body of the world.”⁹⁵ It is this second withdrawal – a becoming not-God by God – that allows Him to be present in a world that is other than Himself.

To understand Weil’s thinking here we turn to the *Timaeus*. The *Timaeus* consists primarily of a “likely story”⁹⁶ told by Timaeus about the creation of the universe and an account of how it is ordered. According to Timaeus’ telling, the world was created by a maker after a “transcendent model.”⁹⁷ The reason for this creation is described quite simply:

[The maker] was good, and one who is good can never become jealous of anything. And so being free of jealousy, he wanted everything to be as much like himself as possible. [...] The god wanted everything to be good and nothing to be bad so far as that was possible, and so he took over all that was visible – not a rest but in discordant and disorderly motion – and brought it from a state of disorder to one of order, because he believed that disorder was in every way better than disorder. (30a)

In this passage, Timaeus describes the presence of something “discordant” and “disorderly” which is “taken over” by God and out of which the model is created. The telling goes on to detail

⁹³ Weil, 103.

⁹⁴ Allen and Springsted, “Divine Necessity: Weilian and Platonic Conceptions,” 43.

⁹⁵ Allen and Springsted, 43.

⁹⁶ Plato, “Timaeus,” in *Complete Works*, trans. Donald J. Zeyl (Indianapolis, Ind: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 1224–93. 48e.

⁹⁷ Allen and Springsted, “Divine Necessity: Weilian and Platonic Conceptions,” 35.

how exactly how this model is proportioned and shaped, but for our purposes, it is best to turn directly to Timaeus's attempt to describe this "disorder" brought to order. He continues:

The new starting point in my account of the universe needs to be more complex than the earlier one. Then we distinguished two kinds, but now we must specify a third, one of a different sort. The earlier two sufficed for our previous account: one was proposed as a model, intelligible and always changeless, a second as an imitation of the model, something that possesses becoming and is visible. [...] This [third kind] is a receptacle of all becoming – its wetnurse, as it were. (49a)

As Allen and Springstead note, for Plato in the creation of the universe two opposing elements are united: reason (or intellect) and necessity (or *ananke*). Creation is therefore "the combined work of reason and necessity."⁹⁸ Given that necessity is in opposition to reason, however, it is not itself intelligible (because intelligibility is a work of reason). Instead, Timaeus can describe only its nature, which is "to be available for anything to make its impression upon, it is modified, shaped and reshaped by the things that enter it."⁹⁹ This is the third kind described above.

It is important to note that given that *ananke* is "devoid of any characteristics" and not graspable by the human mind, it is therefore distinct from "matter." Matter is *ananke* persuaded by reason to take intelligible form. That is to say, matter is *ananke* "structured by form and number."¹⁰⁰ According to Allen and Springstead, Plato's story of creation therefore suggests that there is a "dual causality for all that occurs within creation:" one aspect is that which is brought about by the Maker (and is a work of reason) the other is that which is brought about by necessity (the receptacle of all becoming).¹⁰¹ Therefore, "the creation is the will of the Maker, but insofar as it is not simply an extension of the Maker's thought, it also really exists in its own right."¹⁰² We can see why such a description of creation would be appealing to Weil, whose own

⁹⁸ Allen and Springsted, 37.

⁹⁹ Plato, "Timaeus." 50c.

¹⁰⁰ Allen and Springsted, "Divine Necessity: Weilian and Platonic Conceptions," 39.

¹⁰¹ Allen and Springsted, 39.

¹⁰² Allen and Springsted, 40.

understanding of creation depends on the separation and resulting difference between God and His creation. Because the *Timaeus* is a creation narrative in which creation is not merely an extension of its creator, it too contains, by its own logic, a division between creation and creator in need of resolution.

As such, Plato goes on to suggest that this first structuring (of *ananke* by “form and number” resulting in matter) is not sufficient to structure the totality. In other words, individual phenomena may be intelligible as individuals but they lack an account of themselves as a whole which would give them purpose. For this, Plato introduces a second structuring principle, that of the World Soul. The World Soul is an intermediary, for “in-between the Being that is indivisible and always changeless, and the one that is divisible and comes to be in the corporeal realm, he mixed a third intermediate form of being, derived from the other two.”¹⁰³ Unsurprisingly, for Weil “this being which Plato calls the Soul of the World is the unique Son of God.”¹⁰⁴ The World Soul, by partaking in both the divine and the corporeal functions as a mediator between the two. More than this, however, it harmonises and gives order to the world as a *whole*. It is in this role as harmonizing principle that gives an ordered structure to the totality that, for Weil, Christ becomes *Logos* or the Order of the World. We can see from this how Weil uses the incarnation as a way to overcome of problem of God’s lack of activity in the world as well as account for the fact that the created world, despite being entirely other-than-God, can still bear a relationship¹⁰⁵ to Him.

Mediation

¹⁰³ Plato, “Timaeus.” 35a.

¹⁰⁴ Weil, “Divine Love in Creation,” 92.

¹⁰⁵ I refer here to a relationship which is *more than* the given conditional relationship, as in, the one the created world always-already bears by having come about as a result of God’s withdrawal.

Christ's role as mediator becomes all the more apparent thanks to Emmanuel Gabellieri's careful examination of Weil's annotations in her copy of the *Timaeus*. He notes that "the annotations made in her own copy of the *Timaeus* [...] shows the evolution of [her concepts of mediation]." ¹⁰⁶In particular Weil elaborates her view of the World Soul as the "the proportional mean' and the 'mediator between God and the world' because it partakes of both heavenly and earthly being, a mixture that is cut like a ribbon in an X [...] and wrapped around the World." ¹⁰⁷In Weil's terms the World Soul is "crucified in time and space." ¹⁰⁸ God, in the incarnation, having "made himself man" therefore "makes himself matter." ¹⁰⁹ Gabellieri explains that this therefore places the World Soul/Christ at the intersection of a "divine person" and "inert matter," ¹¹⁰ in the same way that necessity is the "intermediary between matter and God." ¹¹¹ Thus, the World Soul and Christ are analogues to each other and both are further equated with necessity. All are mediators insofar as they are the intersection of that which is limited and that which is unlimited. Christ as World Soul therefore brings structure and harmony to the discordant matter of the world. This harmony is made apparent to us in the form of necessity or the Order of the World.

As noted above, there are however two ways of perceiving this necessity: (1) mechanical and (2) obedience. We furthermore determined that this change in perspective is relationally dependent or predicated on desire. Now we may further note that one kind of relation is the appropriate relationship between matter and God, the other is unique to the human person and

¹⁰⁶ Emmanuel Gabellieri, "Reconstructing Platonism: The Trinitarian Mextaxology of Simone Weil," in *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 140.

¹⁰⁷ Gabellieri, 141.

¹⁰⁸ Gabellieri, 141.

¹⁰⁹ Simone Weil, *The Notebooks*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1956), 190.

¹¹⁰ Gabellieri, "Reconstructing Platonism: The Trinitarian Mextaxology of Simone Weil," 141.

¹¹¹ Simone Weil, "The Pythagorean Doctrine," in *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1998), 185.

God. Ultimately, the unique kind of relationship available to human creatures is due to the fact that we contain what Weil calls an “infinitely small faculty of free consent.”¹¹² It is important to remember that matter, insofar as it is inert, is not capable of consenting to necessity; it simply does so in the sense that it exists in time and space. This is what Weil means when she refers to (1) mechanical necessity as “blind.” Matter’s subjection to necessity is evident merely in the fact that it has form; it is subject to size, shape, space etc. Human beings participate in this kind of necessity also; we too are subject to size, shape, space, etc. Weil also refers to this as “mathematical necessity” and writes that “mathematical necessity is on the one hand the mediator between God and things, and on the other between each thing and every other thing. This necessity constitutes an order whereby each thing, being in its place, permits all other things to exist”; it is, in other words, the structure of the boundaries between things¹¹³; matter subject to form and number and therefore akin to Plato’s first structuring principle in the *Timaeus*. As such, this mathematical “necessity is the obedience of matter to God;”¹¹⁴ and insofar as we are composed of matter, we are obedient to God in this same way.

That said, matter only has the possibility of one kind of relation to necessity; we differ in that we have the ability to *contemplate* this mediation, as described above, this is referred to as “the faculty of free consent”; this is misleading, however, as our faculty of contemplation does not imply that we are able to act against God, hence Weil’s description of this relationship to necessity as a change in perception: “we see necessity from below” or “we see [necessity] from outside.”¹¹⁵ Gabellieri picks up on this difference, though he does not go into detail, when he states that “obeying the World Soul not only implies obedience to necessity but also entails, on a

¹¹² Weil, 185.

¹¹³ Weil, 185.

¹¹⁴ Weil, 185.

¹¹⁵ Weil, 186–87.

deeper level, obedience to ‘the inertness of matter’¹¹⁶ Here Gabellieri implicitly acknowledges the presence of two kinds of relationships to necessity, however, Gabellieri, like Chenavier, mistakenly applies the term obedience to “the inertness of matter” which is not possible because matter can not contemplate *what it is*. Matter cannot be *obedient* to necessity because matter does not have the faculty of contemplation which manifests as free consent. Inevitably the confusion here comes as a result of Weil’s own language when she writes: “Necessity is the obedience of matter to God” (“*La nécessité est l’obéissance de la matière à Dieu*”). But matter is not obedient to necessity; necessity is the obedience of matter to God, and as the term suggests this is a fact in the ways the laws of physics are laws. This could imply, however, that matter is, in a way, less removed from God because matter relates to God through his will in a one-to-one relationship. By which I mean, by merely being what it is it is relating to God via the necessity that is his will; God wills that it is *as such* and it is *as such*. In other words, matter cannot be disobedient to God, implying a smaller distance of removal. However, because human beings have the ability to contemplate necessity, we are nearer to God than matter; Weil describes this as having “passed to God’s side”¹¹⁷(hence, the emphasis in a change in perspective). Obedience is therefore the contemplation of necessity:

But just as the order of the world, in God, is a divine Person which may be called the ordering Word, of the Soul of the World, so in us, the younger brothers, necessity is relationship – that is to say, thought in action. ‘The eyes of the soul,’ says Spinoza ‘are the demonstrations themselves.’ It is not in our power to modify the sum of the squares of the sides in the right-angled triangle, but there is no sum if the mind does not work it out by conceiving the demonstration.¹¹⁸

This possibility of contemplation allows the human person to participate in the will of God in a different sort of way to matter, as imitators or co-creators. Thus, we are called “the younger

¹¹⁶ Gabellieri, “Reconstructing Platonism: The Trinitarian Metaxology of Simone Weil,” 142.

¹¹⁷ Weil, “The Pythagorean Doctrine,” 187.

¹¹⁸ Weil, 187.

brothers” of the “ordering Word.” This faculty of contemplation is also referred to by Weil as “intellectual attention”:

This virtue of intellectual attention makes it an image of the Wisdom of God. God creates by the act of thinking. We, by intellectual attention, do not create, we produce no object, yet in our sphere we do in a certain way give birth to reality.¹¹⁹

However, this act of attention alone is later described as producing only a “half reality.”¹²⁰ For the fullness of reality to come into being we must add to this attention a “higher degree” which is “consent, love.”¹²¹ It is important to note that this “higher degree” is not either consent *or* love; consent and love are, in Weil’s view, the same: to love *is to consent* and to consent *is to love*. Nonetheless, intellectual attention is required for this love: “attention makes [necessity] a thing belonging to us which we can love.”¹²² Thus, intellectual attention (or contemplation) is the prerequisite for the consent which Weil calls “supernatural love.”¹²³ This also clarifies why the kind of relationship required to transform mechanical necessity into obedience is one of desiring or not-desiring. In desiring necessity, it is transformed into loving obedience. In its highest degree contemplation becomes love, and this love has a transforms reality.

Detachment and Reading Necessity

For Weil, this loving obedience expresses itself as our willingness to “consent impartially to the existence of all that exists,” a kind of letting be.¹²⁴ For Weil, divine providence is still deeply mysterious; all we know of it is necessity. Thus, just as “the sun shines on the just and the unjust” we are required to love all necessity, meaning all that exists and all that happens. Weil

¹¹⁹ Weil, 188.

¹²⁰ Weil, 188.

¹²¹ Weil, 188.

¹²² Weil, 188.

¹²³ Weil, 194.

¹²⁴ Weil, 190.

takes matter to be our first model in this regard. Matter insofar as it expresses by its mere existence its constraint by necessity expresses the will of God at all times. Weil presents as an example “the fidelity of floating bodies in rising out of the water precisely as much as their density exacts, no more no less.”¹²⁵ In this respect, things in the world have an “incorruptible fidelity [...] to their place in the order of the world.”¹²⁶ In her view, “man may present his equivalent [to that fidelity] only once he has arrived at perfection, once become identical to his own vocation.”¹²⁷ The “means” to achieving this fidelity in the human person is by “contemplation of the fidelity of things.”¹²⁸ The fidelity of matter to its place in the world is a model for the fidelity we ought to emulate regarding our own place in the world. If we become identical to our vocation, we would abide by that vocation in the same incorruptible way that floating bodies rise out of water to a degree precisely equivalent to their mass.

Moreover, Weil writes that “one must come to see above the skies and throughout the universe nothing by divine mediation.”¹²⁹ The mere existence *of the things that exist* is “the image of the creative will” of God and it is to this will that “our consent must adhere.”¹³⁰ Thus, “universal consent” – which we must remember is also love – is identical to “detachment,” as “any attachment, even the weakest and most legitimate in appearance, is an obstacle to [this fidelity].”¹³¹ If we attach ourselves to one outcome rather than another, we forget that “the light

¹²⁵ Weil, 189.

¹²⁶ Weil, 190.

¹²⁷ Weil, 190.

¹²⁸ Weil, 190.

¹²⁹ Weil, 196.

¹³⁰ Weil, 190.

¹³¹ Weil, 190.

shines impartially on all beings and things.”¹³² If we are able to achieve this detachment even the deepest suffering¹³³ can become a way to God.

In “The Concept of Reading and the Book of Nature” Allen and Springstead write that “suffering seems to contradict or at least count against the idea that the source of all the universe is the Christian God.”¹³⁴ For Weil, however, “if we learn to read our sensation otherwise, the natural world’s operations, which because they cause us pain act as a barrier between us and the love of God, actually becomes a passageway.”¹³⁵ Weil likens the function of suffering in recognition of this passageway to the way the body learns a trade:

When an apprentice gets hurt, or complains of being tired, the workmen and peasants have this fine expression: ‘It is the trade entering his body.’ Each time that we have some pain to go through, we can say to ourselves quite truly that it is the universe, the order and beauty of the world, the obedience of creation to God that are entering our body.¹³⁶

Allen and Springstead note that in *The Need for Roots* Weil uses the meeting of two friends after a long separation as another example:

The friends embrace each other so hard that it hurts them. But the pain is a mark of their love for each other. So too God sometimes embraces us through the grip of the universe very hard, causing pain, but those who have completed their apprenticeship, know that it is the love that grips them through the universe and, because of their detachment, they are indifferent to the pain they feel, and attend only to the love of God.¹³⁷

Another way to understand this is by looking at Weil’s idea of *reading* from her “Essay on the Concept of Reading” where she argues that there is no distinction between what we commonly refer to as interpretation and reality. In her view, one’s interpretation of reality *is* reality. In the

¹³² Weil, 190.

¹³³ It is worth noting, however, that suffering is distinct from Weil’s use of the term affliction (*malheur*). She writes, “But affliction is not suffering. Affliction is something quite distinct from a method of God’s teaching”: Weil, *Waiting for God*, 79.

¹³⁴ Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springstead, *Spirit, Nature, and Community: Issues in the Thought of Simone Weil*, SUNY Series, Simone Weil Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 61.

¹³⁵ Allen and Springstead, 61.

¹³⁶ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 78.

¹³⁷ Allen and Springstead, *Spirit, Nature, and Community*, 62.

already given example of the stooping man and the tree, Weil suggests that the transformation that takes place does not involve “an appearance *and* then an interpretation” but the immediate presence of a human person and then then the immediate presence of a tree.¹³⁸ In her view “meanings impose themselves on us successively.”¹³⁹ As in, we do not interpret sensations after we experience them; sensations impose on us an immediate interpretation in the very moment they occur to us. Another example of this would be upon hearing a sound that frightens us: “if I hear an explosion, fear lives in the noise and comes to take my soul by hearing; I no more can refuse to fear than I can refuse to hear.”¹⁴⁰ Although our ability to think and remember may give us the impression of an after-the-fact interpretation of sensation, in actuality all experience is a simultaneity of sensation and interpretation. This is most simply analogized by jumping at a loud sound. We do not hear a loud sound *and then* interpret danger *and then* experience fear, the sound is danger, is fear.

And yet, Weil at the same time insists that we have a certain power over how we read the world. She writes: “I possess a certain power over the universe that allows me to change appearances, but it is an indirect one that requires work; it isn’t there by simply wishing.”¹⁴¹ The practice of learning to read differently is a contemplative exercise for Weil, one that can be accomplished in practical ways, one that can be learned by the mind the way a body learns a trade. For one thing, we must recognize that because everything we experience is experienced from our perspective, we are necessarily self-centered. As Allen and Springstead note, this self-centering “causes us to read people, events, and nature incorrectly.” Acknowledging this is the

¹³⁸ Lawrence E. Schmidt, *Simone Weil: Late Philosophical Writings* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 23, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvpj7gb6>.

¹³⁹ Schmidt, 26.

¹⁴⁰ Schmidt, 24.

¹⁴¹ Schmidt, 26.

first step to correcting it. Suffering is an example of an experience that forces us to de-center ourselves because in moments of hardship, we often respond by asking why this has happened to *me*; what have *I* done to deserve this? Allen and Springstead suggest that for Weil these moments can also be “the occasion for reflection;”¹⁴² in other words, they can forcefully de-center us by making us realize that we are not impervious to suffering, that we are “material, and as pieces of material we are vulnerable to injury, illness, and decay.”¹⁴³ To realize this is to reckon with our own status as *limited*. It is, in their words, “to come to terms with necessity” and thereby be to freed “from inadequate readings caused by our egocentricity.”¹⁴⁴ The experience of suffering is therefore one way to learn to perceive or “read” differently.

Thus, Weil suggests that we have some level of control over how we read reality despite the fact that meanings impose themselves on us immediately. In part, this is what Weil means when she says that we “in a certain way give birth to reality.”¹⁴⁵ We must train ourselves to read necessity into all things – especially where it is not readily apparent. As Allen and Springstead explain, “to recognize that we are vulnerable pieces of matter, and that this is an inescapable fact about us, is to read necessity behind our sensation.”¹⁴⁶ Weil admits that most of the time how we read “obeys the law of gravity”; as in, how we read is mostly beyond our control unless “with a higher degree of attention our reading discovers gravity itself.”¹⁴⁷ To discover gravity itself means that we are able “to read necessity behind sensation, to read order behind necessity, and to read God behind order.”¹⁴⁸ Attention is therefore the key to *seeing* necessity as a mediation to

¹⁴² Allen and Springsted, *Spirit, Nature, and Community*, 64.

¹⁴³ Allen and Springsted, 64.

¹⁴⁴ Allen and Springsted, 64.

¹⁴⁵ Weil, “The Pythagorean Doctrine,” 188.

¹⁴⁶ Allen and Springsted, *Spirit, Nature, and Community*, 64.

¹⁴⁷ Weil, “The Pythagorean Doctrine,” 188.

¹⁴⁸ Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 136.

God. Thus, while we are called to respond passively to necessity, learning to read the necessity behind any given experience requires contemplative work.

The Natural Part of the Soul

As I described above, for Weil the experience of beauty functions as an example for the kind of relationship we ought to develop towards all things of the world. As such, beauty is the *immediate experiential love for necessity* that elsewhere comes about as a result of attention or contemplation. Earlier I cited Weil's description of the soul's "natural inclination" to the beautiful as "the trap God most frequently uses in order to win [the soul] and open it to the breath from on high."¹⁴⁹ This "natural inclination" is important because for Weil, "even though this consent is the very function of the supernatural part of the soul, it cannot in fact operate without a certain complicity from the natural part of the soul and even the body."¹⁵⁰ The experience of beauty *naturally* tilts the soul towards the love of necessity. She writes, "when we are alone in the heart of nature and disposed to give it attention, something inclines us to love what surrounds us, which, however, consists only of brute matter, inert, dumb and deaf."¹⁵¹ For Weil, when we find something beautiful, we implicitly and unconsciously recognize divine necessity. It is in this sense that the love of beauty is an implicit love of God. She writes,

Doubtless the very essence of the perception of beauty is itself the sentiment of that necessity one of whose facets is brutal constraint and the other obedience to God. Thanks to a providential mercy, this truth is made manifest in the carnal part of our soul, and even in some sort to our bodies.

¹⁴⁹ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 103.

¹⁵⁰ Weil, "The Pythagorean Doctrine," 190.

¹⁵¹ Weil, 191.

Beauty is thus a secret entry point to the love of God, hence Weil describing “the beauty of the world as commonest, easiest, and most natural way of approach”¹⁵² in “Forms of Implicit Love of God,” and as that which “if it were made true and pure” would “sweep all secular life in a body to the feet of God.”¹⁵³

That said, this understanding of beauty as *the implicit love for necessity made manifest to the natural part of the soul* presents a new challenge, for it introduces us to the presence of what Weil refers to as the “natural” and “supernatural” parts of the soul. Weil admits, that “even in those who are perfect, the natural part of the soul is always entirely subject to mechanical necessity. But the presence of supernatural love in the soul constitutes a new factor of the mechanism and transforms it.”¹⁵⁴ It thus follows that there is some part of the soul without which we would not have the capacity to consent to necessity and thereby love it. We would be wrong to understand this supernatural part of the soul as merely intellectual capability or consciousness because for Weil these functions of the mind are included under the workings of mechanical necessity; they are, in a sense, as material as matter and therefore reside in the natural part of the soul.

In *Oppression and Liberty* Weil writes that “among all the form of materialism, the works of Marx contain one extremely valuable indication [...] – the idea of non-physical matter.”¹⁵⁵ In her view, Marx’s most important contribution to philosophy was including in his definition of matter “social matter,” and “psychological matter.” In her opinion, “under all phenomena of a moral order, whether collective or individual, there is something analogous to matter properly so

¹⁵² Weil, *Waiting for God*, 103.

¹⁵³ Weil, 103.

¹⁵⁴ Weil, “The Pythagorean Doctrine,” 194.

¹⁵⁵ Simone Weil, *Oppression and Liberty* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 177.

called.”¹⁵⁶ This psychological, social matter is analogous to matter proper because, like matter, it is subject to “a mechanism”¹⁵⁷: necessity. When we think of matter proper, we “think of a mechanical system of forces subject to a blind and rigorous necessity.”¹⁵⁸ This has been explored above. What Marx introduces, however, is the idea that “the same applies to that non-tangible matter which is the substance of our thoughts.”¹⁵⁹ This is what Weil means when she says that our way of “reading” the world “obeys the law of gravity.” Hence, Weil includes under the umbrella of “natural” – and by extension created – not merely the materiality of the body as it is subject to physical mechanisms like form, number and the laws of physics, but also the mechanism of the mind, as it is equally subject to other non-physical mechanisms that are analogues to the laws of physics. In the sense that a rock is bound by necessity to the forces of physical gravity, the mind is equally bound to non-physical forces. In her view, “moral phenomena,” for example, are not “brought about by an auto-suggestion or suggestion from without, or indeed by an act of will”; they are “subject to necessity” analogous to physical necessity. In other words, we think according to a system of laws; thought is not truly free but constrained by social forces analogous to gravity. The “relation between cause and effect is as rigorously determined in [the moral, mental and social field] as it is in that of gravity.”¹⁶⁰ In this way, Weil, through Marx,¹⁶¹ broadens the category of “material” to include *almost* everything – with “the exception of the supernatural part of the soul.”¹⁶²

¹⁵⁶ Weil, 178.

¹⁵⁷ Weil, 178.

¹⁵⁸ Weil, 178.

¹⁵⁹ Weil, 178.

¹⁶⁰ Weil, 178.

¹⁶¹ For more on Weil’s relationship to Marx see: Robert Chenavier, “Simone Weil: Completing Platonism through a Consistent Materialism,” in *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 61–76.

¹⁶² Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, 177.

The Supernatural Part of the Soul

In his examination of Weil's annotations, Gabellieri cites a "significant group of annotations on the last part of the *Timaeus*" on the "formations of spinal fluid" which for Plato "flows between the head and the organs of desire."¹⁶³ Along this section, Weil notes this as the "core of the hidden doctrine of the *Timaeus*"; this "spinal fluid" is the "supernatural seed," the "living, divine being within us, an internal mediator."¹⁶⁴ For Gabellieri, these annotations – alongside the "World Soul" and *ananke* (or necessity) – constitute the sources for Weil's "doctrine of consent and obedience" found in "The Pythagorean Doctrine" which I have been describing above.¹⁶⁵ We are now in a position to understand these summative statements as description of what Weil calls the supernatural part of the soul. As such, they are worth quoting in full:

At the end of such meditations, one reaches an extremely simple view of the universe. God has created, that is, not that He has produced something outside Himself, but that He has withdrawn Himself, permitting a part of being to be other than God. To this divine renunciation, the renunciation of creation responds, that is to say, obedience, responds. The whole universe is a compact mass of obedience. This compact mass is sprinkled with points of light. Each one of these points is the supernatural part of the soul of a reasonable creature who loves God and who consents to obey. [...] When one conceives the universe as an immense mass of blind obedience sprinkled with points of consent, one conceives also one's own being as a little mass of blind obedience with a point of consent at the centre. The consent is supernatural love, it is the Spirit of God in us. [...] The consent to obey is mediator between blind obedience and God. The perfect consent is that of Christ. Our consent can only be a reflection of that of Christ. The Christ is mediator between God and ourselves on one side, and on the other between God and the universe. Likewise we, in so far as it is granted to us to imitate Christ, have this extraordinary privilege of being, to a certain degree, mediators between God and His own creation.

This "point of life" or "point of consent" is the supernatural part of the soul. In her annotations, Weil describes it as "the soul of our soul."¹⁶⁶ It is supernatural in the sense that it is the "Spirit of

¹⁶³ Gabellieri, "Reconstructing Platonism: The Trinitarian Metaxology of Simone Weil," 142.

¹⁶⁴ Gabellieri, 142.

¹⁶⁵ Gabellieri, 142.

¹⁶⁶ Gabellieri, 142.

God in us” and therefore entirely distinct from the part of us which is created and therefore “other than God.” It therefore constitutes the indwelling of God in a created being; the supernatural at the center of the natural, the un-created at the center of the created. Any relationship to God is only made possible by the existence of this supernatural part of the soul.

Weil writes,

The infinity of space and time separates us from God. How are we to seek for him? How are we to go towards him? Even if we were to walk for hundreds of years, we should do no more than go round and round the world [...] We cannot take a step toward the heavens. God crosses the universe and comes to us.

By crossing the universe to come to us God “puts a little seed in us and goes away” – this seed is planted in the supernatural part of the soul that is reserved for it. From here, so long as we do not regret consenting to it, the seed grows and “a day comes when the soul belongs to God.” This seed is divine itself: “it is the love of God for God.”¹⁶⁷ This is the meaning of the analogy of the window and of decreation as a way to this mediation; decreation is the contemplative process (or in the passage above the result of the “meditations”) which allows one to reach this point.

The unification between the supernatural part of the soul and God is not a unification between the finite with the infinite, but the *infinite within the finite* that unites with itself. Thus, decreation is not a way of facilitating a unification between ourselves and God – for the self ceases to exist – but a way of facilitating a unification between God and the World. This is only possible if the created part of the self has allowed the uncreated, supernatural part of the soul to grow this seed via the act of decreation. Weil writes that “he who truly loves God leaves its proper function to each part of the soul”¹⁶⁸ All we must do for this seed to grow is “not regret the consent we [give] him.”¹⁶⁹ In doing so, we become a mediation between God and God, which is

¹⁶⁷ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 80.

¹⁶⁸ Weil, “The Pythagorean Doctrine,” 194.

¹⁶⁹ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 79.

simultaneous and identical to a mediation between God and the part of Himself that He has been separated from and now resides in the world.

Christ is our model in this regard; we are called to imitate Christ's mediation between God and the World, although to a lesser and more imperfect degree. Christ is for Weil "mediation itself, and harmony itself"; he is "the key that locks together the Creator and creation."¹⁷⁰ Christ was separated by God in the incarnation; we have likewise been separated by the distance of time and space that is creation. That said, while Christ was separated from God by the "totality of space and time," we are only separated by "the portion of time between our birth and death."¹⁷¹ This is a fraction of the distance which separated God and Christ. Nonetheless, we have a spark of divinity within us that seeks to be reunited with the divine. The result of this reunion is that God is made present here in the world *through us*. We are capable of piercing through the distance between God and world, a piercing made possible by the incarnation of Christ in the world as the Order of the World, through "divine love" or our consent to obey that order. As a result, it becomes possible for us, like Christ, to become a mediation ourselves. For Weil, this is what it means to imitate Christ. We become mediations the way Christ is a mediation. She writes:

We are a point through which God's divine Love for self passes. In no case are we anything else. But if we know this, and if we consent to it, all our being, all that is us appears to be ourselves, becomes infinitely more foreign, more indifferent, and more distant, than this uninterrupted passage of God's love.

This becoming "a passage of God's love" is affected in and through a contemplative process and as such is that process' proper end, but there is another simultaneous end of decreation which involves action. For this passage of God's love is identical to the passing of a morsel of bread

¹⁷⁰ Weil, "The Pythagorean Doctrine," 195.

¹⁷¹ Weil, 197.

between strangers, insofar as that act is the actualization of this passage. This actualization will be taken up in Part Two.

PART TWO | “The Passing of a Morsel of Bread”: The Active End of Decreation

As a result of Weil’s unique and somewhat opaque terminology, Weilian scholarship tends to reproduce the insularity of her work and enact the problematic representation of Weil as an ‘outsider’ whose ideas, while fascinating, are somewhat impossible to translate into other contexts. Though scholars have attempted to locate Simone Weil in numerous intellectual traditions – as a communist, a traditionalist, and a Platonist – few labels tend to stick. Weil’s thought is notoriously contradictory, often taking on the preliminary shape of one or another tradition while remaining unique enough to prevent her thought from being set down in a stable location. While Weil was undoubtedly influenced by Marx, for example, she felt his materialism was ultimately too limited to consider herself a Marxist. While she was deeply influenced by Plato, her unique reading of Plato as a mystic whose works are reflections of Greek culture’s pre-Christian intimations complicate locating her within the Platonic or neo-Platonic traditions alone. Even her status as a Christian thinker is debated, as despite her trinitarian and Christological language she was famously critical of the Church and the status of her baptism remains a topic of much debate.¹⁷² Thus, Weil is something of a challenge to accept as a member of designated intellectual or religious communities, leaving her thought peripheral to contemporary religious

¹⁷² This status of Simone Weil’s baptism is still a topic of debate, as Allen and Springstead show in the introduction to her text *Spirit, Nature, Community* there is reason so believe that Weil was baptized on her deathbed. They also show that a dismissal of this evidence – primarily a testimony from Weil’s friend Simone Deitz first brought to light by Simone Petrement in her biography of Weil in 1974 – may be a result of certain biases by both the Christian and Jewish communities. Namely, Allen and Springstead suggest that the Christian intellectual community has reason to prefer locating Weil as an outsider. To accept Weil’s Baptism would require that the Catholic Church accept her as a member and therefore as a potential challenge. This relegates Weil’s thinking to the margins of both the Jewish and Christian communities, an unorthodox outlier that need not be taken too seriously by either group. For more on this, see: Allen and Springsted, *Spirit, Nature, and Community*, 3–18.

and philosophical scholarship. Nonetheless, many scholars have been working to show that her thinking is not as alien as general opinion suggests. For example, Peter Winch's comparative study of Weil and Wittgenstein is seminal;¹⁷³ numerous essays have been written on her Christian Platonism,¹⁷⁴ and the relatively recent publications of her early writings reveal something of her philosophical influences.¹⁷⁵

One area of Weil's thought that lacks significant comparative analysis is that of her mysticism. There is no proper historiographical analysis of Weil's thought as it relates to the history of Christian mysticism. A comparison between Weil and mystical texts written in Europe during the high medieval period, whose use of self-annihilatory language bear a striking resemblance to Weil's own decreation, has never to my knowledge been thoroughly conducted. Given that Weil continues to garner academic attention while scholarship on medieval Christian mysticism grows, the need to evaluate the depth of these similarities is now overdue. A comprehensive comparison of Weil's relationship to Christian mysticism is not possible here and would constitute another endeavour all its own, but within the scope of this thesis it is worth examining the concept of annihilation as it appears in 13th and 14th century mystical literature.

In Part One of this thesis, I dealt exclusively with the thought of Simone Weil. In doing so I presented my reading of Weil which places particular emphasis on the function of decreation as it pertains to the contemplative aspect of decreation, but this reading alone is not entirely sufficient, as decreation unto becoming a mediation between God and God has a secondary end: just action. The description in Part One focused on the internal transformation of the Soul but not

¹⁷³ Peter Winch, *Simone Weil: "The Just Balance,"* Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹⁷⁴ E. Jane Doering and Eric O. Springsted, eds., *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004).

¹⁷⁵ Weil, *Formative Writings*.

the resulting external obligations. In short, the internal transformation described above has a simultaneous expression in action. To make this secondary result evident, however, it is worth engaging in a dialogue between Weil's decreation and its analogue annihilation in Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart. In doing so, I hope not only to recontextualize Weil's thought, but clarify the active end of the decreative process and unite it with the contemplative.

Beguines

Marguerite Porete was a Beguine – described by Bernard McGinn as “a woman who had adopted a free style of religious life that had grown in popularity in many areas in Europe from the end of the twelfth century.”¹⁷⁶ The beguines were one of many new religious movements flourishing across Europe with large female branches: “Cistercian and Carthusian nuns among the monks; Premonstratensian canonesses in the canonical reform; female “second orders” for both major mendicant groups, the Franciscans and Dominicans,” but the Beguines were unique as the only “new form of ‘apostolic life’ (*vita apostolica*) in which women took the leadership role.”¹⁷⁷ Beguine women lived together in communities across Europe in predominantly urban areas called Beguinages but were not an official religious order, a fact McGinn notes “made them automatically suspect to many.”¹⁷⁸ Porete herself was accused of heresy and burned at the stake by the Inquisition in 1310 due, in part, to Porete's unorthodox dismissal of the need for the church in aiding one's salvation.

According to Walter Simons, “like many other religious movements – orthodox as well as heretical – that rose up after the eleventh century, the beguines demonstrated both a desire to

¹⁷⁶ Bernard McGinn, ed., *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2001), 2.

¹⁷⁷ McGinn, 3.

¹⁷⁸ McGinn, 2.

withdraw from contemporary social life and a wish to be involved in it.”¹⁷⁹ They sought to live lives of “voluntary poverty, material asceticism, simplicity, and a more profound and introspective religiosity” which tends to necessarily privilege a life of exclusion and social withdrawal. At the same time, however, they “emphasized a need for charity work toward the weak and sick.”¹⁸⁰ Thus, Simons confirms that “two tendencies [. . .] coexisted in the beguine movement”: one contemplative and the other active, the latter consisting of “charity, manual work, and teaching.”¹⁸¹

This duality between contemplation and action was not wholly unique to the beguine movement, however. Hollywood finds the conflict encapsulated analogously by the division between Mary “(who sits facing [Jesus’s] feet)” and Martha “(who rushes to prepare a meal for her visitor),”¹⁸² elaborated by Eckhart which I will examine later in this paper. Nonetheless, Hollywood admits that it is true that women’s movements across northern Europe struggled with their desire “to live actively in the world” while contending with social expectations to “remain enclosed within the walls of a convent.”¹⁸³ Against this backdrop Hollywood suggests that the Beguines sought new ways to “bring together” the active and contemplative lives, at times disrupting the binary between the two. In her view, Porete for example “argues that those activities generally associated with action [...] and those associated with contemplation” were all similar forms of action “from which the soul seeking annihilation must become detached.”¹⁸⁴ As

¹⁷⁹ Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200 - 1565*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia, Pa: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 61.

¹⁸⁰ Simons, 61.

¹⁸¹ Simons, 61.

¹⁸² Amy M. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*, Religion and Postmodernism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 10.

¹⁸³ Hollywood, 10.

¹⁸⁴ Hollywood, 10.

such the contextual background out of which annihilation developed is composed of a similar dual impulse towards contemplation and action as we see in Weil.

Annihilation and Decreation

With these preliminary statements in mind, we can turn our attention directly towards the comparison in question. There are several key elements in Weil's decreation and Porete's annihilation which render them comparable: (1) an emphasis on perception or the re-organization of one's self-understanding, (2) an innate structural capacity for divine union, (3) the loss of the will, and (4) an emphasis on divine imitation. Below I examine these similarities:

Micheal Hahn notes that "the term annihilation was seemingly first mentioned in a mystical manner in the twelfth century by Bernard de Clairvaux (d.1153) in his *De diligendo Deo*" when Bernard instructs "the human soul [to] 'lose[s] yourself in some way, as you did if you did not exist, and not to feel yourself in any way, and to be emptied out from yourself [*exinaniri*], and to be almost annihilated [*annullari*].'"¹⁸⁵ Hahn argues that the association between the terms *exinaniri* and *annullari* as near-synonymous forges a link between "mystical self-annihilation [and] Christ's kenosis."¹⁸⁶ Later, Bonaventure would make numerous citations from Philippians in his sermon from 1268, stating that "all creatures, with respect to God are almost nothing' and 'because he assumed our nature,' it can therefore be said that it is 'like he had annihilated himself [*quasi se annihilavit*].'"¹⁸⁷ Hahn argues that these citations clearly reflect the fact that Bonaventure's language, like Bernard's, is "indicative of a radically-kenotic form of incarnational theology," meaning that the incarnation constitutes a self-emptying or lessening of

¹⁸⁵ Micheal Hahn, "Deification in Bonaventure and Angela of Foligno," *[Manuscript Submitted for Publication]*, 2023, 4.

¹⁸⁶ Hahn, 4.

¹⁸⁷ Hahn, 5.

God's being.¹⁸⁸ This “radically-kenotic form of incarnational theology” requires that any *imitatio Christi* resemble a similar kind of “emptying” or “lessening” which bares striking resemblances to how Weil’s unique understanding of creation constitutes the grounds out of which decreation becomes both necessary and imitative. According to Hahn, Bonaventure moves beyond Bernard when he “claims the soul imitates Christ’s annihilation by *recognizing* its own nothingness, littleness or lesserness.”¹⁸⁹ In Hahn’s words, Bonaventure “explained that [...] the soul must come to *acknowledge* its own smallness”¹⁹⁰ if it is to imitate Christ. The mode of this imitation is therefore stresses “acknowledgement” and “recognition” of our finiteness as the proper expression of humility which mirrors the humbling of God in Christ’s incarnation. We see a similar emphasis on the recognition of one’s humble, finite creaturely position in Weil when she speaks of giving up “our imaginary position as the center” in *Waiting for God*.¹⁹¹ For Bonaventure, the fact that this humbling is a “recognition” marks it as a change in perspective similar to Weil’s decentering of the ego – a way of seeing our position in the world *truthfully* (hence our “*imaginary* position as the center”). In Weil this decentering has radical implications, as we saw in Part One reading the world differently has ontological implications; it transforms meanings which re-constitutes reality.¹⁹²

In Porete, Arblaster argues that despite the “emphasis on the loss of the soul’s identity [...] the soul never speaks from the perspective of God.”¹⁹³ In fact, the Soul retains its ability to speak and “continues to refer to itself as distinct” even after it has “therein lost [its] name.”¹⁹⁴ In

¹⁸⁸ Hahn, 5.

¹⁸⁹ Hahn, 6. Emphasis mine.

¹⁹⁰ Hahn, 6. Emphasis mine.

¹⁹¹ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 100.

¹⁹² See Part One, section titled: *Detachment and Reading Necessity*.

¹⁹³ John Arblaster, “Flowing from the Wild Sea and Back to the Sea’: Water Metaphors and Mystical Union in the Late Medieval Low Countries,” *The Journal of Religion* 98, no. 2 (April 2018): 180, <https://doi.org/10.1086/696271>.

¹⁹⁴ Arblaster, 180.

his view, this reveals something about Porete’s “anthropological position,” namely, that “the mutual indwelling to which she refers presupposes that the soul’s ontological structure is such that it is capable of receiving the consciousness that it stands in direct relationship to God’s love.”¹⁹⁵ Arblaster seems to be suggesting that the Soul’s ability to receive God’s love has structural implications, and that because the Soul continues to refer to itself as distinct *after* its annihilation it may suggest a kind of awareness of its own latent potential to receive this love. To say this in another way, Arblaster’s phrasing reveals something about the conditions for this indwelling; namely, that Porete admits the possibility of an unmediated relationship between God and the Soul and that this relationship is predicated on the Soul’s own “consciousness that it stands in direct relationship to God’s love.” In other words, that this indwelling is made possible in part due to a re-structuring of one’s awareness, in many ways mirroring Bonaventure’s position. In short, for Porete indwelling may be a latent structural potential belonging to the Soul, but the *actualization* of this indwelling is concomitant with a transformation of our “consciousness,” much in the same way that Weil’s decentering of the ego via decreation is the prerequisite condition for one’s becoming a mediation between God and God. This is important because for Weil the Supernatural Part of the Soul is an ontological given; it is structurally intrinsic to all created beings, but the actualization of this part of the soul requires a transformation not of *what* we are, but whether we can *recognize* what we are.

We can see in *The Mirror* a similar lack of ontological change. In Chapter 111 of *The Mirror* “Errant Will” speaks, saying:

... now I cannot be [...] what I am to be until I am back there again where once I was, and as I was before I issued from him, as naked as is he who is; as naked as I was when I

¹⁹⁵ Arblaster, 181.

was who was not. And I must have this, if I want to have again what is mine; and otherwise I shall not have it.¹⁹⁶

In a different way, this speaks a similar notion to the ontologically given possibility for an unmediated relationship between the Soul and God that Arblaster argues for above. Errant will makes this clear when it laments that it is not able to be “what I am” until it has returned to “where I once was.” It seems as if Errant Will is frustrated that it can not self actualize under its present conditions, suggesting that the change that happens to the will is not transformative (a change in kind) but an actualization of its own potential becoming what it already *is*. In other words, the Errant Will in its current condition is in a state prior to it’s becoming itself. This gives the impression that the Soul, of which the Errant Will is a faculty, already has a latent capacity for this change, and that this change is not a transformation in kind but an actualization of its same-self potential.

Weil’s use of the phrase “imaginary position” is important because it speaks to a “realization” of something truthful by way of giving up what is false. Decreation is a shedding of what is false to reveal what was is true but hidden by creation. Similarly in *The Mirror*, Errant Will is simply the Will when it is not able to be *what it is*. This is because, in Ellen L. Babinsky’s terms, the “proper activity of the human will is to will the divine will,”¹⁹⁷ Errant will runs amuck when it wills independently of God. Like in Weil, the will has the ability to either “wander into perdition, or through grace to return to where it belongs, in God.”¹⁹⁸ For Babinsky, “the spiritual task, then, is to return the will to where it belongs.”¹⁹⁹ Once the will has returned to its original

¹⁹⁶ Marguerite Porete et al., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, Notre Dame Texts in Medieval Culture, vol. 6 (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 134.

¹⁹⁷ Ellen L Babinsky, “Christological Transformation in The Mirror of Souls, by Marguerite Porete,” *Theology Today* 60, no. 1 (April 2003): 38.

¹⁹⁸ Babinsky, 39.

¹⁹⁹ Babinsky, 39.

belonging in God “the soul cannot sin” because it can “no longer contradict God” – what the soul wills is identical to what God wills. In *The Mirror*, this is the Will’s *true* nature. Thus, annihilating the personal or Errant Will constitute a similar shedding of what was, in fact, never real to begin with, such as we see in Weil.

Importantly, in Babinsky’s view the possibility of this return of the Soul to its origin in God is “clearly Christological” due to Christ’s role as exemplar; Porete writes, “and the Son of God is exemplar for us and thus we ought to follow Him in this regard, for we ought to will in all things only the divine will. And so we will to be sons of God the Father according to the exemplar of Jesus Christ His Son.”²⁰⁰ Thus, in Babinsky’s terms “the soul becomes by grace what Jesus Christ is by nature – truly human and truly divine.”²⁰¹ Evidently, the conditions that make this transformation of the will possible depend on its having something to imitate. Babinsky asserts this in no uncertain terms when she writes, “the exemplar’s function is crucial in making possible the soul’s Christological transformation. The image of an exemplar participates in its reality by virtue of the exemplar itself. [...] For Porete, then, the soul’s Christological transformation is possible only insofar as Christ is its exemplar.”²⁰² Similarly in Weil, Christ’s exemplary role and mediator and harmonizer was shown to be a necessary condition for us to, in imitation, take on a similar mediative role. Thus, the similarities between Porete’s annihilation and Weil’s decreation go beyond a mere inclination towards radical humility and asceticism. Rather, both positions hold similar ontological and Christological claims.

²⁰⁰ Porete et al., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 132.

²⁰¹ Babinsky, “Christological Transformation in The Mirror of Souls, by Marguerite Porete,” 38.

²⁰² Babinsky, 43.

Dualism or Non-Dualism?

There are, however, several differences between Weil's decreation and Porete's annihilation. For one thing, Porete's text implies a kind of 'breakthrough' in its discussion of annihilation in which the soul progresses through the stages of annihilation, becomes transformed, and from then on is in a *permanent* state of freedom and simplicity. This is certainly not true for Weil who laments at her inability to meet the standards she sets for herself, and whose decreation appears more like a continual striving cycling between moments of success and failure. There is reason, however, to suggest that this difference can be overcome.

As scholars have shown there are moments in the text which seem to suggest a remaining dualism between the Soul and Love: "one will, one love, one work, in *two* natures."²⁰³ Arblaster, for example, argues for such a reading by showing that "an unremitting ontological distinction between the soul and God" remains throughout Porete's text evident in the fact that the soul "continues to refer to itself as distinct" even after the narrative gives the impression of a divine union, described above. Arblaster goes on to suggest that such terms as 'distinct' and 'indistinct' are not entirely useful categories for someone like Porete, whose use of river metaphors suggest a dynamic, flexible "merging with the sea" which "implies continuity and dynamism" rather than the finality of a nondual fusion.²⁰⁴ Micheal Hahn supports Arblaster in this conclusion. Most notably, Hahn explores Bernard McGinn's division between "hard or radical" annihilation, as containing ontological claims, and "soft or metaphorical" annihilation, which do not, in his forthcoming book *Medieval Mystical Women of the West: Growing in the Height of Love*.²⁰⁵ In

²⁰³ Porete et al., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 116.

²⁰⁴ John Arblaster, "'Flowing from the Wild Sea and Back to the Sea': Water Metaphors and Mystical Union in the Late Medieval Low Countries," *The Journal of Religion* 98, no. 2 (April 2018): 182–83,

²⁰⁵ Micheal Hahn, "Becoming Nothing in Christianity, Sufism and Buddhism: Why Christian Annihilation Is Not Nirvana. A Response to Barbara Newman.," [Manuscript Submitted for Publication], 2023, 3.

his view, while the distinction between “soft” and “hard” annihilation is at times useful, in particular by differentiating the more radical claims of total self-loss in Porete to the metaphorical claims of imitation and conformity popular in someone like Angela of Foligno, Hahn successfully argues that in actuality both make use of metaphorical *and* ontological claims. In support he cites Arblaster’s investigation of river imagery in Porete, but additionally, Hahn notes that it isn’t until “[Porete’s] seventh stage that complete annihilation [. . .] occurs upon death,”²⁰⁶ which, in his opinion, suggests that Porete is at least partially working in metaphor, else the internal logic of her claims for a final and totalizing transformation breaks down. We cannot excuse these moments of discordance between the apparent totalizing “once and for all” indistinct deification of the Soul and moments which suggest remaining dualism, but I believe it is possible to reconcile the two, and in doing so deepen the similarity between Porete’s annihilation and Weil’s decreation, particularly as they pertain to action.

Reading The Mirror

One major point of difference between the works of Weil and Porete is the form and intention their texts take. Weil’s are scattered notebooks, diaries rife with question marks and puzzlement; they are unfinished texts that give their reader a glance into Weil’s mind *in process*, as it moves through time, cycling between subjects, adjusting and building on earlier thoughts. Porete’s is a complete book meant for widespread distribution and teaching. Remembering this, it is worth looking to chapter 110, where Porete adds an interesting description of art:

How art in the creature is a subtle instrument which is in the substance of the Soul She who seeks. What then is art in the creature? Says she who seeks.
Love. It is a subtle instrument of which perception is born, which gives knowledge in the Soul, to understand more perfectly what is said than even he who says it, however much

²⁰⁶ Hahn, 4.

the speaker may understand what he says, because the listener rests, and the speaker labors, and knowledge cannot endure labor without becoming less noble. This art is swift, and so it tends naturally to attain the whole of its undertaking.

Additionally, after the seventh stage when the annihilation is complete the text adds an “excuse,” titled:

How the Soul who has caused this book to be written excuses herself for having made this so long-winded, this book which seems so small and short to the Souls who dwell in nothingness and who have fallen from Love into the state of being.

After the seventh stage the ‘speaker’ has not forgotten that this is a mere book, and she goes so far as to remind their reader by way of an apology. These two comments frame Porete’s telling of the seven stages of mystical union and, I contend, suggest a certain way of reading them; namely, they remind the reader that this book is a representation and as such a piece of art.

As Newman notes, “what seems remarkable [about Porete] is that this most vigorous apostle of annihilation was also the more deliberate, self-conscious author.”²⁰⁷ She explains that “it would be tempting to say that few medieval books ever sprang so self-evidently from authorial will” if it were not for how “insistent” she is that her heroine be “bitterly without will and desire.”²⁰⁸ The paradox of authorship plagues the text: how does one speak if they are annihilated? Where is Porete’s voice and where is God’s? I believe it is more than possible that moments such as those cited above suggest a certain degree of hermeneutical self-consciousness and therefore offer the reader a way of interpreting the text which may point to a solution in which the remaining dualism vs complete deification debate are both true.

Porete appears to be reminding the reader of the text’s own textuality, that is, that the book is a representation. Hollywood notes a similar representational self awareness in her

²⁰⁷ Barbara Newman, “Annihilation and Authorship: Three Women Mystics of the 1290s,” *Speculum* 91, no. 3 (2016): 615.

²⁰⁸ Newman, 615.

investigation into the ambiguities of the text's title and the various medieval understandings of the term *mirouer*.²⁰⁹ She writes that, "for the medieval reader the deceptive quality of mirrors plays a notable role in understanding the term" because the poorer quality of mirrors in the era meant that the term implicitly denotes illusion and deformity.²¹⁰ Hollywood goes on to say that "the Latin *speculum* also refers by extension to all painting or representation, whether reflective or not"²¹¹ leading, to my mind, to the natural implication that all art or representation is by extension somewhat deceptive, illusory, or a deformity of that which it depicts. No doubt Porete's "excuse" carries with it a hint of this same implication insofar as it refers to the text's relative insufficiency or "small[ness]" in the eyes of "Souls who dwell in nothingness."

This textual self-consciousness is further supported by Hollywood when she goes on to examine whether the text ought to be understood as an attempted depiction of divinity. She suggests that the Prologue gives reason to assume as much when Lady Love, "one of the main personified speakers in the ensuing dialogue, gives an exemplum in which she shows the purpose of the text about to be read."²¹² The exemplum is the story of a young princess who falls in love with a king from a distant land who she has never met nor seen. The princess nonetheless commissions a painting to be made of this king so that he can "in some way be present to herself."²¹³ This, of course, requires that we ask how it is possible to represent something one has never seen? As Hollywood points out, the question "is implicitly answered by the assertion that the painter produced a likeness of the image by means of which the princess had come to love the king, the interior picture found in her heart" and that this would not have "discount[ed] the

²⁰⁹ Amy M. Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart*, Studies in Spirituality and Theology 1 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 87.

²¹⁰ Hollywood, 87.

²¹¹ Hollywood, 88.

²¹² Hollywood, 88.

²¹³ Hollywood, 88.

reality of her love” nor the veracity of the image, “for in the courtly ethos image and reputation are important extensions of the person.”²¹⁴ From there, the story of the princess is analogously applied to the *Mirror* itself: “Truly, says the soul who had this book made, I speak to you of matters similar to this.”²¹⁵ Hollywood goes on to describe the relative similarities and differences between the exemplum and the *Mirror*; namely, that “both are images or representations, less of the beloved himself, who is and remains beyond the reach of the lover, than the love felt for him or the image of the beloved found within the heart or soul of the lover” and yet, in the case of *The Mirror*, the king (God) “has given to [his beloved] an image of his love,” a reciprocity not found in the exemplum, and one which implies divine co-authorship.

However, Hollywood’s own comparison between the exemplum and *The Mirror* suggests another implication: since in the exemplum the likeness produced by “the interior picture found in her heart” still holds some “reality” or truth despite the inaccessibility of that which it represents, *The Mirror* – by analogy – may hold a similarly ambiguous relationship to ‘true’ or ‘false.’ This is no more than the paradox of all art – known to anyone who has been moved by a painting, or poem or song – that art is a representation and therefore definitively *not reality*, and yet, by way of this depiction it can show us something honest about reality itself. Thus, art is a lie which tells the truth; it is faithful to its object by way of its own unfaithfulness. Given that the exemplum leaves room for the “reality” of a representation which is no less false than it is true, it follows that *The Mirror* is open and aware of both the limits and possibilities of representation as it relates to truth.

Demanding that the text be either dualist or non-dualist fails to take into consideration the ambiguity of the text’s relationship to representation and therefore as unstable and in flux.

²¹⁴ Hollywood, 88.

²¹⁵ Porete et al., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 11.

Scholars like Arblaster and Hahn, by noting the metaphorical nature of certain remarks and the implications of those metaphors, disrupt the possibility of a strict and stable non-dualist reading, but they do not go far enough. Merely asking this either/or question presupposes a demand for a certain kind of narrative consistency which the text is not obligated to provide. As Hollywood insists, “the *Mirror* [...] cannot be understood as static and descriptive” nor can we ignore the obvious conflict of the dramatization being played out, namely, that “the change involved in the stages of being and the goal of absolute changelessness are in conflict.”²¹⁶ Because the text is, as Hollywood notes, attempting to describe “a state of being and of union with God that those who experience it recognize without words and those who do not cannot understand because of the distortions of reason and the will,” it is necessarily struggling under the impossibility of its own project. Any sustained narrative within the text (which Hollywood admits there is) is nonetheless “undermined by the desired goal, a state of timeless and transparent union with the divine on earth. Such a state is difficult to achieve while one is involved with the things of the world, or at least difficult to describe in narrative terms...”²¹⁷ Cathrine M. Bothe describes this as the “paradox of the Mirror” in which “there is an abyss between the work written by Love and the work rewritten by the Soul.”²¹⁸ Any attempt made by the Soul to aid the reader’s understanding is foolish and impossible, but she may rely on God’s grace to succeed where she fails. In Bothe’s description this is made possible by the Soul’s “will to write.”²¹⁹ Her desire bridges the “abyss” and Love becomes the author of the text.

²¹⁶ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 97.

²¹⁷ Hollywood, 119.

²¹⁸ Cathrine M. Bothe, “Writing as Mirror in the Work of Marguerite Porete,” *Mystics Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (1994): 107.

²¹⁹ Bothe, 107.

Perception and Knowledge

Another way of reading the texts attempt to overcome this paradox is in and through Love's description of art, in the passages quoted above, as "a subtle instrument of which perception is born" that is "swift" and therefore able to "attain to the *whole* of its undertaking." As Hollywood and Bothe note, the experience being described is not transmittable in language, but it can be immediately recognized by those who already know it. And yet, the text is attempting to *describe* the Soul's transformation as well as *effect* this transformation in the reader. As an instructional text its medium (language) is too narrow to accomplish its task. Nonetheless, there appears to be evidence of another way towards understanding that is not grounded in reason. In Chapter 109, directly before the description of art mentioned above, the Soul expresses its gratitude for being provided the means to recognize its own nothingness. When Truth tells the Soul of its own nothingness the Soul can recognize this *as true*. This results in a certain ambivalence of Soul towards itself: "I willingly accept Justice, or Mercy, or Truth, or Gentleness. Whichever of these two sides be my lot, it is all one to me."²²⁰ The Soul which now experiences this newfound ambivalence – similar in kind to the ambivalence of God the Father when he "gives us his son," and the Son when He "redeemed us by dying, paying obedience to the Father" – is then contrasted with an 'other': a Soul who lacks this particular kind of understanding. The ambivalent Soul speaks, saying "if anyone seeks for what he has, his perception is at fault," as they are lacking in "the art which brings such knowledge."²²¹ It would appear, therefore, that the Soul is telling (in the negative) of another way to knowledge or understanding brought about by art. In other words, the ambivalent Soul has been brought to this understanding his faculty of "perception" which "brings such knowledge."

²²⁰ Porete et al., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 132.

²²¹ Porete et al., 132.

Given that the text is meant to be transformatively instructional – telling not only of the Soul’s transformation but also attempting to elicit this transformation in its reader – but, as Hollywood notes, not able to conduct this instruction in the language of reason, we must assume that it “brings such knowledge” in another way. And given the above analysis, the text is certainly conscious of itself as a representation with similar limits and possibilities as the painting of the princess’s beloved king. It follows, therefore, that the text is aware of itself as art and that this may be the “subtle instrument” by which the text can bring knowledge and understanding to its reader. Certainly, we can see the text struggle to articulate the difference between knowledge gained via the faculty of reason and this ‘other’ kind of knowledge hinted at by repeated use of the term perception rather than understanding.

Moreover, the text tells of a difference between the giver of this knowledge or “speaker,” and the “listener” who receives it. The difference between the two being that the speaker corrupts knowledge in their telling of it because “knowledge cannot endure labor without becoming less noble.” The listener, however, given that they are at rest, can understand what the speaker says in its fullness. This draws a complicated picture of artistic expression with three implications: 1) art has the ability to transmit some kind of “knowledge” in a way reason does not; (2) something of what is told is always lost by its being told, by its being subject to the labor of telling; and (3) somehow the listener is nonetheless able to experience the fullness of what is being told in a way that moves beyond that of the teller. The difference between the experience of the speaker and of the listener seems to come down to a difference of pace (“swiftly”) and whether the telling is given as a totality (“given as a whole”). By inference, it appears that part of what constitutes a successful transmission of knowledge comes down to whether that knowledge is immediate or

sequential, whether it is told as a whole and “swiftly” or told piecemeal and dawn out through time and labour.

Timelessness

What does this difference look like? Jean-Francois Lyotard’s notion of the instant, though from a radically different era, may offer some context. In Lyotard’s definitively post-modern text *The Inhuman*, he describes a quality of Barnett Newman’s paintings that separate him from either the avant-gardes or American abstract expressionists. This difference is related to how Newman considers his paintings in relation to time. Lyotard writes that “the purpose of a painting by Newman is not to show that duration is in excess of consciousness, but to be the occurrence, the moment which has arrived.”²²² Lyotard goes on to say that a painting by Newman is “an angel [...] it announces nothing; it is the annunciation. [...] Newman is not representing a non-representable annunciation; he allows it to present itself.”²²³ Unlike the avant-gardes or abstract expressionists who are trying to represent the unrepresentable, Newman’s pieces, in Lyotard’s view, allow the unrepresentable to simply ‘happen.’ In his words,

A canvas by Newman draws a contrast between stories and plastic nudity. Everything is there – dimensions, colors, lines – but there are no allusions. So much so that it is a problem for the commentator. What can one say that is not given? [...] It is a feeling of ‘there’ (Voilà). There is almost nothing to ‘consume’, or if there is, I do not know what it is. One cannot consume an occurrence, but merely its meaning. The feeling of the instant is instantaneous.²²⁴

This feeling is, for Lyotard, a post-modern sublime. The instant is in excess of linguistic telling because the instant cannot be transcribed into meaningful language because meaning and interpretation necessarily occur *after* the fact. The instant, because it is not subject to sequence, is

²²² Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1991), 78.

²²³ Lyotard, 79.

²²⁴ Lyotard, 80.

therefore necessarily outside of time. In other words, we might say that Newman's paintings – large canvas's total devoid of a figurative image, usually a singular wall of color with thin sharp lines called "zips" running vertically down the center or near center – are an example of meaning transmitted totally and immediately, akin to the perfection of the "swift" and "whole" description which we found in Porete's text. We may also note that in Lyotard's description the author of the work adds no representation of their own, but "allows [the annunciation] to present itself." This is not unlike Bothe's description in which it is God who "unveils his book" rather than the speaking Soul who, despite their attempts, cannot put what has been unveiled by God into words.²²⁵

Lyotard's "instant" is more explicit in the plastic arts. Because a painting occurs in space not in time it can (relatively speaking) be apprehended as a totality, all at once. A book or poem, on the other hand, occur in time – meaning that they require temporality for them to be what they are. Language is not primarily a visual medium; it is a temporal one, the reader passes from one word onto the next to gather up the meaning of the whole. In other words, a book cannot be apprehended instantly. It is worth remembering, however, that Porete's text *is* the Mirror itself. While it may be a book whose meaning is gathered up over time, it nonetheless strives *also* to be the enactment of an object. Moreover, Hollywood reminds us that the "desired goal" of the text is "a state of timeless and transparent union with the divine," and that "such a state is difficult to achieve while one is involved with the things of the world, or at least difficult to describe in narrative terms."²²⁶ Timelessness is impossible to achieve in narrative terms, insofar as narrative occurs in time – one of the many paradoxes of the text. The text's relative success and failure on this account is part of what Hollywood refers to as the text's need to surpass itself. As such, it is

²²⁵ Bothe, "Writing as Mirror in the Work of Marguerite Porete," 109.

²²⁶ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 119.

worth remembering that despite the narrative progression, the text is not attempting to *describe* ‘a mirror’ but *be* ‘the mirror’ itself. Hollywood acknowledges that the text “continually undercuts its own hierarchies, for it is insofar as she is nothing that she is all, insofar as she is liberated that she is perfect, and in the moment what is most hidden and distant becomes most clear,”²²⁷ and I would suggest that the text also undercuts a narrative/non-narrative binary. For, insofar as it is instructional, the text is subject to narrative progression and the binary between dualism and non-dualism still holds meaning, but insofar as it is ‘a mirror’ of simple and annihilated souls the text is necessarily beyond narrative; insofar as it is in “a state of timeless and transparent union,” the binary between dualism and non-dualism is rendered meaningless.

But this does not imply that the simple and annihilated soul is always and forever in this state of “transparent union with the divine,” as Barbara Newman implies when she writes that in *The Mirror* “annihilation is experienced as a breakthrough that occurs once and for all: after a Soul has entered the Land of Freedom, there is no going back.”²²⁸ Nor does it mean that, as Bothe describes it, “the unveiling of the secret [...] lasts but a moment.”²²⁹ Rather, given that the annihilated soul is subject to “timelessness” the idea of a “before” or “after” annihilation holds no meaning within the moment of annihilation – even a term like ‘moment’ is meaningless here, as a moment would require a *before* and *after*. The annihilated soul, insofar as it is subject to timelessness is necessarily a-temporal. It is perfectly plausible to admit that a soul experiences *moments* of annihilation and *afterwards* “falls back into being,” but such an admission is only possible temporally: you have one moment and then another different moment. To the extent that the *Mirror*’s annihilated Soul is atemporal, annihilation is *only* one *singular* moment; it is an

²²⁷ Hollywood, 115.

²²⁸ Newman, “Annihilation and Authorship,” 620.

²²⁹ Bothe, “Writing as Mirror in the Work of Marguerite Porete,” 106.

“instant” to use Lyotard’s term. In this instant nothing exists outside of it, and rightly so; the instant is infinite when it is separated from time. Thus, applying any temporal logic to the understanding brought about by Love is untenable.

The difficulty of this reading lies in the fact that the text works both in time and a-temporally *at once*. We cannot deny that Porete’s text points to a totalizing deification in which the Soul is completely indistinct to God, and within the atemporal logic of the annihilated moment we need not. At the same time, however, we need not suggest that this is a *permanent* state. It is the text’s relationship to a-temporality that allows Porete’s annihilated soul to claim to have ‘become’ Christ: “I am the salvation of every creature and the glory of God.”²³⁰ But to assume, that the annihilated Soul becomes indistinct from Christ and is therefore transformed into Christ “once and for all,” as Newman does, is to dismiss the text’s enactment *in time* of an inexpressible *a-temporality*; it is to apply time to something a-temporal. We can plausibly admit that Porete is suggesting that the annihilated soul becomes Christ while acknowledging that one does not *stay* annihilated – at least not until death, as Hahn notes. If the soul becomes perfection, it is a moment of perfection, an instant of deification. On this basis, we can theorize that Christ’s perfection differs insofar as it was able to maintain itself within the temporal. The ‘instant’ of perfection for the annihilated soul is amplified infinitely in Christ across all of time. Thus, Porete can make the claim of a Christological transformation in the instant of annihilation both with and without suggesting a totalizing deification because doing so depends on whether the instant is viewed temporally of a-temporally.

The Act

²³⁰ Porete et al., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 139.

Admitting this has interesting implications, for it could suggest that there are a-temporal moments²³¹ here in the temporal realm in which Christ is present via the annihilated soul – even if those moments do not last. What do these moments look like? Porete answers this question: they are moments when one’s individual will is replaced with the will of God’s, thereby creating perfect action. Arblaster describes Porete’s form of deification as a doctrine of grace in which “a radical and transformative union with the infused love of God – the Holy Spirit – sanctifies and perfects human action.”²³² For Weil, this is what decreation facilitates also: a moment in which Christ comes to act through her. For Weil, the context of these moments is made more explicit because she argues that Christ’s will can be made apparent to us through necessity: Christ’s will becomes evident to us when we recognize the way things *must* be. As such, attending to necessity, particularly where it is not outrightly explicit, is attending to God’s will. Weil therefore refuses to act unless she feels completely, unavoidably compelled to do so. This, along with the suppression of her own will, allows her to act only in accordance with God. She goes so far as to admit that she would not feed a starving stranger unless she felt unavoidably compelled to do so. This may seem like cruelty, except that for Weil, one *cannot* pass a starving stranger with bread in one’s own hand *without* stopping to feed them. This is a perfect action, that which we cannot help but do – with no volition of our own we are compelled by God to act.

Acting as/in Christ

This passage of love described at the end of Part One is, for Weil, actualized in the act of the charity. In her essay “Forms of the Implicit Love of God,” she writes,

²³¹ As I stated above, this language is inaccurate but it is sufficient for the purposes of this description.

²³² John Arblaster, *On Becoming “Not God but What God Is”*: Essays on the Doctrine of Deification in The Late Medieval Low Countries (Catholic University of Leuven, 2016), 63.

The text of the Gospel is concerned only with Christ's presence in the sufferer. Yet it seems as though the spiritual worthiness of him who receives has nothing to do with the matter. It must then be admitted that it is the benefactor himself, as bearer of Christ, who causes Christ to enter the famished sufferer with the bread he gives him. The other can consent to receive this presence or not, exactly like the person who goes to communion. If the gift is rightly given and rightly received, the passing of a morsel of bread from one man to another is something like a real communion.²³³

This communion is a "moment" in which the benefactor is "raised [...] to the state spoken of by Saint Paul" in which "he no longer lives in himself but Christ lives in him."²³⁴ Here we have the basic formula that decreation facilitates – a simultaneous self-loss and filling of that now empty space with Christ. The loss of the will – by way of a dislocating the self as the center of the world and attending to necessity – does not transform that individual into Christ, it facilitates and indwelling in which Christ's will is acted out in and through the decreed individual. This is identical to the "passage of God's love" described in Part One. In this moment God and the world have contact or "something like a real communion," which is simultaneously a communion between God and the world and God and God's-self because the part of the world that God makes contact with is the Supernatural Part of the Soul, which properly belongs to God.

Importantly, this "moment" of charity, exemplified in the giving of bread, is for Weil indistinguishable from justice and is defined by circumstances which create an imbalance of power between a benefactor (more powerful) and the sufferer (less powerful).²³⁵ In other words, charity and justice are made possible by the lack of power in one individual and an excess of power in the other. For the more powerful individual "supernatural virtue of justice consists of behaving exactly as though there were equality when one is stronger in an unequal relationship."²³⁶ For the sufferer, "what is called gratitude" consists in "not believing that there

²³³ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 84.

²³⁴ Weil, 84.

²³⁵ Weil, 85.

²³⁶ Weil, 87.

really is equality of strength and in recognizing that his treatment is due solely to the generosity of the other party.”²³⁷ Both participants in the exchange practice a lessening of the self in order to allow the transmission of love to occur. The benefactor willingly ignores and thereby negates their power, and the sufferer willingly accepts their dependency on the benefactor. To genuinely accept the help of another is as humbling as doing the help itself.

This creates a relationship between the two akin to God’s act of creation because the benefactor “really makes them a gift of the quality of human beings, of which fate had deprived them” and, at the same, mirrors God’s dual act of self-negation (in Creation and in the Incarnation) by *not* making use of the full power available to him. All while the Sufferer willingly accepts either the generosity or violence of the one more powerful than themselves, as Christ accepted the cross. Thus, “creation and compassion are inseparable, and both have their model in God, that is to say, in creation and in the Passion.”²³⁸ The “supernatural exchange” of compassion and gratitude between the benefactor and the sufferer is a “flash between two beings, one possessing and the other deprived of human personality”²³⁹ in which Christ resides simultaneously in both; Christ is both the giver and the receiver because it is supernatural compassion which makes the benefactor exercise less than their full power (akin to a body rising out of water *less* than their density allows – in a ‘super’ natural way) and supernatural gratitude which allows the sufferer to accept the gift, which requires that they recognize that this treatment is “due solely to the generosity of the other party.”²⁴⁰ In other words, both are in an egoless state. According to Weil, “the essence of [human] desire always consists is this, that he wants above all

²³⁷ Weil, 88.

²³⁸ Weil, 90.

²³⁹ Weil, 90.

²⁴⁰ Weil, 88.

things to be able to exercise his will freely.”²⁴¹ As such, in a moment of compassion in which the benefactor wishes “for the existence of the free consent in another” who by circumstance has been deprived of it, the benefactor must “transport oneself into him” which is at the same time “to consent to affliction oneself, that is to say to the destruction of oneself.”²⁴² This self-destruction combined with a “gladness to be the recipient of supernatural compassion” that thereby “leaves self-respect absolutely intact” results in the benefactor becoming “capable under God of establishing someone else by a creative affirmation.”²⁴³ In other words, the benefactor has the opportunity to bring the sufferer out of their deprived state or not. This complete subjection to the benefactors will is acknowledged and accepted by the sufferer. In the moment in which the bread is passed, the benefactor confirms the sufferer’s personhood at the same time that the sufferer recognizes and is grateful for the gift. Between the benefactor and the sufferer, a friendship is formed: “the afflicted man and his benefactor, between whom diversity of fortune places an infinite distance, are united in this acceptance.”²⁴⁴ Both are humbled, and in turn God comes to dwell in both.

This is the secondary aspect of decreation which pertains to action: a moment of “love for our neighbour [...] analogous to genius;” a kind of work “of the highest order” or of “true creation” facilitated by self-loss. All this is absolutely dependent on the benefactor loving the sufferer “for themselves alone,” not as an “occasion for doing good,” not as a time of “love our neighbour in God, or for God.”²⁴⁵ Rather, in those moments “the presence of God in us has as its condition a secret so deep that it is even secret from us.”²⁴⁶ In reality, the exchange is between

²⁴¹ Weil, 91.

²⁴² Weil, 91.

²⁴³ Weil, 91.

²⁴⁴ Weil, 91.

²⁴⁵ Weil, 93.

²⁴⁶ Weil, 93.

God and God, and as such is simultaneously also the same end of decreation we saw as mediation:

God is present at the point where the eyes of those who give and those who receive meet. The sufferer and the other love each other, starting from God, through God, but not for the love of God; they love each other for the love of the one for the other. This is an impossibility. That is why it comes about only through the *agency* of God.²⁴⁷

In Part One, we saw that the passage of love between God and God comes about through the contemplation of necessity such that we see in it the Order of the World and thereby accept it lovingly. Here we see that the passage of love between God and God is also an act-based event, and the simultaneity of these two aspects of decreation is epitomized in Hollywood's analogy of the *virgin wife*.

Meister Eckhart

The act-oriented aspect of annihilation is not overt in Porete's text. For while Hollywood admits that "Porete suggests that the free soul becomes the place in which Love operates" a "certain ambivalence with regard to embodiment remains" which Hollywood views as a potential result of the "contemporary culture's expectations about female spirituality."²⁴⁸ As such, Hollywood turns to Meister Eckhart who extends Porete's "new relationship toward things of this world" and thereby elaborates and emphasizes that "the detached soul" is "the site of divine justice in the world."²⁴⁹ Through her reading of Eckhart the relationship between annihilation as the unity of active and contemplative lives is brought to the surface and symbolically expressed in the *virgin wife*. A look at Hollywood's reading of Eckhart therefore further solidifies the

²⁴⁷ Weil, 94.

²⁴⁸ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 119.

²⁴⁹ Hollywood, 119.

comparison between decreation and annihilation as they pertain to the unity of action and contemplation.

Eckhart's elaboration of the detached souls as "the site of divine justice in the world" is grounded in his ontology of *bullitio* and *ebullitio* wherein, according to P.L Reynolds, *bullitio* is "a metaphor depicting the generation of the Son from the Father," (235) and, in Hollywood's words, "the self-birth of the Godhead into the Trinity, or the reflexive movement by which the One emanates into the three self-identical persons of the Godhead."²⁵⁰ In essence, the two terms are used to explain the difference between the unity of the Trinity or "absolute equality of the Father and Son" who are in an univocal (and therefore equal) relationship and the different analogical relationship between creator and creation (who are therefore in an unequal relationship). The difference between these two kinds of relations is grounded in a distinction between that which emanates from the Creator but does not participate time and space (persons of the Trinity) and that which emanates from the Creator but *is* subject to time and space (creatures). Both the Son and creatures emanate from God and therefore have their being rooted in divine *bullitio*. However, unlike the Son, who is in a persistence state of "being born" and therefore indistinct from the unity in the Godhead, everything in the created world is subject to generation and therefore while it emanates from God and has its virtual existence in divine *bullitio*, the actual act of creation has an added "new dimension" (*ebullitio*) which constitutes the difference between God and creation, a difference which is not present between the Father and Son. Hollywood summarizes it thus:

Since that which proceeds not only pre-exists in its source, but also remains in that source 'just as it was in the beginning before it came to be' even after its procession from the source, a new dimension is added to creation's claims for coeternity and equality. Because all creation has both a virtual and formal aspect, it has corresponding coeternal and temporal relations to the divine production – coeternal as always virtually produced

²⁵⁰ Hollywood, 136.

in the *bullitio* of production of the three divine Persons and temporal insofar as it is the product of *ebullitio*. [...] Therefore human beings, insofar as they are other than God – insofar as they are created – do not live or have their being in the proper sense, but only analogically and in an inferior manner. Eckhart thus states the radical dissimilarity between God and creation. To be taken up into a univocal relationship with the divine, the soul must become nothing and empty herself of all createdness, making herself indistinguishable and undifferentiated from God and therefore equal to him. In doing so, she is taken up into univocal relationship with the divine.²⁵¹

This is important because it is the soul's virtual existence in God which grounds Eckhart's understanding of the uncreated aspect or precreated spark of the soul – a notion that bares an obvious resemblance to Weil. Hollywood notes that this same notion is present, though less explicitly, in Porete's *Mirror* in moments when the reader is reminded of some prior existence of the Soul in God.²⁵² For example in Chapter 91 the text reads:

And she is wholly dissolved into him that she sees neither herself nor him; and so he in his divine goodness sees himself all alone. In that goodness it will be with him just as it was when he knew himself all alone, before she ever was, when he gave her his goodness of which he made her the mistress.²⁵³

This recalls the soul's latent structural capacity for an unmediated relationship to God, described earlier. In Eckhart's annihilation given in Sermon 2 – “whose mystical sources are the beguine texts”²⁵⁴ – the soul must become free and detached to return to this precreated state, bring obvious similarity to the process described in Part One.

At the same time, Eckhart's view of creation in *ebullitio* “states the radical dissimilarity” between the creature and God, much like Weil's conception of a creation predicated on God's self-emptying sets the conditions for a created world which is distanced from its creator and in need of mediation. In her account, while creation is made possible via God's self-negation and therefore bares a conditional relationship to him, it is also totally other to God. As such, creation

²⁵¹ Hollywood, 139.

²⁵² Hollywood, 175.

²⁵³ Porete et al., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 116.

²⁵⁴ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 146.

in both Eckhart and Weil sets the conditions for the distance between creation and God as well as the possibility for their reconciliation. Insofar as we are created “the infinity of space and time separates us from God,” but insofar as we are created, we continually bear a mark of our origin in God; for Eckhart this is our virtual existence in God, and for Weil this is the Supernatural part of the Soul.

This similarity is striking, but more importantly, for Eckhart annihilation leads to the “birth of the Son in the Soul” which is the just human being.²⁵⁵ In Hollywood’s terms,

The birth of the Son in the soul is exhibited or revealed in the world through the just actions or “works” of men and women. When human beings are just, they are the Son who is born in the soul and is equal to the soul.²⁵⁶

The birth of the Son in the soul occurs in a similar manner to the way in which the cultivation of the void in Weil reflexively instigates the inpouring of divine grace; that is to say, this state of detachment forces God to respond in kind, the way a vacuum pulls in air. In Hollywood’s terms, “the soul becomes nothing and as nothing is equal to God” which in turn requires that “God gives everything that he can achieve” back to the soul.²⁵⁷ Thus, this birth of the Son in the soul results in a paradox in which the soul, insofar as she is nothing, is infused with God and becomes the site through which God works in the world. Hollywood summarizes this nicely as: “In forsaking self-love, she abandons the world of creatures and becomes virgin. The soul becomes nothing and as nothing is equal to the divine.” Yet in this newfound equality “God gives everything he can achieve” back to the Soul and as a result “the Father who gives birth to his Son in eternity gives birth to his Son in the soul.”²⁵⁸ The Son, we must remember, is continually in a state of being-born. This results in the soul’s participation in the birth of the Son: by becoming

²⁵⁵ Hollywood, 150.

²⁵⁶ Hollywood, 157.

²⁵⁷ Hollywood, 151.

²⁵⁸ Hollywood, 151.

the space whereby the Son is birthed she becomes both mother and wife. As such, the soul is both virgin (empty) and wifely (birthing): “the virgin soul is made wifely and fruitful through the work of the divine as/within her.”²⁵⁹ Analogously speaking, the virgin soul is the decreeted soul described in Part One while the “fruitful” work which constitutes the wifely soul is akin to the passing of a morsel of bread described above.

Contradiction and Unity

Hollywood notes that “there is an apparent contradiction between virgin and wifely soul” but one which is “only a problem for Aristotelian logic [. . .] grounded in the rule of noncontradiction.”²⁶⁰ In other words, this is not a problem for Eckhart because this kind of mystical thinking works in aporias: “a breakdown of logical categories and human reason” in order to catch “a glimpse into the mystery of nondualistic reality.”²⁶¹ Similarly for Weil, “when attention has revealed the contradiction in something on which it has been fixed, a kind of loosening takes place.”²⁶² This loosening reveals a reality more real to us than any stable or fixed singularity can on its own.²⁶³ The simultaneity of contradictions is also, for Weil, part of the definition of detachment: “an attachment to a particular thing can only be destroyed by an attachment which is incompatible with it.”²⁶⁴ To be perfectly detached is to be a perfect “balance which leans both ways at once.”²⁶⁵ Thus, contradiction is not suspect but a sign of something truthful and trustworthy, far more so than anything grounded in logic. I bring attention to this because Hollywood insists that the process hitherto described in Eckhart ought not to be thought

²⁵⁹ Hollywood, 151.

²⁶⁰ Hollywood, 152–53.

²⁶¹ Hollywood, 153.

²⁶² Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 98.

²⁶³ Weil, 98.

²⁶⁴ Weil, 101.

²⁶⁵ Weil, 101.

of according to the “temporal and spatial categories” we are familiar with. Meaning that we ought not think of the Soul as *first* a virgin and *later* transformed into a wife, but as “a wife *while still* a virgin.”²⁶⁶ It is precisely here, in the unity of the virgin (a soul made into nothingness, the perfection of the contemplative life) and the wife (a soul who in their nothingness becomes Christ and as such becomes God’s activity in the world) that we find an analogous reconceptualization of the unity at the heart of Weil’s thought, a unity that operates outside of the limits of the Aristotelian law of non-contradiction.

This unity is important because it is the symbolic expression of the unity of the active and contemplative lives.²⁶⁷ This unity is demonstrated most explicitly by Eckhart’s reinterpretation of the story of Mary and Martha in sermon 86 in which Martha’s request to “make Mary get up so that she will not become stuck in a life that demands pleasure rather than spiritual progress [...] carries with it an admonishment of those who hope to escape action.”²⁶⁸ This mirrors Porete’s warning about the “delights” of mystical contemplation in the fourth state of the *Mirror* wherein “Love’s great brightness has so dazzled her sight” that the soul cannot see that there are two “greater and nobler” states she has yet to achieve.²⁶⁹ According to Hollywood “in the sermon Eckhart describes three possible paths to God” of which the third is the highest and the only one without mediation.²⁷⁰ This is the path Martha takes. Unlike St. Peter, who had “been drawn up by the power of the heavenly Father above all created powers of comprehension to the rim of eternity” but had not yet “seen God without a medium,” Martha is able to “see God immediately in his ownness” (341). According to Eckhart, all creatures “acting as means” only border this

²⁶⁶ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 155.

²⁶⁷ Hollywood, 166.

²⁶⁸ Hollywood, 167.

²⁶⁹ Porete et al., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 143.

²⁷⁰ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 168.

third state (341). The difference between Martha and Mary, or between Martha and St. Peter is that Martha does not become “so great that [she] cannot be moved” but that her greatness dictates that she cannot “move away from God” (341). In words, Martha is still affected by the world; she is not indifferent to pain and suffering as we might assume from one who is detached or decreed. Rather, Martha is one who acknowledges that “whatever happens,” whether she suffer or experience joy, she remains nonetheless “steadfast in God” (343). Similarly for Weil, suffering is not something to be eradicated. Rather, suffering when recognized as God’s will becomes a mediation itself.

Hollywood writes that, “against those spiritual writers who stress special, individual experiences and inactive contemplation, Eckhart claims that the highest contemplation is compatible with, and in fact brings about, a state of heightened activity.”²⁷¹ As in Weil, this is achieved in and through annihilating the self. For Porete, this means the soul must live “without a why;” it must not expect, hope, or direct itself toward any end whatsoever. In Eckhart, the birth of the Son in the Soul does not produce any “purpose, goal, or end to human and divine activity.”²⁷² Rather, the activity *is* the work of the Son in the soul precisely insofar as that activity has no end; it is *for itself*. This for-itself-ness distinguishes the creaturely from the divine, and as such we can come to recognize the creaturely by that which has a why and the divine by that which does not. This is identical to Weil’s understanding of necessity, and accounts for why she sees the Order of the World (the way things merely *are*) as analogous to Christ: it is the expression of God’s will in the created world. God’s will is therefore accessible to us insofar as it is that which *is*; it is the way things must be; it is a law which we are always subject to but can nonetheless love by our faculty of free consent. Loving this is simultaneously contemplative and

²⁷¹ Hollywood, 169.

²⁷² Hollywood, 170.

active. In Weil, we are tasked with aligning ourselves with this will by dissolving our own intentionality and volition, thereby learning to recognize and attend to this necessity. This ability to recognize necessity and consent to it is further mirrored by Eckhart in what Hollywood calls the “interior intention” that, paradoxically, strives towards “having no will, no end, and no goal.”²⁷³ One actively *strives* towards silencing their own will, and in doing so, learns to hear the voice of God.

The result is that one becomes, like Martha, “in the midst of things” but “not *in* things.”²⁷⁴ One does not become detached as in indifferent to things in the world but detached in a different manner. Eckhart distinguishes between three kinds of willing: “sensible,” “rational,” and “eternal.”²⁷⁵ The first two operate according to a purpose or goal; they are “directed to and ordered by what is highest.”²⁷⁶ The third is without purpose, it is willing in accordance with what is bestowed directly by the Holy Spirit. This is not to say that one does not act in the world, but that that activity is for itself, it is not purposeful good; it is good without a *why*. It is only by giving up the will that one “knows rightly whether to perform or avoid an action.”²⁷⁷ As such, Martha is still “bothered by many cases,” but the goal is not to become unaffected by the world. The goal is “whatever insight on the alert commands the will to turn away, that the will say: ‘I’ll do it gladly.’”²⁷⁸ In other words, that the soul does not cease to experience joy and suffering, but that one accepts joy and suffering equally. In this state, virtue is truly possible, because one’s

²⁷³ Hollywood, 171.

²⁷⁴ Eckhart et al., *Meister Eckhart, Teacher and Preacher*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 342.

²⁷⁵ Eckhart et al., 342.

²⁷⁶ Eckhart et al., 342–43.

²⁷⁷ Eckhart et al., 342.

²⁷⁸ Eckhart et al., 344.

personal will has been irradiated but they are not apathetic; Martha is still “bothered,” as it were.²⁷⁹ This is where Martha moves beyond Mary.

It is worth noting that Eckhart here is speaking about “virtue” and “activity” but not describing singular “acts”; we might say, therefore, that Eckhart elaborates the grounds out of which virtuous acts become possible, but not what those acts are. Here Eckhart’s thinking is aligned with Weil’s understanding of orienting oneself towards necessity, but less so the ‘instant’ of justice, such as the passing of bread between benefactor and sufferer. Nonetheless such an articulation of the “supernatural exchange” between the benefactor and suffering undoes the supernatural quality of the exchange because in the moment of giving God’s presence must be veiled. God is absent insofar as the intention behind the giving and receiving is not *for God* but *for itself* – hence its truly being without a why. So long as the exchange is without a why it is an exchange of love between God (as benefactor) and God (as sufferer). As such, God’s presence is only ever “in secret,” as Weil says. Calling attention to the unmediated transference of God’s love in the act of charity undoes that very love by calling attention to this secret. Producing, yet another, contradiction. At the same time, Hollywood reminds her reader that it is impossible to describe what this divine activity looks like in Eckhart, as “justice is irreducible to referential language.”²⁸⁰ For Weil too, justice is beyond unrepresentable because in the telling the just moment ceases to be *for itself*, hence her lack of prescriptive definitions of the ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ thing to do in any given situation. None of these thinkers describe an ethical code of conduct.

Properly speaking, decreation is the means to becoming a decreed soul which, like the *virgin wife*, is the perfection and unity of contemplative and active life. As such, it binds together Weil’s mystical and political impulses. Neither can be wholly without the other because they are

²⁷⁹ Eckhart et al., 342.

²⁸⁰ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 158.

both derived from the same decreative movement. Contemplation which reaches its end in self-loss simultaneously results in the possibility of just action. At the same time, a truly just act is necessarily an event in which the self is absent. The motion inward pierces through the deepest recesses of the self, annihilating it and in that now empty space God conducts His work. As such, the moment “where the eyes of those who give and those who receive meet” is *more than* the perfection of either contemplation or action taken alone. It is the perfection of their unity which harmonizes the two into a singular instant.

CONCLUSION |

I have sought to unify the apparent contradiction between Weil’s mystical and political impulses through a reading of decreation as the cite through which contemplation and action are unified in the passage of God’s love, identical to the passing of a morsel of bread. All the while, I have wondered at length what the appropriate term for this unity might be. In the end, the example given by Weil, the feeding of a stranger, is only an example. We must acknowledge that there are an infinite number of ways this passage can be affected and remember that in the description itself the event is undone. However, in “Forms of the Implicit Love for God,” Weil

tells us that in the Gospel when the hungry Christ is given meat “he does not call his benefactors loving or charitable. He calls them just.” (85). The Gospel, she says, “makes no distinction between the love of our neighbour and justice” (85). We might conclude, therefore, that the end of decreation is justice itself, and that the call to be just is the grounds out of which all of Weil’s philosophical, mystical, and political concerns are derived.

For Weil, justice is nothing more than the moment in which, by causes beyond our understanding, we are compelled absolutely to act. In this sense, Sontag’s suggestion that Weil’s thought is too absurd or too extravagant to be taken seriously is a gross underestimation of the simplicity, universality, and applicability of her ideas. For this is not a Christian, mystical, or philosophical discussion. It is a discussion about those rare moments in which a human being recognizes – truly and unequivocally – the humanity of another.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Diogenes, and Eric O. Springsted. “Divine Necessity: Weilian and Platonic Conceptions.” In *Spirit, Nature, and Community: Issues in the Thought of Simone Weil*, 33–52. SUNY Series, Simone Weil Studies. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- . *Spirit, Nature, and Community: Issues in the Thought of Simone Weil*. SUNY Series, Simone Weil Studies. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Arblaster, John. “‘Flowing from the Wild Sea and Back to the Sea’: Water Metaphors and Mystical Union in the Late Medieval Low Countries.” *The Journal of Religion* 98, no. 2 (April 2018): 169–91. <https://doi.org/10.1086/696271>.
- . *On Becoming “Not God but What God Is”: Essays on the Doctrine of Deification in The Late Medieval Low Countries*. Catholic University of Leuven, 2016.
- Babinsky, Ellen L. “Christological Transformation in The Mirror of Souls, by Marguerite Porete.” *Theology Today* 60, no. 1 (April 2003): 34–48.
- Blum, Lawrence A., and Victor J. Seidler. *A Truer Liberty: Simone Weil and Marxism*. Critical Social Thought. New York: Routledge, 1989.

- Bothe, Catherine M. "Writing as Mirror in the Work of Marguerite Porete." *Mystics Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (1994): 105–12.
- Carson, Anne. *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera*. Vintage Canada ed. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2006.
- Cha, Yoon Sook. *Decreation and the Ethical Bind: Simone Weil and the Claim of the Other*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2017.
- Chenavier, Robert. *Simone Weil, Attention to the Real*. Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012.
- . "Simone Weil: Completing Platonism through a Consistent Materialism." In *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil*, 61–76. Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004.
- Davy, Marie-Magdeleine. *The Mysticism of Simone Weil*. Translated by Cynthia Rowland. Boston: The Beacon Press, 1951.
- Doering, E. Jane, and Eric O. Springsted, eds. *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil*. Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004.
- Eckhart, Bernard McGinn, Frank J. Tobin, and Elvira Borgstädt. *Meister Eckhart, Teacher and Preacher*. The Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1986.
- Gabellieri, Emmanuel. "Reconstructing Platonism: The Trinitarian Mextaxology of Simone Weil." In *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil*, 133–58. Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004.
- Hahn, Micheal. "Becoming Nothing in Christianity, Sufism and Buddhism: Why Christian Annihilation Is Not Nirvana. A Response to Barbra Newman." [Manuscript Submitted for Publication], 2023.
- . "Deification in Bonaventure and Angela of Foligno." [Manuscript Submitted for Publication], 2023.
- Hollywood, Amy M. *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays: Mysticism, History, and the Study of Religion*. Gender, Theory, and Religion. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.
- . *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*. Religion and Postmodernism. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- . *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart*. Studies in Spirituality and Theology 1. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1991.
- McGinn, Bernard, ed. *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*. New York, NY: Continuum, 2001.
- Narcy, Michel. "The Limits and Significance of Simone Weil's Platonism." In *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil*, 23–42. Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004.
- Newman, Barbara. "Annihilation and Authorship: Three Women Mystics of the 1290s." *Speculum* 91, no. 3 (2016): 591–630.
- Pétrément, Simone. *Simone Weil: A Life*. 1st American ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1976.
- Plato. "Timaeus." In *Complete Works*, translated by Donald J. Zeyl, 1224–93. Indianapolis, Ind: Hackett Publishing, 1997.

- Porete, Marguerite, Edmund Colledge, Judith Grant, and J. C. Marler. *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. Notre Dame Texts in Medieval Culture, vol. 6. Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999.
- Rozelle-Stone, A. Rebecca, ed. *Simone Weil and Continental Philosophy*. Reframing Continental Philosophy of Religion. London ; Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, 2017.
- Rozelle-Stone, A. Rebecca, and Lucian Stone, eds. *The Relevance of the Radical: Simone Weil 100 Years Later*. London ; New York: Continuum, 2010.
- Schmidt, Lawrence E. *Simone Weil: Late Philosophical Writings*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvpj7gb6>.
- Simons, Walter. *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200 - 1565*. The Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia, Pa: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.
- Springsted, Eric O. "Mystery and Philosophy." In *The Relevance of the Radical: Simone Weil 100 Years Later*, 91–104. London ; New York: Continuum, 2010.
- Weil, Simone. "Divine Love in Creation." In *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks*, 89–105. London ; New York: Routledge, 1998.
- . *First and Last Notebooks*. London: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- . *Formative Writings*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987.
- . "God in Plato." In *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks*, 74–88. London ; New York: Routledge, 1998.
- . *Gravity and Grace*. 1st complete English language ed. London ; New York: Routledge, 2002.
- . *Oppression and Liberty*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1973.
- . *The Notebooks*. Vol. 2. 2 vols. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1956.
- . *The Notebooks*. Vol. 1. 2 vols. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1956.
- . "The Pythagorean Doctrine." In *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks*, 151–201. London ; New York: Routledge, 1998.
- . *Waiting for God*. Translated by Emma Craufurd. First Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition. New York [New York]: HarperPerennial Modern Classics, 2009.
- Winch, Peter. *Simone Weil: "The Just Balance."* Modern European Philosophy. Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.